

Thursday, 30 March 2017
from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Easter 2017 Messages from Australian Church Leaders

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ... they ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!'

As we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, and hear and receive the accounts of disciples encountering the Risen Lord, may we rejoice that the Lord is truly risen. May we be assured that he has gone before us. Like Mary Magdalene may we with eager hearts tell our sisters and brothers what we have witnessed and may we, like them, meet Jesus on the way

The National Council of Churches in Australia wishes all a healthy and holy Easter.

*Sr Elizabeth Delaney, General Secretary
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(**Note:** This year both the Western and Orthodox Churches will celebrate Easter on the same day, Sunday 16 April.)

The 5 messages follow.

For more information, contact the NCCA Secretariat on 8259 0800.

Catholic Church in Australia

CHRIST IS RISEN! ALLELUIA!

Dear Friends,

This joyous Easter message is the same every year, but it always echoes just a little bit differently given the world in which we live.

Across the globe in 2017, there is political upheaval and wars and rumours of war. We pray that our political and civic leaders be blessed with wise and compassionate hearts. May they avoid all rhetoric and decisions that divide people. Christ in his costly death and resurrection has made us all one!

That is why we privileged citizens of a richly blessed country like Australia are all called to generously reach out to be guardians of life to those in need.

Our mission is to protect those who are vulnerable and give special tender care to refugees, the poor, the unborn, the aged and our children. We ask forgiveness when we fail in this sacred duty.

Especially in recent weeks, we Catholics in Australia have all been deservedly shamed and saddened at the extent of the crimes, damage, pain and harm done by too many ministers of our Church. Our need for repentance and a renewed commitment to be vigilant and proactive in protecting our children has never been more urgent.

Yes, the Cross of Christ is very real. Even within our own families, we often have challenging times of disagreement, despair and perhaps even depression.

But the Easter season reminds us that our struggles are not the final word. The final word is new life in the Risen Christ. When we join the crosses that we bear every day – those small deaths in our everyday lives – with the cross of Jesus, we have the Risen Christ’s promise of new life.

The Risen Christ no longer lives in a tomb but he lives in our hearts and in our world and in the church of sinners, which is his body today. It’s critical during this Easter season that we recognize that the Lord Jesus suffered and died for us. He has come to bring us mercy.

The mercy that the Risen Christ gives to us – and which we embrace – helps us to accept God’s forgiveness, to forgive ourselves and to forgive others. If we truly do that, then we can celebrate the new life of the Risen Christ during the Easter season.

*Archbishop Denis J Hart, President
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Catholic Church in Australia

EASTER’S LIGHT AND DARKNESS

It is said that that the medieval artists perfected the style called “*chiaroscuro*”.

It contrasts light and darkness to produce an almost three-dimensional dramatic form. Masters such as Da Vinci, Caravaggio and Rembrandt perfected this art form. It can often elevate a rather simply work of art into a masterpiece.

Easter is a kind of “*chiaroscuro*” too. There is the darkness of Good Friday. The darkness of sin and alienation are nailed onto the Calvary Cross. But the lamb led to the slaughter is not the end of the story. There is the light of Easter. The slain lamb becomes the Risen “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”!

The light/darkness (*chiaroscuro*) of Easter becomes the central tenet of our faith. Our redeeming God has made it into the Christian masterpiece!

Let us be *chiaroscuro* people too! When in darkness may we await in Christ for the light of Easter to dawn upon us. When in the light of Christ we know that not even future darkness can “ever separate us from the love of Christ.”

Alleluia!

*Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn*

Churches of Christ in Australia

In any one year, over 2 million Australians will have an anxiety disorder. Among young people in Australia, one in six is currently experiencing an anxiety disorder. Even these horrifying statistics do not factor in the distressing, but non-clinical levels of anxiety experienced by many.

