

## Christians and reconciliation

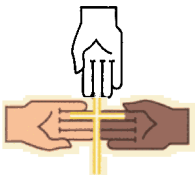
Making up after a quarrel, making peace – that's what reconciliation is about.

For real reconciliation to occur, the things that caused the quarrel or division need to be addressed. Unless this happens, we might have an uneasy truce but things will continue to smoulder under the surface.

In the Bible we are told how the hostility between God and sinners is overcome by the death of Christ (Romans 5:10). God goes to the root of the problem – sin – and he deals with it so that we can have peace with him. In the Bible's best-known passage on reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21) Paul tells how Christians are God's representatives or spokespeople. As we tell what Jesus has done to make peace with God possible, we are involved in God's reconciliation process.

Christians are people who have accepted God's offer of reconciliation and have put their faith in Christ. As Christians are filled with God's love and as they walk in harmony with his Spirit, reconciliation can occur between all sorts of people, many of whom would not get on in normal circumstances.

Our special task as Christians is to share the gospel so that people can be reconciled to God. We also have social and civil responsibilities. We are called to be peacemakers and are to do what we can to promote unity and harmony in society.



## For reflection or discussion

- 1 An Aboriginal member of the LCA has said, 'The past history still exists there inside'. What do you think this person meant? How important is it that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people learn, understand and accept each other's view of history?
- 2 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in our church are already reconciled to each other through Christ. Does this mean that the present reconciliation process in Australia has nothing to do with us?
- 3 'We're all one people, whether we have a dark skin or a light skin. We are one people. We're together' David Costello, Hope Vale, Qld.  
What can we do to show more clearly that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are one people?

### Suggested further reading

*One Blood*, John Harris, Albatross Books, 1990  
*Sharing the Country*, Frank Brennan, Penguin Books, 1991  
*Reconciling Our Differences*, Frank Brennan, David Lovell Publishing, 1992  
Material from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (look under Aboriginal Reconciliation in the phone book)



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# Reconciliation

Aboriginal Issues and the Church

*'Unless we are reconciled to Christ, there can be no reconciliation in this country.'*

Neville Bonner, former senator

*'We talk about problems, we talk about healing, reconciliation. But it goes much deeper. It's a spiritual problem.'*

David Costello, Hope Vale congregation, Qld

*'The gift of reconciliation with God implies the need for reconciliation with others.'*

LCA statement on 'Apartheid'

*'Someone needs to say, "We're very sorry this happened and we need to start working together in new ways".'*

Bronwyn Sleep, Ceduna congregation, SA



## The early years

Since Europeans came to live in Australia in 1788, relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have often been very poor. Indigenous people were looked down on and their culture was regarded as being of no value. They were dispossessed of their land without negotiation, treaty or compensation. They were often treated brutally and in some places were hunted like animals.

It has been estimated that during the first 160 years of colonisation, about 20,000 Aboriginal people and 2000 non-Aboriginal people were killed in frontier conflicts over land and property rights. Many other Aboriginal people died from introduced diseases, deliberately poisoned food and despair.

Many Aboriginal people were forced to live in institutionalised conditions where many aspects of their life were controlled by non-Aboriginal people.



Until the 1960s, Australia's historical record hardly mentioned Aboriginal people. Often they were treated as if they didn't matter or didn't exist.

## The situation today

Past events continue to affect relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians today. Ignorance, misunderstanding and false ideas still exist. Deeply ingrained negative attitudes, passed from one generation to the next, are not easily overcome. Distrust and resentment are often legacies from the past.

Aboriginal people continue to be severely disadvantaged compared to other Australians. They have a lower life expectancy, poorer health and higher rates of unemployment and imprisonment than the general community. Reasons for this include cultural factors, major disruption to their way of life, as well as the ill-treatment and discrimination they have received in the past and in some cases still experience today.

## The modern reconciliation process

The Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report in 1991 strongly recommended that a process of reconciliation be initiated as a matter of urgency.

That same year the commonwealth government set up the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The Act of Parliament states that it is highly desirable that there be a formal reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians by the year 2001, the centenary of federation.

The council, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, has promoted reconciliation events and projects throughout

Australia and has produced a range of resource materials. One of its tasks is to investigate the desirability of a document of reconciliation.

The council's vision is of a *'united Australia which respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all'*.

## Who is involved in this process?

The reconciliation process involves all Australians. We each have a role to play wherever we live.

The process offers the wider community a chance to help heal the hurts of the past that still affect Indigenous people every day. It provides a chance for non-Aboriginal people to demonstrate respect for Indigenous cultures and to fully embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as fellow human beings and fellow Australians.

True reconciliation can come only from the hearts and minds of all Australians. Better relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will come from an understanding and acknowledgment of what has happened in the past and a desire and determination to find better ways of relating to each other in the future.

Christians have been reconciled to God and therefore have a significant role to play in promoting and working for harmony and good relations among all Australians.