‘You are a part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others’.

Pope John Paul II, 1986
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pope John Paul II’s Address in Alice Springs: 1986</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extract from The Church and Aborigines</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator of the Universe</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer of the Aboriginal People</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My talk with Jesus the Boss of Australia</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer for the Journey of Healing</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation 200 Years</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blue Heeler</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadirri</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Have a Dream</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treaty Let’s Get it Right</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message of Hope</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer for Special People</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rock and the Tree</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer for Healing</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 23 [Aboriginal Style]</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Walked on Sacred Ground</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcheringa</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurtured in the Nest</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God of the Holy Dreaming</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry Day Prayer</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation Prayer</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someday There Are Songs That We Shall Sing</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rainbow Serpent</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Poem for the Week of Prayer</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let us not be Bitter</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The coming of the light Prayer</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquility Prayer</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey to the Centre</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer for Guardians of the Land</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extract from Sally Morgan’s ‘My Place’</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tree of Life</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a peacemaker I will.........</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Blessing</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Father, God of Love</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NATSICC Prayer

Prime Minister’s Speech: Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples
Dear Brothers and Sisters

It is a great joy for me to be here today in Alice Springs and to meet so many of you, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia. I want to tell you right away how much the Church esteems and loves you, and how much she wishes to assist you in your spiritual and material needs.

At the beginning of time, as God’s Spirit moved over the waters, he began to communicate something of his goodness and beauty to all creation. When God then created man and woman, he gave them the good things of the earth for their use and benefit; and he put into their hearts abilities and powers, which were his gifts. And to all human beings throughout the ages God has given a desire for himself, a desire which different cultures have tried to express in their own ways.

As the human family spread over the face of the earth, your people settled and lived in this big country that stood apart from all the others. Other people did not even know this land was here; they only knew that somewhere in the southern oceans of the world there was ‘The Great South Land of the Holy Spirit’.

But for thousands of years you have lived in this land and fashioned a culture that endures to this day. And during all this time, the Spirit of God has been with you. Your ‘Dreaming’, which influences your lives so strongly that, no matter what happens, you remain for ever people of your culture, is your own way of touching the mystery of God’s Spirit in you and in creation. You must keep your striving for God and hold on to it in your lives.

The rock paintings and the discovered evidence of your ancient tools and implements indicate the presence of your age-old culture and prove your ancient occupancy of this land.

You culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost. Do you perhaps remember those words that Paul VI spoke to the Aboriginal people during his visit to them in 1970? On that occasion he said:

_We know that you have a life style proper to your own ethnic genius or culture – a culture which the Church respects and which she does not in any way ask you to renounce … Society itself is enriched by the presence of different cultural and ethnic elements. For us you and the values you represent are precious. We deeply respect your dignity and reiterate our deep affection for you._

[Sydney, 2 December 1970]

For thousands of years this culture of yours was free to grow without interference by people from other places. You lived your lives in spiritual closeness to the land, with its animals, birds, fishes, water-holes, rivers, hills and mountains. Through your closeness to the land you touched the sacredness of man’s relationship with God, for the land was the proof of a power in life greater than yourselves. You did not spoil the land, use it up, exhaust it, and then walk away from it. You realized that your land was related to the source of life.
The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God’s Spirit. Your careful attention to the details of kinship spoke of your reverence for birth, life and human generation. You knew that children need to be loved, to be full of joy. They need a time to grow in laughter and to play, secure in the knowledge that they belong to their people.

You had a great respect for the need which people have for law, as a guide to living fairly with each other. So you created a legal system – very strict it is true – but closely adapted to the country in which you lived your lives. It made your society orderly. It was one of the reasons why you survived in this land.

You marked the growth of your young men and women with ceremonies of discipline that taught them responsibility as they came to maturity.

These achievements are indications of human strivings. And in these strivings you showed a dignity open to the message of God’s revealed wisdom to all men and women, which is the great truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some of the stories from your Dreamtime legends speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help, its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person. They are not unlike some of the great inspired lessons from the people among whom Jesus himself was born. It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people.

The culture which this long and careful growth produced was not prepared for the sudden meeting with another people, with different customs and traditions, who came to your country nearly 200 years ago. They were different from Aboriginal people. Their traditions, the organization of their lives, and their attitudes to the land were quite strange to you. Their law too was quite different. These people had knowledge, money and power; and they brought with them some patterns of behaviour from which the Aboriginal people were unable to protect themselves.

The effects of some of those forces are still active among you today. Many of you have been dispossessed of your traditional lands, and separated from your tribal ways, though some of you still have your traditional culture. Some of you are establishing Aboriginal communities in the towns and cities. For others there is still no real place for camp-fires and kinship observances except on the fringes of country towns. There, work is hard to find, and education in a different cultural background is difficult. The discrimination caused by racism is a daily experience.

You have learned how to survive, whether on your own lands or scattered among the towns and cities. Though your difficulties are not yet over, you must learn to draw on the endurance which your ancient ceremonies have taught you. Endurance brings with it patience; patience helps you to find the way ahead, and gives you courage for your journey.

Take heart from the fact that many of your languages are still spoken and that you still possess your ancient culture. You have kept your sense of brotherhood. If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn.
The time for this rebirth is now!

We know that during the last two hundred years certain people tried to understand you, to learn about you, to respect your ways and to honour you as persons. These men and women, as you soon realised, were different from others of their race. They loved and cared for the Indigenous people. They began to share with you their stories of God, helped you cope with sickness, tried to protect you from ill-treatment. They were honest with you, and showed you by their lives how they tried to avoid the bad things in their own culture. These people were not always successful, and there were times when they did not fully understand you. But they showed you good will and friendship. They came from many different walks of life. Some were teachers and doctors and other professional people; some were simple folk. History will remember the good example of their charity and fraternal solidarity.

Among those who have loved and cared for the Indigenous people, we especially recall with profound gratitude all the missionaries of the Christian faith. With immense generosity they gave their lives in service to you and to your forebears. They helped to educate the Aboriginal people and offered health and social services. Whatever their human frailty, and whatever mistakes they may have made, nothing can ever minimize the depth of their charity. Nothing can ever cancel out their greatest contributions, which was to proclaim to you Jesus Christ and to establish his Church in your midst.

From the earliest times men like Archbishop Polding of Sydney opposed the legal fiction adopted by European settlers that this land was ‘terra nullus’ – nobody’s country. He strongly pleaded for the rights of the Aboriginal inhabitants to keep the traditional lands on which their whole society depended. The Church still supports you today.

Let it not be said that the fair and equitable recognition of Aboriginal rights to land is discrimination. To call for the acknowledgment of the land rights of people who have never surrendered those rights is not discrimination. Certainly, what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow.

Christian people of good will are saddened to realize – many of them only recently – for how long a time Aboriginal people were transported from their homelands into small areas or reserves where families were broken up, tribes split apart, children orphaned and people forced to live like exiles in a foreign country.

The reserves still exist today, and require a just and proper settlement that still lies unachieved. The urban problems resulting from the transportation and separation of people still have to be addressed, so that these people may make a new start in life with each other once again.

The establishment of a new society for Aboriginal people cannot go forward without just and mutually recognized agreements with regard to these human problems, even though their causes lie in the past. The greatest value to be achieved by such agreements, which must be implemented without causing new injustices, is respect for the dignity and growth of the human person. And you, the Aboriginal people of this country and its cities, must show that you are actively working for your own dignity of life. On your part, you must show that you too can walk tall and command the respect which every human being expects to receive from the rest of the human family.

The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human and, when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God.
That Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires. You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them. Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.

The old ways can draw new life and strength from the Gospel. The message of Jesus Christ can lift up your lives to new heights, reinforce all your positive values and add many others, which only the Gospel in its originality proposes. Take this Gospel into your own language and way of speaking; let its spirit penetrate your communities and determine your behaviour towards each other, let it bring new strength to your stories and your ceremonies. Let the Gospel come into your hearts and renew your personal lives. The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to your Aboriginal minds and hearts. All over the world people worship God and read his word in their own language, and colour the great signs and symbols of religion with touches of their own traditions. Why should you be different from them in this regard, why should you not be allowed the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion?

As you listen to the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, seek out the best things of your traditional ways. If you do, you will come to realize more and more your great human and Christian dignity. Let your minds and hearts be strengthened to begin a new life now. Past hurts cannot be healed by violence, nor are present injustices removed by resentment. Your Christian faith calls you to become the best kind of Aboriginal people you can be. This is possible only if reconciliation and forgiveness are part of your lives. Only then will you find happiness. Only then will you make your best contribution to all your brothers and sisters in this great nation. You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.

In the new world that is emerging for you, you are being called to live fully human and Christian lives, not to die of shame and sorrow. But you know that to fulfill your role you need a new heart. You will already feel courage rise up inside you when you listen to God speaking to you in these words of the Prophets:

Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine. Do not be afraid, for I am with you  
[Is 43:1,5]

And again

I am going to .. gather you together .. and bring you home to your own land .. I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you .. You shall be my people and I will be your God  
[Ez 35:24,26,28]

With you I rejoice in the hope of God’s gift of salvation, which has its beginnings here and now, and which also depends on how we behave towards each other, on what we put up with, on what we do, on how we honour God and love all people.

