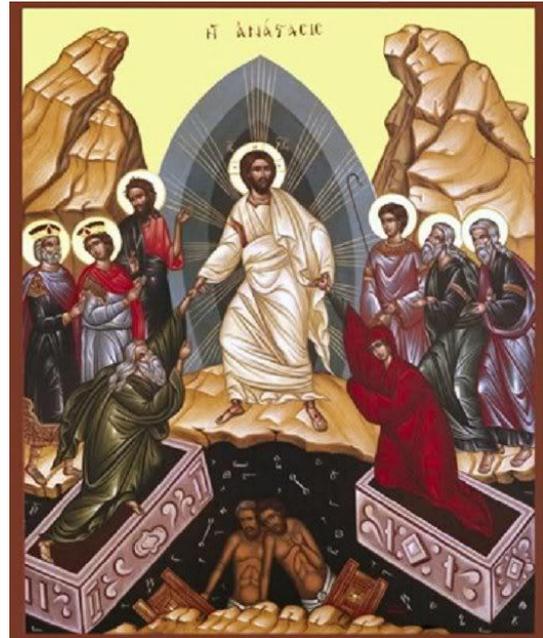




National Council of  
Churches in Australia

Easter 2015

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples,  
'I have seen the Lord'.  
(John 20:18)



### Easter Messages from Leaders of the Christian Churches in Australia

#### AUSTRALIAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

The Reverend Keith Jobberns, National Director, Australian Baptist Ministries

#### **Easter... It can be a terrible weekend!**

The Easter weekend can be a very difficult time. Whether it is the mundane exhaustion after a day at the Royal Easter Show, or the pain of relationship stress as the family and friends gather over an extended long weekend. However neither of these types of experiences can compare to the outright horror of traffic accidents over the Easter period that leave families shattered, as lives are crippled or heartbreakingly cut short. Easter can be a really terrible time.

The first Easter week was terrible as well. Jesus' followers had seen their charismatic leader judged unfairly by a kangaroo court, beaten, humiliated, stripped and horribly nailed to a cross to die an excruciating death. Finally, the ignominy of his body being buried in a borrowed tomb. It is little wonder after these events on that terrible Friday they dispersed; downcast, disillusioned and defeated. Their dreams smashed, they faced a future without hope. These events are recorded succinctly in chapter 15 and 16 of Mark's Gospel in the Bible.

Friday night was awful. Saturday was a prolonged period of gloom and Sunday didn't start well with the horror of finding that Jesus body was no longer in the tomb. The shock and surprise of the women who found the tomb empty on the Sunday morning turns to exhilarating delight as they meet Jesus risen from the dead. It changed their world. Indeed it changed the course of human history. Death had been defeated. Hope was restored and the future guaranteed.

As we pause over this Easter long weekend, might the reality of God's conquering love in raising Jesus from the dead refresh your hope that disaster can be changed into triumph, injustice will be overturned and evil will be defeated.

## **AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

Wayne Alcorn, National President

### **EASTER – THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE**

Easter is a special time for Christians, because it's a celebration of the reason for our hope.

The day we call Good Friday is oh so necessary, because that's when we remember the Son of God died for our sin.

But the Sunday morning is a real game changer. They discovered the grave could not hold Him...and that's the thing that separates Jesus from other religious leaders.

Because Jesus is alive, I have hope for the future - regardless of what comes my way.

Maybe this is a good time of year to find a Bible and read the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection; have a conversation about faith with a Christian friend; or connect through prayer to the living and loving God.

## **CHINESE METHODIST CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

Rev Dr James Kwang, Bishop

### **THE PARADOX AND MYSTERY OF EASTER TESTIMONY**

The only people who witnessed our Lord alive again were his disciples. Mary Magdalene was the first witness among them all (Mark 16:9), but her testimony was not philosophically cogent or judicially “beyond reasonable doubt” to persuade her listeners to believe (Mark 16:11). The combined testimony of the disciples could not convince Thomas that the Lord Jesus had risen either (John 20:24,25). Indeed, the testimony of the disciples only roused Saul to such great antagonistic zeal that he “persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13). And the testimony of more than five hundred witnesses did little to change the minds of those who did not want to believe.

