

SORRY DAY 2008

Action Resource:

Giving the Apology Flesh & Bones

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Mark Raper SJ, speaking as the President of Catholic Religious Australia, noted that the Prime Minister's apology on behalf of the National Parliament was immensely moving, touching our common humanity:

"The apology spoke to our hunger for healing and for reconciliation. We were moved and changed by it; a great burden was lifted.

The truth has a way of setting us free and the apology will become a source of strength for further action - at home and abroad...

Facing our domestic issues frees us to engage deeply and honestly with the rest of the world.

We can share both our struggles to do what is right, our successes, and even acknowledge our failures, encouraging the community of nations to address together our shared responsibilities, rather than withdrawing in defensiveness."

http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au/0408/indigenous_rights.doc

Fr Raper said that within Australia, right relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians must be given expression in policies, legislation, the allocation of resources and the operation of institutions. He suggested that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma's *Social Justice Report for 2007* provided useful leads for this.

Just as the apology lifted a burden from us all - individuals, families and communities as well as governments - all have a role to play in giving the spirit of the apology flesh and bones. We must now act to ensure that these things cannot happen again, and, that as far as possible, things are set right.

This Action Resource Sheet provides some ideas of ways in which individuals, parishes, schools and communities might take action.

IMPLEMENTING THE BRINGING THEM HOME RECOMMENDATIONS

The report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children from their Families – the Bringing Them Home report – contains 54 recommendations.

Eleven years after its publication, many of them are yet to be fully implemented. The national apology, which recommendation 5 called for, draws our attention back to this unfinished business.

Recommendation 6 calls on churches and other non- government agencies which played a role in the administration of the laws and policies under which children were removed to:

- acknowledge their role;
- make apologies; and
- participate in commemorations.

Some ways of responding could include:

- Reflecting on some of the apologies which have been made by church bodies. The Catholic Church has acknowledged that it played a role in the implementation of the forcible removal policies, and apologies have been made by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and other Catholic bodies. Some of them can be accessed at <http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au/issues/ind-aus.php>
- Planning a Sorry Day commemoration for your parish, school or community.
- Taking up the National Sorry Day Committee's invitation to plant a 'Stolen Generations Track Home'. *The Stolen Generations Track Home Action Resource Sheet* explains how to do this. Details can also be found at www.nsdcc.org.au
- Participating in commemorations organized by local Aboriginal Catholic Ministries or other Indigenous organizations.
- Writing your own 'sorry statement' and sending it to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) at 185 Pirie Street, Adelaide, South Australia, 5000 or Email natsicc@ozemail.com.au
- Encouraging your parish, school or community

to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday on 6 July using the liturgical materials prepared by NATSICC (see www.natsicc.org.au)

Recommendation 8a of the *Bringing Them Home* report calls for substantial compulsory modules in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools on the history and continuing effects of forced removal.

You could respond by:

- Finding out if schools in your area teach such modules. Congratulate them if they do, and encourage them to do so if they do not.

Recommendations 9a and b concern professional training for those who work with Indigenous children, families and communities.

Here are some possible ways of responding:

- Ensuring the provision for key people in your parish, school or community of in-service training for cross cultural awareness and understanding of the history and effects of the separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities.
- Participating in cross cultural awareness programs such as those offered by Nungalingya College www.nungalingya.edu.au
- Raising funds to support the work of Indigenous organizations such as Nungalingya College which provide cross cultural awareness programs.

Individuals and small groups can also honour the spirit of a number of the other recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report by advocating the following to governments:

- Deep dialogue aimed at the establishment of an appropriate national compensation fund.
- Adequate funding for measures of restitution and rehabilitation.
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.
- Dialogue to enable Australia's meaningful acceptance of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the implementation in domestic law of the Genocide Convention.
- Revision of the Northern Territory intervention to bring it into line with Australia's international human rights obligations, and to take into account recommendations 43 – 54 of the *Bringing Them Home* report.

CLOSE THE GAP CAMPAIGN

Supported by more than 40 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, this campaign calls on federal, state and territory governments to commit to closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

The campaign website provides information, options for action such as signing online petitions, and campaign materials including posters, bumper stickers, postcards and pledge sheets.

To find out more or get involved, visit:

<http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-health/>

RACISM MAKES ME SICK

A range of health problems including high blood pressure and heart disease, depression, anxiety, low birth rate and premature birth can all be caused directly by people's personal experiences of racism.

At <http://www.antar.org.au/racism> you can get the facts, sign a campaign pledge and access ideas for taking positive action.

ONLINE SEA OF HANDS

Remember the Sea of Hands? You can express your support for reconciliation by joining an online version of the Sea of Hands at

<http://seaofhands.antar.org.au/>

PRAYER & LITURGY

Sorry Day falls on Monday 26 May. The following actions might be included in liturgies on the preceding weekend, or on the day itself:

- In the penitential rite, acknowledge the complicity of Church people and organizations in the laws, policies and practices of forcible removals.
- Prayers of the Faithful: include prayers for the children who were taken away, their families and communities; pray for leaders in government and the community sector, that they might respond wisely, compassionately and justly to address the ongoing consequences of forcible removal.
- Include notices of local community activities for Sorry Day in your parish bulletin.
- Provide material for personal reflection on the meaning of Sorry Day in the parish bulletin. Extracts from these Action Resource Sheets may be suitable.