Dear Aboriginal people: the hour has come for you to take on new courage and new hope. You are called to remember the past, to be faithful to your worthy traditions, and to adapt your living culture whenever this is required by your own needs and those of your fellow man. Above all you are called to open your hearts ever more to the consoling, purifying and uplifting message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died so that we might all have life, and have it to the full. [cf Jn 10:10]
God did not begin to take an interest in men with the Incarnation of His Son, nor with Moses and the prophets, nor with Abraham. My people existed here in Australia thousands of years before Abraham. In all that time, God was with my people. He worked through their culture. He was saving us despite human weakness. He was preparing us for the day when He would see the features of Aborigines in the Image of His Son. So I must recognize, I must USE the things of God that are in my culture. I must use them in His service. If I do not do this my faith and my service are shallow. They are a pretending. They belong to someone else, not to me. God has asked us to love Him with whole mind, heart and soul. So I must give myself to God as an Aboriginal. This is what God wants or else He would not have made me what I am. Really it is the only way I can go about it.

**The good things in our way of life**

When I read the Gospels, I read them as an Aboriginal. There are many things in the Gospel that make me happy to be an Aboriginal because I think we have a good start. So many of the things Christ said and did, and the way He lived, make me think of the good things in our way of life.

Christ did not get worried about material things. In fact He looked on them as things that get in the way and make it hard to get to our true country. He was born in the countryside in a cave, like many of us have been born. He walked about like us and with nowhere to lay His head. He died with nothing on a cross. So many of our people die with nothing.

He had his own little group like us. He was strong on sharing – ‘If someone wants your tunic, give him your cloak’. We do a lot of things like that. Of course He went a lot further: In the Eucharist He shared Himself as nobody else could.

He liked the bush as we do. He loved nature. He saw in the lilies of the field a glory greater than Solomon’s. He loved the big things like the hills and open spaces. He loved the little things like the mustard seed and the grain of wheat and the corn, drops of cold water and the little sparrows. We have similar things like seeds and berries and yams, small water holes, and we like the quietness of the hills and the bush.

Like Him we have a deep sense of God in nature. We like the way He uses the things of nature to teach, and the important part nature plays in the Sacraments.
We have Dreamtime figures who formed the world, who gave us law and ceremony and life centres, from where our spirits come. We find it easy to see in Christ THE great Dreamtime figure, who, more than all others gave us Law and Ceremony and life centres, and marked out the way we must follow to reach our true country.

We have certain things in nature for our dreaming. We call some of them brother or sister. They not only represent our Dreamtime figure but in some way they are him. In some ways he lives in them and is them. So He is forever present. So it is not over difficult to realize that Christ is with us always ... the same yesterday, today and forever.

We do not find it strange when he says he is the life, that we can and must live with his life, that in this life of His we are one. In some way He lives in us and is us, so that what we do for each other we do for him.

We can appreciate also the community nature of the Church, because we are very conscious of being part of a group bound by religious ties.

We are strong on ceremony, through dance and song and painted bodies. Our ceremony closely involves groups and group participation. We have ceremony leaders. We have initiation ceremonies with long rituals. So the ceremony of the Mass, the ceremony of the Sacraments and the Liturgy should find ready response in us, provided it is made meaningful, based on a theology that is tuned to the Aboriginal mind.

From what I have said, it must surely be possible over the years, with prayer and hard work for all of us, to work out an ‘Aboriginal Theology’ that is truly catholic, Gospel theology, that sets up harmonizing chords in the soul of the Aboriginal. When this is done, and only then will the Aboriginal fully participate in the life of the Church and make his own peculiar enrichment of the life of the Church.
Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation

We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation.

We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters.

We recognize this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent.

Reaffirming the human rights of all Australians, we respect and recognize continuing customary laws, beliefs and traditions.

Through understanding the spiritual relationship between the land and its first peoples, we share our future and live in harmony.

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

Reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians. Many steps have been taken, many steps remain as we learn our shared histories.

As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologizes and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives.

We desire a future where all Australians enjoy their rights, accept their responsibilities, and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, overcome disadvantages, and respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination within the life of the nation.

Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

Reconciliation Australia’s challenge

Final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth

December 2000
Creator of the Universe

Creator of the universe,
we pray in gratitude and praise.
You were there at the beginning of all things,
shaping our world and preparing it for us.
You have provided the mountains and the trees,
the waters and the earth.
Help us to be caretakers of your gifts,
protecting the land from abuse,
and ready to share with all in need.
Show us how to use our science and technology in creative,
not destructive ways.
Deepen our awareness of our connectedness
with all your creation,
so that future generations will also enjoy every blessing.

Amen

Michael Gormly SSC
Blessing

May you always stand tall as a tree,
be as strong as the rock Uluru,
as gentle as the morning mist,
hold the warmth of the campfire in your heart,
and may the Creator Spirit always walk with you.

Elizabeth Pike
Aboriginal Elder
Prayer of the Aboriginal People

Father of all, You gave us the dreaming,
You have spoken to us through our beliefs.
You then made Your love clear to us
in the person of Jesus.
We thank You for Your care.
You own us.
You are our hope.
Make us strong as we face the problems of change.
We ask You to help the people of Australia,
to listen to us and respect our culture.
Make the knowledge of You grow strong in all people,
so that You can be at home in us and we can
make a home for everyone in our land.

Prayer composed for the meeting between Pope John Paul II
and the Aboriginal people,
November 1986.
My talk with Jesus
The Boss of Australia

Have you ever talked to someone very important, that you trust, and has that person given you the time to listen and you come away with the feeling of hope that something can be done about your problem.

Well Brothers and Sisters of Christ I want to tell you about my talk with Jesus, the Boss of Australia.

Last night I was talking with a man who invited me into his home. Being friendly I asked him his name and where did he come from. With a gentle smile he replied, ‘My name is Jesus and I come from a place called Australia the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit’. He went on to say that it was the sacred land to a group of people, who God his father, had given the authority to look after and these people have been there for over 50,000 years.

He told me, that these people, the Indigenous people of Australia took great care of the land and obeyed all the laws that his father had given them since time began and still today carry on the sacred rituals of Religion and ceremonies as passed down through the Dreaming. I said, ‘What is Dreaming, for I have had great visions for my people but these are only dreams’.

‘My son’, Jesus said, ‘the great Dreaming is the gift of life to love and share, therefore love your neighbour and share all your worldly goods then you shall inherit the Great Dreaming of the Creation that my father has made’.

‘Creation, and who is this Great God the Creator’, I asked.

‘My father has created all things around you. The mountains, the rivers, the hills, the trees, the birds and animals and all the plants. The Great God has control over the sun, the moon, day and night, the wind, the water and fire. He made all the things on this earth and most important of all he created you, in his own image, and now he has chosen you to carry on his great work’.

‘Me – has God really chosen me to continue his work in this great beautiful land the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit and the sacred land of my people. Please, tell me, Jesus what am I to do. This place is too big and it is such an enormous task and responsibility to put upon a poor Blackfella like me and who would listen to me anyway’.

Jesus placed a gentle hand upon my shoulder and in a kind and loving way, said, ‘Believe in me, my son and follow me and look up and see’.
I looked up and there before me was a wonderful sign of God’s great creation. A huge rock in the middle of Australia standing majestically in its desert surrounds. It was a magnificent sight. I watched in awe as the great rock turned all kinds of beautiful colours as the great Sun God danced across the sky.

Jesus said, ‘This is where we start. This is the mystical and Holy Place of the Dreamtime where all spirituality starts from its birthplace, where your people follow the dreaming as commanded by my father, to carry the religious and sacred laws of the land’.

I became frightened to be in such a holy presence of my ancestral Fathers but Jesus said, ‘Do not be afraid because I have done this before and summoned another mortal and great leader, Peter the Fisherman, to build my church upon a Rock. Now you know that Aboriginal spirituality is the essence of your sacred land and you may want to bring some of those dreamtime religious rituals and symbols into the church I asked Peter to build’.

‘Hey mate!’, I said to Jesus, ‘that’s an excellent idea, then all Australians can learn about the same things that the bible is saying about creation and at the same time follow the sacred pathway to God through the Gospels. Hang on Jesus! What if they, you know those people who have tried to destroy my culture and persecuted and massacred my people, those who exploited and desecrated the sacred land because of greed and wealth, who is going to tell them! Will I need an army or shall you stand by me and speak for me and support my stance. For I am forever hearing the woeful sound of wailing and anguish of my people dying through the injustices of the white man’s law.

Jesus you know that many of my people are imprisoned sometimes for just being born black and for pitiful things but why do you let them suffer and take their lives in a prison cell. Jesus, some of them are so young to die and it is taboo to die in a foreign and lonely place where no family can be there to set their spirit free. Maybe I should call to John the Baptist, he knows how to suffer and he understands us properly, because he died for justice and also in a prison cell. Jesus why did you allow your cousin John to die when you could have saved him? Sometimes I cannot understand white people who break away from the family and do not care. Not like us Blackfellas, we are all one mob and always support and share with each other.

But Jesus you are forgiven because you stood up for the oppressed and needy, was a prisoner in your own land, and you died a horrible death on the cross to save us poor sinners. And Jesus what have they done to my land, my sacred land. God, they have destroyed the land and the great mountain has disappeared. They have taken the very soul out of my people, my own people, whose birthplace belong to the mountain.
Can you hear their spirits crying out for help? How can I a Blackman, stop the desecration of the sacred land when such heavy machinery and new technology keep ripping up my soul for greed. **Yes greed, to make the rich get richer and poor get poorer.** Where is the Lazarus of this earth? Now he was a good fella, and a poor man, but you brought him back to life because of his sisters and your Mother Mary asked you to.

And what about your loving mother Jesus, Mary the Patroness of Christianity, did she not suffer and ached within her heart for you when you were, tortured, humiliated and died upon the Cross. Mary fully understands the agony and cries of my mothers and sisters who have given birth to this land and have shielded the children from evil and death. They have protected them and taught them to understand the laws of the Dreamtime and have fed them to make them grow up, like your Mother Mary who wrapped you in a swaddling blanket for warmth on Christmas Day. Mary also became a refugee when she and Joseph took you away from your homeland to get away from the blood thirsty soldiers who hunted you down like animals.

My people also suffered the loss and pain, when my brothers and sisters were cruelly torn apart from their mother’s breast and arms to be taken away to a foreign place, away from their loved ones and the place of their birth, many never to see their families, and their mother’s loving face again, and many never to return home but were told lies and treated like slaves and servants to their white masters - theirs protectors.

Like Mary, Jesus, how long do we the Indigenous people have to continue the suffering and heartache and persecution of those who carry out the cruel laws that we do not understand. Must we keep forgiving and keep turning the other cheek? And speaking of life, what is this world coming to. There is no more pretty things to see and treasure like before when us people, could count upon the Creator your Father to bring new life every year and fill the water-holes with food to bring forth new grass and flowers to enjoy and to provide plenty of bush tucker. There was contentment and harmony in the camps with plenty of laughter then, Jesus. The campfires burnt brightly and the sounds of didgeridoos playing, people singing and clap sticks humming in tune to the corroboree. There were the sacred rituals and religious ceremonies and initiations where people gathered in great numbers.

Now Jesus, what have we got? We are no longer happy but a self destructive race who has succumbed to the loss of our dignity and culture. **We have been punished for too long.** How could you allow this destruction? It is tearing my heart apart, this new suffering and disease I do not know about. When will it end and why are people in the world today fighting wars and killing themselves - what for Jesus? And Jesus what about your Rock that you asked Peter the Fisherman to build. **Where is it today?** Are you going to ask them Christians and those in authority to stop pussy footing around and be serious and committed to what they preach and practice their Catholic faith properly.
Jesus, my mate, if you are a true Australian then you know all Australians like a challenge. These Non Indigenous Australians are always boasting about how they took this land – stole the sacred land, because they say it was unoccupied. Remember the famous words Terra Nullius – how many people know what it means. And it’s in a foreign language so people cannot speak it properly. But that good Blackfella Mabo he took up the challenge and changed that law, and Brother Jesus all us Aboriginal and Islanders the Indigenous people of Australia, are really glad because the term is racist and a slur upon us as human beings. Fancy treating and calling us like animals and flora.

And Jesus I cannot understand all this fuss about Native land title because the Indigenous people was treated and called natives for one hundred and seventy nine years. And now they are saying we as Natives, the oppressed, who never surrendered our land, say we cannot have security of land that God the Almighty Creator has given to us.

Jesus when are you going to get dinkum and stop burying your head in the sand like an ostrich. What about you and I put a challenge to all those who believe your word and follow your name. Let us together break down the doors and fight the prejudices that exist in the church, let us break down the attitudes of the past and tell the true history of Australia. Let us share in the breaking of Bread and stop the patronising and paternalistic dogma that exists in the church. Give us the Indigenous people, a real voice to become a part of the church through our own ministry and teachings. And Jesus let us Indigenous people not forget our past and where we came from. Let us be proud of the great tradition, that your Father the God of all Gods has given us to stand tall amongst his people with true dignity. Like my ancestors and family who have died let us call them along with those missionaries who had a vision and the great courage to help lay the foundation stones of Peter’s church in Australia.

O great spirit of this great land, let us awaken those good people who led by example to give peace and harmony between my people and the Non Indigenous people of Australia. Let us walk together, and continue the journey under a new banner called a New Partnership the Church and Indigenous People of Australia. Let us all be bosses of Australia and accept each other’s values and customs and culture, let us listen, learn and love each other as we joyfully re-unite ourselves with Jesus, and I thank you Jesus for bringing us the great message of his holiness Pope John Paul 11 in his address to the Aboriginal and Islander people at Alice springs in 1986 where he said, ‘You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you and the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until that contribution has been joyfully received by others’.

Jesus, thank you for sharing your time with me, and giving me hope to spread the message of peace and a new vision of love, understanding and reconciliation within ourselves and the great Catholic Church of Australia.’

Gabby Willaway
Prayer for the Journey of Healing

Dear God …

We who have come from every land give thanks for Australia; this earth that feeds us; the shores that bind us; the skies that envelop us in freedom.

We stand together, united as one people: proud of our ability to work together; grateful for our gifts; nourished by our diversity and our harmony.

Yet we turn to the original owners of our land and see, too, what we have taken. We weep for their loss of freedom, of country, of children – even of their lives. We stand in awe at their survival, and in debt for their land.

We have shadows in our history which if unfaced diminish us. We have taken without asking; our nation has taken without asking; lives are wounded. We see the pain, feel the sorrow and seek forgiveness.

Let us look back with courage; see the truth and speak it. Let us look around with compassion; see the cost and share it. Let us look forward with hope; see what can be and create it.

Give us courage to face the truth; compassion to share the burden – strength to play our part in the healing – and hope to walk forward to a place of justice.

With courage, compassion, strength and hope, we will walk together on the journey of healing.

A contribution to the nation, for use and adaptation – from the WA Reconciliation Inter-faith working Group.
Reconciliation
200 Years

200 years of devastation
200 years of systemization
200 years of memories and pain
200 years of uniting once again

Time to forget hate and sorrow
Time to build a new tomorrow
Time to come together and unite
Time to forget the hate and fight

We are talking of reconciliation
We are talking of being one nation
We are talking of past devastation
We are talking of strengthening our nation

One nation together at last
One nation sharing our future, our past
One nation planning for future generation
One nation sharing ambitions and aspirations

Reconciliation is what it’s all about
Reconciliation we are talking it out
Reconciliation time to make amends
Reconciliation time to make new friends

We sit here to unite
We sit here black and white
We sit here in celebration
We sit here in education

We sit here no more hate or sorrow
We sit here planning our tomorrow
Reconciliation is what it’s all about
Reconciliation we are talking it out.

Cec Fisher, an Aboriginal man born in Cherbourg and now a resident of Ipswich, Queensland, is a prolific poet. He wrote this poem for a reconciliation day in Toowoomba.
The Blue Heeler

Now I have mustered cattle, quiet ones and wild ones too.
They don’t like the stockyard, mate, the gate they won’t go through.
They’re like so many dinkum Aussie blokes who’ll dodge that narrow way.
So Lord send your Holy Spirit out to muster them today.

Chorus:
Lord, send your Holy Spirit out to muster this wild mob
He’s like a good blue heeler dog, tracking, checking is his job.
He nips them on the ankles, even cranky blokes who fight,
So when God’s spirit musters them they’ll turn from wrong to right.

Oh, they’ll kick and they’ll buck and they’ll bellow, they’ll hear the drover’s voice
He must have a lot of love, a lot of patience to help them make their right choice.
In the towns and the concrete jungles, many clean skins with no brand.
He’ll brand them with the rugged cross, it’s the work of Beulah Land.

So come on, let’s join the muster, mates
Let’s go and round up all the strays
They’re lost like the frightened cattle,
From our God they’ve gone far astray.
Bound for Hell’s destruction,
Satan’s chasing them in a wild stampede.
Let’s muster them for Jesus, mate
For them His heart does bleed.

But the muster will be over soon, and we’ll be going home.
Let’s turn from sin and Satan, from our God no longer roam.
‘Cause you’re worth more than all the gold in Kalgoorlie’s Golden Mile.
The price was Calvary, that’s where Jesus shed His precious life’s blood
To ransom you and me.

Ron Williams
Dadirri.

A special quality, a unique gift of Aboriginal people, is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. It is something like what you call contemplation.

The contemplative way of Dadirri spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again. In our Aboriginal way we learnt to listen from our earliest times. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened.

