

A RESPONSE TO THE APOLOGY OFFERED
BY THE
CANBERRA BAPTIST CHURCH
ON SUNDAY DECEMBER 14, 1997

Ruth Joyce, leaders of the Canberra Baptist Church, guests and friends

Thank you for this service and your words of apology.

When we were young people growing up on the fringe of white society and under the control of missionaries, police and welfare officers -- we were not aware that our parents were being set aside from society for special treatment -- because they were Aboriginal.

I am sure, however, that our parents and our elders knew very well what was going on - that special policies and practices were established for the control of our people.

Our land, our culture, our language, and even our children were taken away from us due to these policies and practices.

Many white Australians may still say --

"we weren't there at the time. We are not responsible for what our forefathers did. Why should we apologise for something that we had no control over."

Let me respond as an Aboriginal person by saying --

"we accept that the people who carried out these policies and practices may have thought they were acting in the best interest of Aboriginal peoples.

What they did, nevertheless, was harmful and wrong. It was intended in many instances to destroy us. For many of us, even

in this church today, the scars and the pain live on. It is very difficult to come to terms with what was done, and with everything that has happened to Aboriginal people in the more than 200 years since white settlement in this country.

We could, and some of our people do, respond with resentment and hostility and want to avenge the wrongs of the past.

As Australians, accepting and acknowledging our history is a responsibility that we too have to share. We will share it with you.

And we must be prepared to forgive.

We all must accept both the good and the bad things that have happened in our relationship since your forebears began living on this land with our forebears in 1788.

As an elder of the Ngunawal people, and on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living here now - present in this church - and who were living here in times past,

I am pleased and honoured and proud to accept the apology from you who offer it to us today before God and in this place.

I assure you that this will set the stage for a new beginning and a new relationship between us and you.

Thank you for what you have done.