

Response to the Acknowledgement and Apology to Aboriginal Peoples

*Excerpt from the Service Order Lutheran Church of Australia
RITE OF RECONCILIATION, GENERAL SYNOD 2000 (23 July 2000)
Source: Lutheran Archives*

Pastor Jimmy Haines from Central Australia responded in Arrarnte with the following translation given by 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.