We are not threatened by silence. We are completely at home in it. Our Aboriginal way has taught us to be still and wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth. When twilight comes we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun. We watch the bush foods and wait for them to open before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies we wait for a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly. We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and meetings. The right people must be present. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes many hours will be spent on painting the body before an important ceremony.

We don't worry. We know that in time and in the Spirit of Dadirri [that deep listening and quiet stillness] the way will be made clear. We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us - to catch up - but waiting with us as we find our own place in this world.

We are like the tree standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burnt, but inside the tree the sap is still flowing and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree we have endured the flames and we still have the power to be re-born.

Our people are used to the struggle and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves have spent many years learning about the white man’s way; we have learnt to speak the white man’s language; we have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time and listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for – respect and understanding. We know that our white brothers and sisters carry their own particular burdens. We believe that if they let us come to them - if they open up their minds and hearts to us – we may lighten their burdens. There is a struggle for us; but we have not lost our Spirit of Dadirri.

There are deep springs within each of us. Within this deep spring, which is the very Spirit, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The time for re-birth is now. If our culture is alive and strong and respected it will grow. It will not die and our Spirit will not die. I believe the Spirit of Dadirri that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves but in our whole nation.

Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman
WE HAVE A DREAM

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties, frustrations and fears of this moment, we still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in our faith.

We have a dream that one day this nation will live out its [Christian] creed that all people are created one and equal [in the Lord].

We have a dream where all our children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the beliefs of their community but by the content of their character.

We have a dream today.

We have a dream that every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain laid low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which we will return to our homes. With this faith we will be able to make out of the mountains of despair a stone of hope.

With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our country into a beautiful harmony of togetherness.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together.

And if our nation is to be a great nation this dream must become true.

We have a dream.

Catholic Community of Portadown, July 1998
[Adapted from Martin Luther King]
Treaty Let’s Get it Right

“Most Australians are open-hearted and fair-minded and essentially want to build a decent society for all Australians, no matter what their cultural background happens to be... I am convinced there is a growing awareness within the general Australian community of what it means to be an Indigenous Australian”

Geoff Clark Chairman ATSIC

As Australians we have made a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation.

Two rivers have run their course separated for so long - Can we embrace diversity together?

We have walked together this far along the Reconciliation road - a dusty, pot-holed road.

Can we dream of a brighter day when the waters will be one? Can a process be put in place which will unite all Australians?

Can we be patient in continuing the conversation with each other?

We must keep walking and working together to build on what we’ve done, keeping our eyes on the prize:

“A future where all Australians enjoy their rights, accept their responsibilities, and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.”
Message of Hope

To our young people
Be proud of your identity as a young Aboriginal person
You are from one of the most ancient living cultures of the Earth
Rich in spirituality, strong in the determination of survival
Wise in the knowledge of belonging and truth
And just in the equality of existence of all living things
Take from your ancestors and old people an understanding
Of their pain and suffering
Allowing you the strengths to overcome life’s tribulations and trials
Recognise the symbol of unity and pride
Embedded in black, red and yellow
Respect your Elders, family and community
Be yourself and never become what they want you to believe you are.

Robert Eggington
Bentley, WA
The Koori Mail
Wednesday 12 February 2003
JUBILEE PRAYER

Father Our Creator,
you created all things, seen and unseen,
listen to my silent prayer as I stand here before you.

As my weary eyes look back over distant horizons,
back to those days where my people walked.
The footprints of my grandfathers are imprinted on the earth,
and their images become real to me.

I see my grandfathers standing tall and strong,
warriors of long ago.
I hear them singing, I see them dancing,
and my spirit moves within me.

They told of the emus fighting,
and the kangaroos picking up the scent of our hunters,
the images fade away as I feel the hurt of my people.
I can hear the cries of my grandmothers as they cry
for their children. Grandfather, you can see me as I stand
here and feel this hurt.

Father Creator, is this the purpose of my being here
or is it Your plan to reshape my people
to be once again the proud race it once was?
Let me walk with You and my grandfathers
towards the dawning of a proud and new nation.
I thank you for my sacred being.
Amen

NATSICC 1995
A long time ago on the banks of the Hawkesbury River, there was an area populated with trees, but every time it rained and waters rushed down the mountains, one by one the trees were washed into the river below. Every tree except one little tree was washed into the river. All alone this little tree stood there worrying every time the clouds gathered in the sky. Right next to the little tree was a little rock, just peeping out of the ground.

One day the little Tree said to the little Rock,

‘You know every time the clouds gather in the sky I get so afraid that it is going to rain and the waters will come rushing down the mountain and wash me into the river just like they did to my family and friends.’

‘Gee’, said the little Rock, ‘I wish there was something I could do’.

So every time the clouds gathered in the sky, together the little Rock and the Tree worried.

Then one day as the Rock and Tree were talking together the little tree said,

‘Why don’t we call on the Aboriginal Spirits that live on the land, and see if they can help?’

So they called on the Aboriginal Spirits, and the Aboriginal Spirits came and they made a fire, and sat in a circle around the Rock and the Tree, and they listened to their story…

The little Tree said,

‘Every time the clouds gather in the sky I worry that maybe this time the waters will come rushing down the mountain and I will be washed into the river just like my family and friends before me’.

The little Rock said,

‘I would like to help the little Tree but I don’t know what I can do, I’m only a little Rock’.

The Spirits talked amongst themselves then one Spirit spoke and said,

‘We have decided with every dawn you, Rock, will get a little bit bigger’.

Then the Aboriginal Spirits left…

When the sun came up the next day, the little Rock started to come out of the earth, getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

When the rain did come and the waters came rushing down the mountain, it would go around the Rock leaving the little Tree to grow, and together they grew bigger and stronger each day.
Then one day the Rock said to the Tree,

‘You know, every time it rains and the waters come rushing down the mountain I can feel my foundations start to move, and I think it won’t be long before I will crack and be washed into the river, and I will be leaving you’.

‘No that will never happen,’ the Tree said, ‘for I am big and strong now, and my roots are so deep down in the earth. I will wrap myself around you and protect you’.

And the Tree began to wrap itself around the Rock ...

And when the clouds gathered in the sky,  
and the rains came  
and the waters came rushing  
down the mountain,  
it went around the  
Rock and the Tree.  
For the Rock and the Tree are so locked together  
That nothing can part them.

So .... every time  
That we Aboriginal people visit the Rock and the Tree  
we see two people  
who have a perfect kindness for each other.

For the perfect kindness is true love.  

Maisie Cavanagh
PRAYER FOR HEALING

God of mercy and compassion,
our hearts too,
are heavy with the pain of our people.
we are sorry.

Hopelessness and despair of life
has caused much hurt and anger.
They have lost their way.
We ask you to touch our hearts
of our broken people
mend their paths and
walk with them.

May they feel the spirit of
Your healing touch.

Show us the way of our ancestors.

May the spirit of
our ancestors strengthen
and guide us on our journey
to the light of hope and the love
of life in Christ.

Amen

By QAICC- 27 October 2000
Rockhampton
Prayer for our Broken People
It’s not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit
says the Lord. Zechariah 4:6

Psalm 23 [Aboriginal Style]

My Big Fella Boss up in the sky is like the father emu.
He will always look after me and take me to green grass.
And leads me to where the water holes are full and fresh all the time.

He leads me away from the thick scrub
and helps me keep safe from the hunter, dingoes and eagles.
At nighttime when I’m very lonely and sad, I will not be afraid.
For my Father covers me with His feathers like a father emu.
His spear and shield will always protect me.

My Big Fella Boss always gives me a good feed
in the middle of my enemies.
In hot times he makes me sit down in a cool shade and rest.

He gives me plenty of love and care all of my life through.
Then I will live with my Big Fella Boss like a father emu,
that cares for his chickens in good country, full of peace and safety,

Forevermore and evermore.

Ron Williams
We Walked on Sacred Ground

The longest occupation of any race in the world…
The longest isolation of any people from all the rest…
By far the greatest number of Australians who have ever lived
have been members of the Aboriginal race…
Wandering… developing spirituality, not materially
Ceremonies, lore, kinship, sharing, settling, 47,000 years
Shattered … in 1788

The land is our mother, our life force
the mother which nurtures, helps us to grow,
has protective feelings towards us
how many people would take a knife and cut their mother?
This is what you have done with your mining and your roads.

Oppressed, shortened life expectancy,
this adult generation educated only to grade 3
shuffled around, separated from our parents, rejected in the work place.
We are a long way from where the institutional Church is to-day
but our God doesn’t sit up there
He is… a part of us

Lord from which side of the river am I asking my questions?
I am compelled in all honesty to say ‘I am racist’, I am part of the original sin.
Teach me how the oppressed can be grace to my sinfulness, questions to my answers.

We named God long before Christianity came.
We dream… our dream is God himself.
Our symbols are symbols shared.
We go from water-hole to water-hole seeking life,
we paint ourselves with the colour of liturgy,
we light our camp fires, circle their purifying smoke,
celebrate corroborees, sacrifice food.
The way of Aboriginal people is not far from the way Jesus taught.
Talk is like the wind…
Talk goes away.