We can readily blame externals like job insecurity, house prices, family breakdown, international conflict and terrorism for this malaise. I suggest swirling beneath this is an unnamed spiritual anxiety. We have unresolved and often unnamed questions deep within our souls. Does my life have any meaning, how do I deal with a vague sense of guilt or unworthiness, how do I respond to all that seems wrong in the world, how can I find inner peace, how can I find lasting love, and if we simply live and die, what is the point of it all?

At Easter time we proclaim anew the ancient message: "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said."

Do not be afraid; because Jesus has absorbed guilt and shame through his death.

Do not be afraid; because through his resurrection Jesus promises eternal life

Do not be afraid; because Jesus has established a community of love.

Do not be afraid; because in joining with Christ your life has a staggeringly important purpose: redemption of the whole world as a place of peace and justice.

The Risen Christ met his disciples with the simple words "Peace to you". My hope and prayer is that you will encounter the Risen Christ in a fresh and personal way this Easter, and experience deep inner peace through him.

*Rev Janet Woodlock, Federal Coordinator
Churches of Christ in Australia*

The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

According to tradition, when in 1781 the British surrendered to the Americans at the Siege of Yorktown in the War of Independence the British band played a tune: *The World Turned Upside Down*. No wonder: with the defeat of their powerful army by an irregular bunch of colonist rebels their world had indeed turned upside down.

While the song was appropriate to the occasion, it was written 150 years previously as a protest when the English Parliament outlawed traditional English Christmas celebrations. In England of the 1640s and 50s the world had been turned upside down, with civil war, a king executed, and all the familiar landmarks of society and religion swept away.

But the accusation "They have turned the world upside-down" was not invented then either. It appears in the Bible, when Paul and Silas were preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). There was a riot. "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also... and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

You can see why the Roman world was confused about the Christians. They refused to accept a Caesar, ruler of the known world who protected and fed them as their saviour, claiming for their saviour an unheard-of convicted and executed criminal from an obscure province. They claimed to belong to a kingdom that no-one could see.

Jesus' world was a world turned upside down. He rejected at the start of his ministry a material path in favour of teaching leading to his final sacrifice. He would not accept a worldly crown or resort to public stunts to impress people. "Away from me, Satan!" he said. "For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:10) Physical presence did not impress him. When he was shown the splendor of the buildings in Jerusalem, he saw beyond them. "There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." (Matthew 24: 2) For him, the adulations of Palm Sunday were bitter because the praises of the crowd were unimportant. The humiliation and pain of crucifixion were a triumph because his death led to eternal life.

If the world around us today seems dominated by suffering, injustice and pain, if the forces of hate and fear seem to be overwhelming tolerance and acceptance, we should not be swept up in the emotions of the moment. We should have the moral courage to stand forth and call things for what

they are: life destroying, hope destroying, evils that divide communities and countries and paralyse people who would do good if they could overcome the fear.

May we like Jesus turn our world upside down.

Dr Joe Goodall, Moderator

The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand

Uniting Church in Australia

SHARE THE LOVE OF GOD

In John 13 we read that in the hours before he was crucified Jesus shared a meal with his close followers, his friends, and during this meal he washed their feet, this was done as a selfless act of love. In this Easter story we are reminded of the full extent of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

The Easter story is an outrageous love story of a Creator God who wants to reconcile the brokenness of his creation and to make peace. The Risen Crucified One accomplishes this. God's love compels us to put the needs of others first, to love as God loves, and to serve. God invites us to do likewise through selfless action and radical hospitality that enables reconciliation and healing.

Easter is a time for new beginnings for each of us personally. It is also an opportunity for our nation to compassionately reframe and renew policy approaches for those in need: like single parent families, as the Senate was so poignantly reminded in recent weeks; for asylum seekers and refugees; for sovereign First Peoples; and in so many other ways to share with greater equity and in a spirit of generosity, the wealth of this lucky country.

I pray we each take every opportunity to share the love of God, shown us in Christ, with others. On behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia I wish you and your loved ones a safe and happy Easter.

Stuart McMillan, President

Uniting Church in Australia

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