

Lutheran Church of Australia
RITE OF RECONCILIATION, GENERAL SYNOD 2000

Background:

At the Synodical Convention in Tanunda SA in 2000, a formal rite of reconciliation between members of the Lutheran Church of Australia and our indigenous brothers and sisters. Pastor George Rosendale from Hope Vale in Far North Queensland and Dr Lance Steicke, the President of the LCA at the time, led the large congregation in this moving event.

Reading : 2 Corinthians 5:17–19

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Prayer

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, who by your cross and passion reconciled the world to God and broke down the barriers of race and colour which divide people and nations: make us and all your people instruments of reconciliation in the life of our world, that we may inherit the blessing which you promised to the peacemakers. AMEN.

Statement by President Steicke

Since our church began its life here with the European settlement, we have been involved in the political, economic and social history of our country. This history also connects us to the difficult, sad and often tragic situations that have occurred.

Therefore today, we, the non-Aboriginal Lutheran people of this country, as church and as citizens, wish clearly to state the following things to our indigenous brothers and sisters:

- 1 You were here on this land before any European people arrived.
- 2 When European people came, much misunderstanding took place which caused great suffering to your people. Many of your people were killed, many died from new diseases, and many others were driven off their land. This has caused a grave breakdown in the culture and lifestyle of your people which continues even today.
- 3 On behalf of the rest of the people of our church, I am sorry for the suffering and hurt that your people have had to endure. We ask God to forgive us for the evil we have done, and the help we have failed to give you.
- 4 We resolve to work together with you, to share and learn together, to accept and respect each other. Help us to listen to you and learn from you.
- 5 We promise to work with you and others for justice and harmony in relationships. We recognise the contribution which indigenous people are making.
- 6 We are sorry for the bad things that have happened in the past. Please forgive us.

Pastor Jimmy Haines from Central Australia responded in Arrarnte with the translation given Garry Stoll.

Dear President, Dr Steicke; dear Christian friends:

Many of us Aboriginal people living in Central Australia and also us pastors have been discussing this word reconciliation for a long time. More recently people asked me to speak on their behalf at this synod. That's why I'm speaking to you as their representative.

Long ago when the white people first came to Australia they probably thought that the Aboriginal people didn't have any laws or customs. They didn't see any laws or customs written down on paper. For that reason they probably thought that Aboriginal people wandered aimlessly around the country spearing game and collecting food. Aboriginal people in every part of the country however each had their own laws and customs. Each group had its own land with its own boundaries. They also had laws and customs about things like kinship and social behaviour. All of these laws and customs they kept in their heads, not in a book.

We Aboriginal people who live in Central Australia today still have our laws and customs. We too keep them in our heads and teach them to our children. We still live according to our good laws and customs. Today however we are also Christians and always try to obey the True God.

Our old people have told us the stories of long ago. That's why we know that the Aboriginal people of long ago fought with the white people of long ago. On occasions white people shot our people. On other occasions Aboriginal people speared white people. All this happened a very long time ago. We have long since forgotten about all of that. We do not hold a grudge against white people for what happened. There are people who always want to only talk about the bad things the white people did. We however would rather remember that many white people helped us and many are our friends to this day. More than anything however, we thank God that he sent his messengers to us with His Word. The missionaries taught us about God and stayed with us for a long time. Today there are many Aboriginal Christians and Pastors in Central Australia. We are really happy about that. We are also happy that the Lutheran Church continues to help us.

Today we heard in English God's Word from 2 Corinthians 5: reading from verse 17. I'll read it in Arrarnta. (*English back translation from the Arrarnta text*). Verse 17: 'Anyone who has been joined to Christ has been made a new person by God. That person is no longer the same as before but is a new person.' V18: 'God himself has worked through Christ to make peace between himself and us. He no longer condemns us them. He has commanded us to tell all people that he has made peace with them.'

Since all of us, both black and white, are today members of God's family, it is up to us to work together to tell all people the Good News about Jesus Christ. We shouldn't look back. We should rather move forward.

Let us ask God to continue to help us to love our neighbours more and to live at peace with all people.

Pastor Rosendale (Hope Vale) led in prayer

Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer: You have forgiven us our sins; please help us to forgive each other. Bring healing and reconciliation to this nation, and make us a people who will walk and live together in lasting acceptance and respect for each other. We ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Dr Steicke led the assembly in the rite of Confession and Absolution.

M Dear friends in Christ, as Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia, we gather here to confess our sins to God our Father and to ask him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us. Today our words and thoughts bring to mind our actions as individuals, as church, and as citizens of this land.

For our contempt for other people who differ from us, and our indifference to our oppressed brothers and sisters:

C Forgive us.

M For condoning injustice and remaining silent when we should have spoken out for others:

C Forgive us.

M For ignoring the suffering and abuse of the vulnerable, the abused and the exploited people in this land:

C Forgive us.

M For refusing to forgive, love and pray for those who have hurt us:

C Forgive us.

M For our unwillingness to seek reconciliation and our reluctance to be peacemakers in our land:

C Forgive us.

M&C

We confess that we are born in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have failed to do. We have not loved you with our whole heart, and we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. We deserve your eternal punishment. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.

M As a called and ordained servant of the word I announce the grace of God to all of you. On behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ and by his command I forgive the sins of all of you who repent and believe, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Peace be with you.

C Amen.

M The peace of the Lord be with you.

C And also with you.

Dr Steicke and Pastor Rosendale shared the peace with each other, Garry Stoll and Pastor Haines; then the leaders moved into the congregation and continued with the sharing of the peace.

Dr Steicke *concluded with the final blessing:*

'From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "in him we live and move and have our being" '. (Acts 17:26–28a)

The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son = and Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and for ever.

Amen.

The rite concluded with the singing of 'What a friend we have in Jesus'.

Source: Lutheran Archives