It is the heart that remains.
As I tell the story of the past in the evening,
I know that my God is an Aboriginal.
My God speaks my language.
Creation told me there was a God…
When I went fishing in the river I saw my God there…
When I meet with my people the Spirit is among us.
I walk strong and proud and tall as an Aborigine.

Lord, help us to gather fragments of all our people together,
to build slowly, actively but patiently, a new humanity.
All our roots feed into the tree whose deepest root
is that of the Aboriginal people
set deeply in the soil of this our land.
Free us from the burden of history and bring us home

Judy Kenny
Alcheringa

The Aborigines called it Alcheringa.
The sacred Dreaming. The Eternal Now.
We humans live in time where passing moments
are touched with meaning by the eternal Presence.

Where the Eternal touches time is Alcheringa

Human life is lived in two dimensions.
One out-stretches to the long horizons
while the other gives us fellowship with stars.
One is secular and the other is sacred.

The secular and the sacred need each other.

We leave our footprints on the crimson earth
and light our little campfires in the night
but our human spirit cannot be contained.
It leaps beyond the canopy of stars.

The human soul is a citizen of the Universe.

This faith-vision of the world is told in story
from generation to generation handed down.
In the circle of humanity a campfire glows
as children listen to the sacred stories.

We live in story as a fish lives in the sea.

Life is a journey and the hidden meaning
is revealed in the unfolding of a theme.
Sacred myths are the deepest of all stories
holding the bed-rock truths by which we live.

To find our theme is to come to self-discovery.

It is in the sacred that man finds his identity
as the timeless myth places him in time,
giving him a home and a familiar land,
giving him a habitation and a name.

The myth is told in time that has no tense.

The stories tell of a past that is ever present,
drawing the events into an all-embracing Now.
The sacred myth marks the tribal boundary,
for a man is a stranger where his story ends.

No one ever holds the total dream.

Sacred myths tell of creative journeys
when Spirit People wandered through this land
to form and fashion all things on this earth.
And all the land is still loaded with their words.

All human life is a creative journey.

They touched the waters that laughed across the rocks
and fish then flashed like sliver in the stream.
They called to trees and multitudes of birds
filled the morning sky with wings and songs.

The Dream is the perpetual morning-time of life.
By our little steps we journey to a great Beyond and in the Sacred our footprints are deep blessed. Anyone who does not look to the Beyond does not understand this present world.

*The meaning of every moment is in the Dream.*

All things are symbols of deeper things unseen. The lily that holds the light of the wintry moon, the mystic mountain and the valley of shade and gloom; all these are whispering of a deeper, higher world.

*The land is the mask of God, worn to reveal.*

The Dream is a spiritual vision of all things. It sees the darkness of mystery beyond the light and is conscious of a world beyond our sight. It is aware of the limitations of the mind.

*The eyes that see no darkness are surely blind.*

Listen to the words that the land is speaking, Hear the hymn that is singing in the wind. The paintings in the sacred cave are silent but all the living world is full of words.

*In every blade of grass is revelation.*

To live in Dream is to be liberated by the theme that is the truth of the story now unfolding. It is to be held in the palm of a loving hand, to feel the heart-throb of this ancient land.

*The Dream is rising from the ground on which we walk.*

Ritual is written into the drama of the universe, into the slow enacted corroboree of stars backed by the silent music of the night. There is ritual in the circulation of the light.

*It is ritual that makes the story real.*

It is the function of most sacred ceremony to realise the myth and to build the Dream so that the distant theme becomes reality and all is seen in the light of Alcheringa.

*In ritual is the heart of Alcheringa.*

We walk this land to drink from its deepest wells. We enter the story and live its ancient life. We walk bare-footed on the crimson ground till we have found the throbbing heart of Alcheringa.

*In the Dream is the strength of life’s reality.*

We do not come to barter artefacts or to chatter on some superficial level. We walk into the mother-place of Dream to lose our life so that we may find it here

*This is an encounter which excites the stars.*

Rod Cameron
Nurtured in the Nest

Family’s so important
to every single one
that’s where you learn of culture
where identity comes from.

Did you think it comes from classrooms
or out of some great book
or painting in a gallery
or flags flying on a hook?

It’s created in the womb you see
then nurtured in the nest
and one by one the family
moulds the spirit and the rest.

Then you’re an Aborigine
Aborigine all the way
not just ‘part’ or ‘of descent’
but Aborigine every day.

You learn about belonging
how to feel the land
you grow in spirituality
in family life first-hand.

Our lifeways, our identity
that’s what it’s all about
generation after generation
living culture out.

‘The Rock and the Tree’
Maisie Cavanagh
A Thanksgiving for Australia

God of holy dreaming, Great Creator Spirit, from the dawn of creation you have given your children the good things of Mother Earth.

You spoke and gum tree grew.

In the vast desert and dense forest, and in the cities at the water's edge, creation sings your praise.

Your presence endures as the Rock at the heart of our land.

When Jesus hung on the tree you heard the cries of your people and became one with your wounded ones; the convicts, the hunted and the dispossessed.

The sunrise of your Son coloured the earth anew, and bathed it in glorious hope.

In Jesus we have been reconciled to you, to each other and your whole creation.

Lead us on, Great Spirit, as we gather from the four corners of the earth;

Enable us to walk together in trust from the hurt and shame of the past into the full day which has dawned in Jesus Christ.

Amen

This prayer was part of the Heart of Reconciliation Service St Paul’s Cathedral Melbourne on the eve of the Australian Reconciliation Convention – 25 May, 1997
**Sorry Day Prayer**

Almighty and loving God, you who created ALL people in your image, lead us to seek your compassion as we listen to the stories of our past.

You gave your only Son, Jesus who died and rose again so that sins will be forgiven.

We place before you the pain and anguish of dispossession of land, language, lore, culture and family kinship that Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander peoples have experienced.

We live in faith that all people will rise from the depths of despair and hopelessness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have endured the pain and loss of loved ones, through the separation of children from their families.

We are sorry and ask God’s forgiveness.

Touch the hearts of the broken, homeless and inflicted and heal their spirits.

In your mercy and compassion walk with us as we continue our journey of healing to create a future that is just and equitable.

Lord, you are our hope.

Amen

Aboriginal and Islander Commission
National Council of Churches in Australia
2002
Reconciliation Prayer

Holy Father, God of Love
you are the Creator of this land and of all good things.

We acknowledge the pain and shame of our history
and the sufferings of our peoples,
and we ask your forgiveness.
We thank you for the survival of Indigenous cultures.

Our hope is in you because you gave your Son Jesus
to reconcile the world to you.
We pray for your strength and grace to forgive,
and accept and love one another,
as you love us and forgive and accept us
in the sacrifice of Your Son.

Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history
so that we may build a better future for our nations.
Teach us to respect all cultures.
Teach us to care for our land and waters.
Help us to share justly the resources of this land.
Help us to bring about spiritual and social change
to improve the quality of life for all groups in our communities, especially the disadvantaged.
Help your people to find true dignity and self-esteem
by your Spirit.

May your power and love be the foundations
on which we build our families, our communities
and our nations, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Wontulp-Bi-Buya Indigenous Theology Working Group,
Brisbane, 1997
SOMEDAY THERE ARE SONGS THAT WE SHALL SING

Now all around Australia, Aborigines once roamed,
and life, it was so peaceful; in this land they called their home.
With his dingo close beside him as he hunted day by day,
he could not foresee the future that would someday change his way.

In seventeen hundred and seventy, along came Captain Cook,
Aborigines’ life went downwards, it’s in many a history book.
There was so much trouble and sorrow and they went down so low,
until on the horizon no light at all did show.

Then something began to happen among Christians ‘round about,
and they became so burdened, for this race was dying out.
‘Oh, we cannot let that happen’, they began to say,
‘We’ll go and we will tell them there is hope for another day.’

Now that hope they brought is Jesus, friend, listen to what I say,
there are many, many Christians among this dark race today.
Oh, yes, we still have problems, such as gambling and drink,
but if we don’t turn to Jesus, then together we will sink.

Friend, think for just a moment, I’ve a few things left to say,
the past is now behind us, and the future’s ours today.
Lord, the problems are beyond us, so we now look to Thee,
for you alone can make us, Lord, a nation of destiny.

My friends here in Australia, I want to say to thee,
we have so many privileges in this great land of the free.
But great responsibility now rests on you and me,
to demonstrate to others, TRUTH, PEACE and LIBERTY.

Then someday there are songs that we shall sing,
then someday there’ll be joy that shall unfold,
Someday all mankind shall harmonise,
and we’ll sing the greatest story ever told.

Ron Williams
The Rainbow Serpent

This important Dreamtime myth relating to the beginnings of life, and to the central role played by the Rainbow Serpent in Creation, is described below by Oodgeroo Noonuccal. As has been mentioned, the Rainbow Serpent, although incorporating both male and female aspects, is generally considered female. In this account the Rainbow Serpent is the primary figure in the chronicle of Creation:

In the Dreamtime all the earth lay sleeping. Nothing grew. Nothing moved. Everything was quiet and still. The animals, birds and reptiles lay sleeping under the earth’s crust. Then one day the Rainbow Serpent awoke from her slumber and pushed her way through the earth’s crust, moving the stones that lay in her way.

When she emerged, she looked about her and then traveled over the land, going in all directions. She traveled far and wide, and when she grew tired she curled herself into a heap and slept. Upon the earth she left her winding tracks and the imprint of her sleeping body. When she traveled all the earth, she returned to the place where she had first appeared and called to the frogs, ‘Come out!’

The frogs were very slow to come from below the earth’s crust, for their bellies were heavy with water which they had stored in their sleep. The Rainbow Serpent tickled their stomachs, and when the frogs laughed, the water ran all over the earth to fill the tracks of the Rainbow Serpent’s wanderings - and that is how the lakes and rivers were formed.

Then the grass began to grow, and trees sprang up, and so life began on earth. All the animals, birds and reptiles awoke and followed the Rainbow Serpent, the Mother of Life, across the land. They were happy on earth, and each lived and hunted for food with his own tribe. The kangaroo, wallaby and emu tribes lived on the plains, the reptile tribes lived among the rocks and stones, and the bird tribes flew through the air and lived in the trees.

The Rainbow Serpent made laws that all were asked to obey, but some grew quarrelsome and were troublemakers. The Rainbow Serpent scolded them, saying, ‘Those who keep my laws I shall reward well, I shall give to them a human form. They and their children and their children’s children shall roam this earth for ever. This shall be their land. Those who break my laws I shall punish. They shall be turned to stone, never to walk the earth again’.

So the law breakers were turned to stone, and became mountains and hills, to stand forever to watch over the tribes hunting for food at their feet. But those who kept her laws she turned into human form, and gave each of them his own totem of the animal, bird or reptile whence they came. So the tribes knew themselves by their own totems, the kangaroo, the emu, the carpet snake, and many, many more. And in order that none should starve, she ruled that no man should eat of his own totem, but only of other totems. In this way there was food for all.

So the tribes lived together in the land given to them by the Mother of Life, the Rainbow Serpent, and they knew that the land would always be theirs, and that no-one should ever take it from them.

Wisdom from the Earth
Anna Voigt & Nevill Drury
A POEM FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER

Always look in, before you look out.  
Try a whisper, before you shout.

Learn from the elders, teach the young.  
Hear the message, no matter what tongue.

Offer your hand, don't stamp your feet.  
Present a smile, to people you meet.

Hear the wind, feel the rain.  
Touch the trees, it soothes the pain.

Watch nature, our beautiful guide.  
Feel the spirit that's by our side.

The spirit by our side is the spirit within.  
The pureness, the oneness, the barrier from sin.

A different name, a different face.  
A different language, a different place.

There seems a great difference, but we're all the same.  
We breathe the same air, we feel the same pain.

Always look in, before you look out.  
Try a prayer, before you shout.

Richard Walley,  
from Perth,  
directed and choreographed the celebration of the Week of Prayer at Parliament House.
LET US NOT BE BITTER

Away with bitterness, my own dark people
come stand with me, look forward, not back,
for a new time has come for us.
Now we must change, my people.
For so long, time for us stood still;
now we know life is change, life is progress.
Life is learning things, life is onward.
White men had to learn civilised ways,
now it is our turn.
Away with bitterness and the bitter past;
Let us try to understand the white man’s ways
and accept them as they accept us;
Let us judge white people by the best of their race.
The prejudiced ones are less than we,
we want them no more than they want us.
Let us not be bitter, that is an empty thing,
a maggot in the mind.
The past is gone like our childhood days of old,
the future comes like dawn after the dark,
bringing fulfillment.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal [formerly Kath Walker]
My People [1970]
Jacaranda Wiley Press
The Coming of the Light Prayer

Sentence

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'.

Prayer

Almighty God,
You have given to the people of the Islands of the Torres Strait the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ: mercifully grant that we may always walk in the light of his love and give us the strength and unifying power of your Holy Spirit to spread that light as we enlarge your kingdom in the hearts of all people.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.

* This prayer should only be spoken by persons of Torres Strait Islander descent.
Tranquility Prayer

In a circle — let us all close our eyes. 
Seek the Creator Spirit with our hearts and minds. 
Seek the face of love. 
Feel the earth beneath your feet, linking you to the past, 
standing where others have stood before you. 
The earth is Mother. 
Hear Mother call out to her child, 
Her suffering is still and deep. 
Listen to her prayer.

SILENCE

We stand under the canopy of eternity to look at this beautiful ancient lady who looked after her people by providing them with identity, home, spirituality, shelter, protection, nourishment and healing. 
Breathe in slowly the sacredness that is all around you. 
Exhale gently so as not to disturb the serenity of Mother. 
Feel the wind / breeze on your face: 
tantalising, sweet. 
Coming from nowhere, going to anywhere. 
But, bringing the gentle hint of a promise of hope. 
Quell the silent tears of Mother by re-establishing your spiritual bond to the land.

SILENCE

Listen to the sounds of the bush: 
hear the birds as they flit around singing, 
imagine them as they majestically catch the breeze with their wings. 
The rustling of the leaves as the gentle wind weaves the magic of Mother.

SILENCE

Smell the fragrance of the bush: 
refreshing, 
revitalising, 
renewing, 
welcoming, 
healing. 
Imagine the sounds from a time long gone: The clap-sticks keeping beat. 
The voices of the people as they celebrate their existence. 
Hear the voices of the Elders telling the ancient stories once written in the land. 
The droning of the didgeridoo. 
A time when the land and the people were one. 
Now, no more dancing, no more song.

SILENCE

[Yarra Healing]
Journey to the Centre

Be still, wait, and do not rush things. Let life happen by itself.  
Trust in the spirituality and wisdom that is around you.  
With certainty, we wait for the coming together of two stories.

Sometimes waiting can be unbearable;  
be patient, listen for the whisper that will herald the arrival of eternity.

The people of the land honour the Creator by honouring creation.  
There is a sacredness about all living things.  
All have the right to be here and breathe.  
Make the relationship between one place and another, then with each other.  
Leave a part of yourself in the land for another to find.  
Look back in sorrow and remember what was,  
then travel on, to what will be.

Spirituality is where you make your tracks in the land,  
It is the place where your story is told.  
Go deep into sacred wells of knowledge and experience the kind of truth  
that has the power to hurt and heal at the same time.  
Seek the new vision that is hidden there,  
silently awaiting the anticipated visit of the hesitant explorer.  
It is a place that speaks softly to you.  
It is a place that whispers, ‘You are mine and I am yours’.

Honour the memory of the people of this land from long ago.  
Enter into the land with the courage needed  
to deal with the true realities that await us there.  
Re-inhabit a moment in time where the silent and deep suffering of the  
people from the past can still be heard in the present.

Go further into the immensity of God and listen to creation breathe.  
Find an unfamiliar path, make a new commitment, change ideas and,  
evry now and then, change direction.  
In this place, the Creator Spirit tenderly stirs our inner peace  
to the friendship about to be born.  
Time enough to heal. Land enough to share.  
Befriend the past, acknowledge it, and then release it.  
Be free to act upon creating a future that unites the two stories into one.

Delsie Lillyst  
Catholic Education Office, Melbourne
Prayer for Guardians of the Land

Holy Father, as we pause at this time.
Let us remember we are standing
in the midst of your creation.
Help us always to remember the presence
of the guardians of this land,
whom you placed here so long ago.
Holy Father, may we always humbly travel
across this sacred land.
Remembering to give thanks for all of creation ~
the land and water,
mountains and lagoons,
trees, birds and animals,
who have been with the guardians all this time.

Holy Father,
we ask for forgiveness for the pain and hurt
from our mindless actions
to your special creation and the guardians.
Holy Father, may each one of us daily, give thanks
for the many blessings that you freely share with us.
May your guardians always walk peacefully.
We ask this prayer in Jesus’ name.
AMEN

Barbara and Ernie Trevaskis
AICCM Rockhampton
God is the only friend we got.

God the Father, the Son and God the Holy Spirit

You stick to him, He’s the only one.

Don’t listen to what others tell you about God,

He’s the best mate a man could have.

You don’t have Him, you don’t have no friend at all.

You look away from God, you go to ruin.

Arthur Corunna

(1893 – 1950)

(from ‘My Place’ by Sally Morgan)
Reflection

There are deep springs within each of us.
Within this deep spring, which is the very Spirit of God,
is a sound.
The sound of Deep calling to Deep.
The sound is the very Word of God.

Today, I am beginning to hear the Gospel
at the very level of my identity.
I am beginning to feel the great need we have of Jesus –
to protect and strengthen our identity
and to make us whole and new again.

‘The time is now for re-birth’, the Holy Father told us.
Jesus comes to fulfill, not to destroy.
If our culture is alive and strong and respected,
it will grow. It will not die,
and our spirit will not die.

And I believe that the spirit of dadirri [inner silence]
that we have to offer will blossom and grow,
not just within ourselves,
but in our whole nation.

*Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman*
The Tree of Life

We all need trees to survive. God made the trees for us to protect and nurture.

They give us fresh air to breathe.
They give us good food to eat and water to drink.
They give us shelter and protection.

Trees give us life.

There are many parts of a tree. All dependant on the other to survive.

THE ROOTS are deeply connected to our Creator Spirit. The roots are the tree’s lifeblood. Drawing on the earth for nourishment. Keeping us deeply rooted to our Culture by teaching us the importance of keeping our feet firmly fixed to the ground.

THE TRUNK is the solidarity and strength we share as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are holes in our trunk that we are still trying to fill and as time passes, these holes become covered in life saving bark protecting us from harm and keeping us strong.

THE BRANCHES of the tree reach out in different directions, all are of a different size and strength. At the top of the tree are some older branches… these are our Elders still strong and connected to the trunk and showing the way for us to grow. The young and green saplings are our children. They rely on the tree for strength, support and encouragement. The Elders welcome the new and young branches. They guide and teach them to grow and reach for the stars. Learning to understand what part they play in the journey of ‘The Tree of Life’.

THE LEAVES cling to the branches and continue to grow with the tree. Some become the branches. Some leaves fall to the ground and become a source or nourishment to the roots.

This is how we continue to survive and grow strong.

Strong in culture.
Strong in Faith.

Let’s up pray that we continue to support and care for the tree.

Giving it strength and love.

For it is the tree of our Families.
The tree of our Communities.
The Tree of our Life.

Marcia Bartley
As a peacemaker I will.......... 

   Develop peace within my own heart and mind.  
      See the good in myself and other people.  
         Give others the benefit of the doubt.  
            Regard life as a precious gift.  
               Take time to look deeply and to listen.  
            Practise kindness – regardless of who “deserves” it.  
               Take responsibility for how I affect others.  
                  Protect the vulnerable.  
                     Learn from my mistakes.  
                        Speak to myself like a true friend.  
                           Notice what I already have.  
                              Soften my reactivity.  
                     Accept difference – even when it challenges me.  
               Extend my vision of community to embrace all living beings.  
         Protect the earth. Honour the earth. Cherish the earth and all its living forms.  
                        Learn the value of silence and of thoughtful speech.  
                           Practise the power of forgiveness.  
                      Open the space for joy, spirit and illumination to come in.  
                        Refuse violence as a solution to human problems – ever.  
                           See the unity in all of life.  
                      Live as a source of peace for others – and also for myself. 

Stephanie Dowrick
Fire Blessing

May the fire be in our thoughts
Making them true, good and just,
May it protect us from the evil one.

May the fire be in our eyes;
May it open our eyes to share what is good in life.
We ask that the fire may protect us
from what is not rightfully ours.

May the fire be on our lips, so that we may
speak the truth in kindness;
That we may serve and encourage others.
May it protect us from speaking evil.

May the fire be in our ears.
We pray that we may hear with a deep, deep listening
So that we may hear the flow of water, and of all Creation,
and the dreaming.
May we be protected from gossip and from things
that harm and break down our family.

May the fire be in our arms and hands,
so that we may be of service and build up love.
May the fire protect us from all violence.
May the fire be in our whole being –
In our legs and in our feet,
enable us to walk the earth
With reverence and care;
So that we may walk in the ways of goodness and truth and
be protected from walking away from what is truth.

An ancient Prayer...40,000 years old......handed down through the Aboriginal culture and translated into the English language. The late Burnum Burnum, Australian Aboriginal Elder, gave this prayer to Helen Summers on January 26, 1995 (Australia Day) in New York.

Amen
Holy Father, God of Love

Holy Father, God of Love, You are the Creator of this land and of all good things. Our hope is in you because you gave your son Jesus to reconcile the world to you. We pray for your strength and grace to forgive, accept and love one another, as you love us and forgive and accept us in the sacrifice of your son. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prepared by Wontulp Bi-Buya Indigenous Theology Working Group
NATSICC Prayer

Lord, we are companions on a journey

Only you Dear Lord

Know the identity and depth of me

You know my hurts and pains

Those frustrations I feel in this land

So please I ask you

Take my hand and comfort me

Reconcile and guide me in justice and in faith

For we’re on our way to Alice (Springs)

Where you expressed you love for me

Lord, set me free

And let me be the servant I want to be

Lord, I thank you

For hearing and understanding me

For Lord,

You are always on my mind

And on my lips

And in my heart

And there’s simply no other way that

It could be.

Amen
Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples
House of Representatives
Parliament House, Canberra

13 February 2008

—I move:

That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our nation's history. The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation. For the future we take heart: resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written. We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again. A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed. A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility. A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

There comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully
reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time. And that is why the parliament is today here assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation’s soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia.

Last year I made a commitment to the Australian people that if we formed the next government of the Commonwealth we would in parliament say sorry to the Stolen Generations. Today I honour that commitment. I said we would do so early in the life of the new parliament. Again, today I honour that commitment by doing so at the commencement of this the 42nd parliament of the Commonwealth. Because the time has come, well and truly come, for all peoples of our great country, for all citizens of our great Commonwealth, for all Australians—those who are Indigenous and those who are not—to come together to reconcile and together build a new future for our nation.

Some have asked, ‘Why apologise?’ Let me begin to answer by telling the parliament just a little of one person’s story—an elegant, eloquent and wonderful woman in her 80s, full of life, full of funny stories, despite what has happened in her life’s journey. A woman who has travelled a long way to be with us today, a member of the Stolen Generation who shared some of her story with me when I called around to see her just a few days ago. Nungala Fejo, as she prefers to be called, was born in the late 1920s. She remembers her earliest childhood days living with her family and her community in a bush camp just outside Tennant Creek. She remembers the love and the warmth and the kinship of those days long ago, including traditional dancing around the camp fire at night. She loved the dancing. She remembers once getting into strife when, as a four-year-old girl, she insisted on dancing with the male tribal elders rather than just sitting and watching the men, as the girls were supposed to do.

But then, sometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men. Her family had feared that day and had dug holes in the creek bank where the children could run and hide. What they had not expected was that the white welfare men did not come alone. They brought a truck, they brought two white men and an Aboriginal stockman on horseback cracking his stockwhip. The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away. They were herded and piled onto the back of the truck. Tears flowing, her mum tried clinging to the sides of the truck as her children were taken away to the Bungalow in Alice, all in the name of protection.

A few years later, government policy changed. Now the children would be handed over to the missions to be cared for by the churches. But which church would care for them? The kids were simply told to line up in three lines. Nanna Fejo and her sister stood in the middle line, her older brother and cousin on her left. Those on the left were told that they had become Catholics, those in the middle Methodists and those on the right Church of England. That is how the complex questions of post-reformation theology were resolved in the Australian outback in the 1930s. It was as crude as that. She and her sister were sent to a Methodist mission on Goulburn Island and then Croker Island. Her Catholic brother
was sent to work at a cattle station and her cousin to a Catholic mission.

Nanna Fejo’s family had been broken up for a second time. She stayed at the mission until after the war, when she was allowed to leave for a prearranged job as a domestic in Darwin. She was 16. Nanna Fejo never saw her mum again. After she left the mission, her brother let her know that her mum had died years before, a broken woman fretting for the children that had literally been ripped away from her.

I asked Nanna Fejo what she would have me say today about her story. She thought for a few moments then said that what I should say today was that all mothers are important. And she added: ‘Families—keeping them together is very important. It’s a good thing that you are surrounded by love and that love is passed down the generations. That’s what gives you happiness.’ As I left, later on, Nanna Fejo took one of my staff aside, wanting to make sure that I was not too hard on the Aboriginal stockman who had hunted those kids down all those years ago. The stockman had found her again decades later, this time himself to say, ‘Sorry.’ And remarkably, extraordinarily, she had forgiven him.

Nanna Fejo’s is just one story. There are thousands, tens of thousands of them: stories of forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their mums and dads over the better part of a century. Some of these stories are graphically told in Bringing Them Home, the report commissioned in 1995 by Prime Minister Keating and received in 1997 by Prime Minister Howard. There is something terribly primal about these firsthand accounts. The pain is searing; it screams from the pages. The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity.

These stories cry out to be heard; they cry out for an apology. Instead, from the nation’s parliament there has been a stony and stubborn and deafening silence for more than a decade. A view that somehow we, the parliament, should suspend our most basic instincts of what is right and what is wrong. A view that, instead, we should look for any pretext to push this great wrong to one side, to leave it languishing with the historians, the academics and the cultural warriors, as if the Stolen Generations are little more than an interesting sociological phenomenon. But the Stolen Generations are not intellectual curiosities. They are human beings, human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of parliaments and governments. But, as of today, the time for denial, the time for delay, has at last come to an end.

