

Reconciliation is all about God's Heart A message by Bishop Paul Smith

If we know that famous Bible verse, John 3:18, then we know what motivates a Christian's contribution to Australia's

Reconciliation Week. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'

The diverse peoples of Australia make up part of the world that God loves. God shows no regard for our DNA or skin colour, and Christ Jesus came among us as Saviour of all the peoples of the world: the Saviour of the World!

Antagonism between people of different nations and racial divisions are all the product of the human heart, not of God's heart.

The theme for this year's Reconciliation Week in Australia is 'Be brave. Make a change!'

I am writing this encouragement for you from Alice Springs in the centre of Australia. I have joined with the people of our church who serve on the Finke River Mission Board. Each year, the board members travel to Central Australia to hold their cycles of meetings among the people they serve, and it is a joy and privilege for me to be part of this work.

You may not know that from this place in Alice Springs I am surrounded by Lutherans in every direction. That is because of the purpose of Lutheran missionaries who came to this part of God's world almost 150 years ago. I think the words 'Be brave. Make a change!' describes their service to Australia's First Nations peoples. Those German women and men brought the good news of Jesus Christ with the knowledge of how much God loves us. The message of God's heart.

On Friday 22 May 2022, after the recent elections, newly elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese spoke about engaging with Australia's Aboriginal peoples. In the opening of his speech, he said 'I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. And on behalf of the Australian Labor Party, I commit to the Uluru Statement from the heart in full' <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>

Prime Minister Albanese directed our eyes to a journey that our Aboriginal sisters and brothers have been travelling; seeking a stronger identity in Australia's Constitution. In 2017, the Uluru Statement was produced in the part of Australia where I am sitting, writing these words to you, surrounded by



Lutherans. The Aboriginal Christian communities in the Centre have much to teach the rest of Australia about the heart that motivates the work of reconciliation.

The annual focus on 'reconciliation' in Australia began as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation in 1993. It is quite profound to remember that the current focus has been brought prayerfully 'before God' from its beginning. The witness of Christians has been influential in the development of the current focus on reconciliation in Australia.

Knowing God's love for us and for all people; knowing the gift of the Saviour to take away the sin of the world, means we know that this work of reconciliation begins with the humble Christian prayer, 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner'. Together, we confess our common contribution to the divisions between nations and races. We share in many ugly histories of slander, violence and abuse against people, because of these divisions.

At the launching of our LCA Reconciliation Action Plan, Bishop John Henderson reflected on our commitment as church to the journey of reconciliation. 'We step out together side by side, First Peoples and other Australians, listening to each other, respecting and learning from each other, deepening our relationships and discovering who we are to be and what we are to do'.

Christians are brave because they are sent by God into the world to bear the good news of Jesus Christ to make the change needed for life and salvation for the forgiveness of sin. During this 2022 Reconciliation Week, please pray for the work of those who are striving to find ways for women and men in Australia to live together in a common purpose with 'common wealth'. I encourage you to go to the [LCA Reconciliation Action Plan website](https://www.rap.lca.org.au/) <https://www.rap.lca.org.au/> to find ways that your local community can be more purposefully engaged in this ongoing focus on reconciliation in Australia.

Please pray for the extraordinary witness of our sisters and brothers of the Lutheran communities in Central Australia, that they would be enabled to help us and the people of Australia in this vital work of reconciliation.

Each of our Lutheran communities across Australia could serve the nation by including a prayer for reconciliation in the coming Sunday prayers.

Your fellow in Christ,

Pastor Paul Smith

Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand
