

APOLOGY

TO THE

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

We, the community of Canberra Baptist Church, with the known support of numerous other Australian Baptists, offer this heartfelt apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We offer this apology having heard the stories of pain, suffering and abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly as they are portrayed in the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, "Bringing them home" (April 1997). We acknowledge that the consequences of these experiences endure today.

We must all face the truth of the past. It lives on in us. We must learn from it and deal with it, so that there may be justice, reconciliation, healing and hope for the future. We therefore recognise this crucial moment in the history of Canberra Baptist Church as a God given opportunity for us:

- to approach the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and publicly express our sorrow for the hurt that has occurred;
- to acknowledge that by silent acquiescence, by moral insensitivity or ignorance we are partly responsible for that hurt;
- and to commit ourselves to do all we can to make sure that such things will not occur again.

God has laid the foundation for reconciliation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and entrusted to us the message and the task of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-21). We want to respond by doing our part in shaping a society of equality, justice and solidarity. It pains us that we have eyes, but fail to see the need in people's lives; that we have ears, but fail to hear the cry from the soul of those who are distressed; that we have hearts, but fail to open ourselves to the hurt of others; that we have minds, but fail to seek and find creative ways towards justice and reconciliation.

APOLOGY

We confess that we have sinned before God and against you. We acknowledge that the churches played a role in the administration of the laws and policies under which indigenous children were forcibly removed from their parents. Your families were dislocated and generational links were severed and we, as silent observers, have

passively contributed. We have not honoured your culture, religion and heritage. We have failed to recognise your prior presence in the land. This land to which you belong was occupied and claimed without fair and just negotiations and we have profited from those acts of dispossession. We recognise with deep regret that we have been blind to our governments making laws, and other public institutions and churches adopting policies and practices that violated fundamental human rights and contravened the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948, entered into force 1951).

We recognise and confess our failure to see that what has been done to you denied our common humanity and degrades us all. We acknowledge the prophetic and compassionate intentions of many missionaries and Christian workers. At the same time Christian churches, in bringing the Gospel to Australia often failed to acknowledge that God was already present in this land, and often failed to distinguish between its own "Western" culture and the good news of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that the continuing social dislocation, loss of personal identity and high rate of imprisonment is often a direct result of children having been separated from their parents.

For all this we are truly sorry and apologise unreservedly.

RESOLUTIONS

A. We invite all Baptist churches and Baptist Unions in Australia to study the Bringing them home report and to embrace this God given opportunity to participate in the apology and reconciliation process.

B. We call upon the Prime Minister of Australia to make a sincere apology on behalf of the Australian people for the forcible separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

C. We call upon the Commonwealth, State, and Territory Governments to implement as a matter of urgency the recommendations of Bringing them home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families.

D. We commit ourselves personally and as a community to seek greater understanding of the difficulties, needs, and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and to support the process of a just reconciliation.