The nation is demanding of its political leadership to take us forward. Decency, human decency, universal human decency, demands that the nation now steps forward to right a historical wrong. That is what we are doing in this place today. But should there still be doubts as to why we must now act. Let the parliament reflect for a moment on the following facts: that, between 1910 and 1970, between 10 and 30 per cent of Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their mothers and fathers. That, as a result, up to 50,000 children were forcibly taken from their families. That this was the product of the deliberate, calculated policies of the state as reflected in the explicit powers given to
them under statute. That this policy was taken to such extremes by some in administrative authority that the forced extractions of children of so-called ‘mixed lineage’ were seen as part of a broader policy of dealing with ‘the problem of the Aboriginal population’.

One of the most notorious examples of this approach was from the Northern Territory Protector of Natives, who stated, and I quote:

Generally by the fifth and invariably by the sixth generation, all native characteristics of the Australian aborigine are eradicated. The problem of our half-castes—

to quote the protector—

will quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of their progeny in the white ...

The Western Australian Protector of Natives expressed not dissimilar views, expounding them at length in Canberra in 1937 at the first national conference on Indigenous affairs that brought together the Commonwealth and state protectors of natives. These are uncomfortable things to be brought out into the light. They are not pleasant. They are profoundly disturbing. But we must acknowledge these facts if we are to deal once and for all with the argument that the policy of generic forced separation was somehow well motivated, justified by its historical context and, as a result, unworthy of any apology today.

Then we come to the argument of intergenerational responsibility, also used by some to argue against giving an apology today. But let us remember the fact that the forced removal of Aboriginal children was happening as late as the early 1970s. The 1970s is not exactly a point in remote antiquity. There are still serving members of this parliament who were first elected to this place in the early 1970s. It is well within the adult memory span of many of us. The uncomfortable truth for us all is that the parliaments of the nation, individually and collectively, enacted statutes and delegated authority under those statutes that made the forced removal of children on racial grounds fully lawful.

There is a further reason for an apology as well: it is that reconciliation is in fact an expression of a core value of our nation—and that value is a fair go for all. There is a deep and abiding belief in the Australian community that, for the Stolen Generations, there was no fair go at all. And there is a pretty basic Aussie belief that says it is time to put right this most outrageous of wrongs. It is for these reasons, quite apart from concerns of fundamental human decency, that the governments and parliaments of this nation must make this apology. Because, put simply, the laws that our parliaments enacted made the Stolen Generations possible. We, the parliaments of the nation, are ultimately responsible, not those who gave effect to our laws, the problem lay with the laws themselves. As has been said of settler societies elsewhere, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors and therefore we must also be the bearer of their burdens as well. Therefore, for our nation, the course of action is clear. Therefore for our people, the course of action is clear. And that is, to deal now with what has become one of the darkest chapters in
Australia’s history. In doing so, we are doing more than contending with the facts, the evidence and the often rancorous public debate. In doing so, we are also wrestling with our own soul. This is not, as some would argue, a black-armband view of history; it is just the truth: the cold, confronting, uncomfortable truth. Facing with it, dealing with it, moving on from it. And until we fully confront that truth, there will always be a shadow hanging over us and our future as a fully united and fully reconciled people. It is time to reconcile. It is time to recognise the injustices of the past. It is time to say sorry. It is time to move forward together.

To the Stolen Generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the Government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the Parliament of Australia, I am sorry. And I offer you this apology without qualification. We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied. We offer this apology to the mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments. In making this apology, I would also like to speak personally to the members of the Stolen Generation and their families: to those here today, so many of you; to those listening across the nation—from Yuendumu, in the central west of the Northern Territory, to Yabara, in North Queensland, and to Pitjantjatjara in South Australia.

I know that, in offering this apology on behalf of the government and the parliament, there is nothing I can say today that can take away the pain you have suffered personally. Whatever words I speak today, I cannot undo that. Words alone are not that powerful. Grief is a very personal thing. I say to non-Indigenous Australians listening today who may not fully understand why what we are doing is so important, I ask those non-Indigenous Australians to imagine for a moment if this had happened to you. I say to honourable members here present: imagine if this had happened to us. Imagine the crippling effect. Imagine how hard it would be to forgive. But my proposal is this: if the apology we extend today is accepted in the spirit of reconciliation, in which it is offered, we can today resolve together that there be a new beginning for Australia. And it is to such a new beginning that I believe the nation is now calling us.

Australians are a passionate lot. We are also a very practical lot. For us, symbolism is important but, unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history. Today’s apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt. Our challenge for the future is now to cross that bridge and, in so doing, embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Embracing, as part of that partnership, expanded link-up and other critical services to help the Stolen Generations to trace their families, if at all possible, and to provide dignity to their lives. But the core of this partnership for the future is to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and
employment opportunities. This new partnership on closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous when it comes when it comes to overall life expectancy.

The truth is: a business as usual approach towards Indigenous Australians is not working. Most old approaches are not working. We need a new beginning. A new beginning which contains real measures of policy success or policy failure. A new beginning, a new partnership, on closing the gap with sufficient flexibility not to insist on a one-size-fits-all approach for each of the hundreds of remote and regional Indigenous communities across the country but instead allows flexible, tailored, local approaches to achieve commonly-agreed national objectives that lie at the core of our proposed new partnership. And a new beginning that draws intelligently on the experiences of new policy settings across the nation. However, unless we as a parliament set a destination for the nation, we have no clear point to guide our policy, our programs or our purpose; no centralised organising principle.

So let us resolve today to begin with the little children—a fitting place to start on this day of apology for the Stolen Generations. Let us resolve over the next five years to have every Indigenous four-year-old in a remote Aboriginal community enrolled and attending a proper early childhood education centre or opportunity and engaged in proper preliteracy and prenumeracy programs. Let us resolve to build new educational opportunities for these little ones, year by year, step by step, following the completion of their crucial preschool year. Let us resolve to use this systematic approach to building future educational opportunities for Indigenous children to provide proper primary and preventive health care for the same children, to begin the task of rolling back the obscenity that we find today in infant mortality rates in remote Indigenous communities—up to four times higher than in other communities.

None of this will be easy. Most of it will be hard—very hard. But none of it, none of it, is impossible, and all of it is achievable with clear goals, clear thinking, and by placing an absolute premium on respect, cooperation and mutual responsibility as the guiding principles of this new partnership on closing the gap. The mood of the nation is for reconciliation now, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The mood of the nation on Indigenous policy and politics is now very simple. The nation is calling on us, the politicians, to move beyond our infantile bickering, our point-scoring and our mindlessly partisan politics and elevate at least this one core area of national responsibility to a rare position beyond the partisan divide. Surely this is the spirit, the unfulfilled spirit, of the 1967 referendum. Surely, at least from this day forward, we should give it a go.

So let me take this one step further to take what some may see as a piece of political posturing and make a practical proposal to the opposition on this day, the first full sitting day of the new parliament. I said before the election the nation needed a kind of war cabinet on parts of Indigenous policy, because the challenges are too great and the
consequences too great to just allow it all to become a political football, as it has been so often in the past. I therefore propose a joint policy commission, to be led by the Leader of the Opposition and myself and, with a mandate to develop and implement—to begin with—an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years. It will be consistent with the government’s policy framework, a new partnership for closing the gap. If this commission operates well, I then propose that it work on the further task of constitutional recognition of the first Australians, consistent with the longstanding platform commitments of my party and the pre-election position of the opposition. This would probably be desirable in any event because, unless such a proposition were absolutely bipartisan, it would fail at a referendum. As I have said before, the time has come for new approaches to enduring problems. And working constructively together on such defined projects, I believe, would meet with the support of the nation. It is time for fresh ideas to fashion the nation’s future.

Today the parliament has come together to right a great wrong. We have come together to deal with the past so that we might fully embrace the future. And we have had sufficient audacity of faith to advance a pathway to that future, with arms extended rather than with fists still clenched. So let us seize the day. Let it not become a moment of mere sentimental reflection. Let us take it with both hands and allow this day, this day of national reconciliation, to become one of those rare moments in which we might just be able to transform the way in which the nation thinks about itself, whereby the injustice administered to these Stolen Generations in the name of these, our parliaments, causes all of us to reappraise, at the deepest level of our beliefs, the real possibility of reconciliation writ large. Reconciliation across all Indigenous Australia. Reconciliation across the entire history of the often bloody encounter between those who emerged from the Dreamtime a thousand generations ago and those who, like me, came across the seas only yesterday. Reconciliation which opens up whole new possibilities for the future.

For the nation to bring the first two centuries of our settled history to a close, as we begin a new chapter and which we embrace with pride, admiration and awe these great and ancient cultures we are blessed, truly blessed, to have among us. Cultures that provide a unique, uninterrupted human thread linking our Australian continent to the most ancient prehistory of our planet. And growing from this new respect, to see our Indigenous brothers and sisters with fresh eyes, with new eyes, and with our minds wide open as to how we might tackle, together, the great practical challenges that Indigenous Australia faces in the future.

So let us turn this page together: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Government and Opposition, Commonwealth and State, and write this new chapter in our nation’s story together. First Australians, First Fleeters, and those who first took the Oath of Allegiance just a few weeks ago. Let’s grasp this opportunity to craft a new future for this great land: Australia. I commend the motion to the House.

http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0073.cfm