Despite the seeming failures of the witnesses at the beginning, first the disciples, Thomas, Saul, and “multitudes” came to faith as the Gospel of the Resurrection was faithfully preached, first by Peter, and then by other disciples and believers. Believers who had not witnessed the Resurrection stood ready to die for the Gospel. Three centuries later, the mighty Roman Empire came under the power of the Gospel. The testimony of the witnesses had moved the hearers to do something, and God took the momentum and did the rest to lead them to faith.

We must not think that it is the clever minds of philosophers, or the zealous souls of the priests, or even the combined might of the communal spirit that will persuade others to believe the Gospel of the Resurrection. Ultimately, it is simply our obedience to the plan and purpose of God to be his witnesses, to testify to his only Son with simple yet steadfast faith and to display the power of the Resurrection through our transformed lives. If we are obedient to God's word now, we shall have the joy of observing God's work in time to come. The truth of the Resurrection is greater than all of us. That's what the Easter story reminds us of.

## **CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AUSTRALIA**

Reverend Janet Woodlock, Federal Coordinator

At Easter we remember how those in power collaborated in a horrendous injustice. An innocent man was tortured and killed for political expediency.

The extraordinary claim of the Christian faith is that God in Christ was the victim of this injustice; that God aligns with the weak, powerless, and suffering; and that evil can be overcome not by the love of power but by the power of love. That death itself is transcended by the power of Christ's resurrection. The cruel might of the Roman Empire was ultimately overcome by the moral influence of one who taught of love, forgiveness, and grace, and inspired a movement in his name.

As we open our newspapers we still daily read of injustice and abuses of power, but those inspired by the way of Christ, empowered by the resurrection life of Christ, continue to share the love, kindness, and grace that is a healing balm to a broken world.

"So we're not giving up. How could we? Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace". (II Corinthians 4:6, The Message). May that new life renew our hearts, and ultimately transform our world as we pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

## **CONGREGATIONAL FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

Dr Joe Goodall, Moderator

### **DO YOU DO WELL TO BE ANGRY?**

Everyone knows the story of Jonah and the Whale but not everyone knows the whole story, including the end, when God asks a fuming Jonah who felt that God had made a fool of him, "Do you do well to be angry?" It is a clever question which avoids confronting Jonah and points out that there are times when being angry can be a good thing.

Jesus got angry. He was angry at the moneylenders and merchants defiling the temple and he drove them out. He was angry at the Jewish leadership: "You brood of vipers" he called the Pharisees and Sadducees on one occasion and "hypocrites" on another. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said to Peter who wanted him to turn from his path of sacrifice, "You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

When it came to his own betrayal, abandonment and death, he was not angry. He was sorrowful and forgiving. He healed the soldier sent to arrest him, he asked the father to forgive the jeering crowds and his executioners, and when he was being cheered as he came to Jerusalem rather than feeling proud because of the people honouring him or angry knowing what was really in front of him, he wept for the future of the city and its inhabitants.

Jesus never thought of himself, only others and the pain they were bringing on themselves by their action. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," he said. There is the key, that even on the occasions when he would have been justified in asking "What about me" he did not. It was always about the other person.

This Easter, may we ask ourselves the question, “Do you do well to be angry?” May we respond as Jesus did at the time of his great trial, by thinking not of ourselves but of others, even those who have caused hurt. May we think not of revenge for ourselves but grace for those around us. May we spread Christ’s love.

### **COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH DIOCESE OF SYDNEY & AFFILIATED REGIONS**

Bishop Daniel, Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

**Christ is Risen, Truly He is Risen!!!**

Today, as we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, we call upon every family who is celebrating this Feast without a loved one to look up to Christ's Resurrection and remember St. Paul's words, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

Let us pray for the peace of the world.

