

The National Apology: A Time for Prayer and Reflection

From **Merry Blair Conference President** and **Paul Cameron Conference Executive Officer**

We rejoice at the spirit of reconciliation that has been shared this week in the Federal Parliament. It is important to remember the long journey that has taken place since Captain Cook landed in Australia and stated "there is not a people living in the land". It took until the 1960s before our Indigenous people were granted rights as a people. Throughout that time, and still today, there have been many injustices that have taken place. Past Australian governments adopted laws that gave warrant to practices resulting in many Indigenous children being inappropriately and forcibly removed from their families. It was a complex tragedy. Often it was done with the thought that it was the best course of action at the time, but hindsight has shown us that this was not a fair, respectful or compassionate thing to do. Hence, the fundamental truth of the stories of the Stolen Generations, and their pain, cannot be denied.

As a way of showing that Christian Churches were walking with our Indigenous people, in July 2000, Heads of Churches (including Churches of Christ) gathered in worship and prayer and signed the following Common Statement of Commitment:

Acknowledging the injustices that characterized the history of this country since 1788, and reaffirming our apology to Indigenous people for our shortcomings and past mistakes, the faith communities of Australia make the following promise:

We will do all we can to secure a fair go for indigenous Australians.

We will act to put right continuing injustices.

We will work together to heal our nation's hurts.

Inspired by our spiritual heritage, we pledge ourselves to work for the vision of a united Australia that respects this land of ours, and values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all.

As we work through the implications of the apology from the Federal Government (the Prime Minister's Apology Motion are included below) we urge churches to remember those among us who have worked so hard towards reconciliation; to reflect deeply on how we as Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas can, with our elected leaders, be part of a mutual ministry of reconciliation; and to continue to pray for justice for our Indigenous people, for reconciliation and for healing. The following prayers could help you do this in one of your services this coming Sunday. The prayers have been sourced from the National Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Ecumenical Commission.

God of all peoples, in Jesus Christ You call us from our foolishness to be your children, coming amongst us like a kookaburra, singing the song of a new day.

Give us that same spirit of solidarity that was in Christ Jesus that we may bear your easy yoke, casting our burdens upon you, and resting in your love.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, who leads us all into a new future. Amen

Almighty and loving God, you who created ALL people in your image,

Lead us to seek your compassion as we listen to the stories of our past.

You gave your only Son, Jesus, who died and rose again so that sins will be forgiven.

We place before you the pain and anguish of dispossession of land, language, love, culture and family kinship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced.

We live in faith that all people will rise from the depths of despair and hopelessness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have endured the pain and loss of loved ones, through the separation of children from their families.

We are sorry and ask your forgiveness.

Touch the hearts of the broken, homeless and inflicted and heal their spirits.

In your mercy and compassion, walk with us as we continue our journey of healing to create a future that is just and equitable.

Lord, you are our hope. Amen.

Text of PM Rudd's Apology Motion

Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were stolen generations - this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/02/12/1202760291188.html>