May the light of the Risen Christ shine through your lives, hearts, families and our Australian Society.

May our Christ bless Australia, its Government and its people.

### **LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

Bishop John Henderson, President

Christians are Easter people. Easter is God’s *tour de force* when we drown in his love and he raises us to life. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the front and centre of our faith, everything we are and will ever be, “... *because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.* (2 Corinthians 5:14–15 NRSV)

A new start; a clean slate; what could be better? “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*” (Ephesians 2:8–10 NRSV)

What are these ‘good works’ God has prepared for us? Sure, you can find the answer in places like the 10 Commandments. Jesus was quite clear about what he expects when he said things like, “*Love your enemies*” (e.g. Luke 6:29).

But perhaps the first ‘good work’ God has prepared for his Easter people is to make us one body. When St Paul writes in Ephesians 2 that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, he goes straight on to talk about the peace that now exists between us. The blood of Christ breaks down the dividing wall. Now there is a single new humanity.

So our first ‘good work’ as Easter Christians is to live as that new humanity. Putting aside our natural divisions, resisting the temptation to separate, we live the common life God has prepared for us. We know we’re far from perfect. The visible church has more factions than

an Australian political party. We know that is a scandal, an offence to the body of Christ. Our external divisions give people the excuse to be hurt, angry, and disdainful of others and the Christian faith. They can block God's clear message of the gospel of grace. That is not something we want.

Each of us, in our own small or large way, has a part to play in this good work of living in the unity of Christ. It begins with you and me. Christ died for the whole world, not a select group. None of us owns the truth. It is God's and he does with it what he will, giving it even to unworthy people like you and me.

Christian churches today face major issues that can threaten us with further divisions. I pray, and I hope you do too, that we keep the truth of God's love for us in Christ, and live in the unity of that love, selflessly sharing the good news of our Saviour with each other and the world.

### **MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH**

Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros , Metropolitan

Greetings to the General Secretary and to the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Easter proclaims the good news the dawn of resurrection and new life has broken and that the night of death has been overcome! We celebrate the triumph of light over darkness; life over death. Easter brings hope, new beginnings, and Eternal Life; made possible by the One who loved us enough to die in our place, Jesus Christ – our deliverer, redeemer and savior. Easter reminds us of God's limitless love, endless goodness, measureless mercy and never ending grace.

Resurrection of Christ is the source of hope, power and peace for every Christian. Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection has done everything that is necessary for us to be forgiven. He has borne our sin and curse. All we can do in response is fall on our knees in repentance and faith, and receive salvation as a free gift from God. He died and rose that we, too, might have new life in him. The Lord offers each of us new life in his Holy Spirit that we may know him personally and walk in this new way of life through the power of his resurrection.

We are living in a world caught up in the darkness of violence, poverty, persecution and war. In 2014, world recorded the highest level of global persecution of Christians in the modern era. Especially the Middle East region has become one of the most violent areas of the world for Christians. Even in a secular country like India, a number of incidents of religious intolerance have been reported recently. Political and Religious leaders all over should unite and rise together to restore peace, justice and reconciliation in the World.

The everlasting love of God is the true message of Easter. Just as our God loved us to give his only begotten son, We are to love one another. God's acceptance has no imperfections – no color; no race; no wealth. This Easter season, let us spread the message of love, equality, freedom and peace. Let us make a vow that we shall cleanse our hearts blotted by the iniquities with the hyssop of repentance and absolute faith in our Saviour; so that our heart reverberate the joy and peace of Christ's Resurrection and see through the gleaming unapproachable light of the Lord.

May God bless you all.

### **ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Archbishop Denis J Hart, President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

**“The heart of Easter is hope.”**

My dear Friends,

Just as a seed planted in the ground, watered and nourished, bursts forth into life as food or beauty, I rejoice when the silence and suffering of Good Friday and Easter Saturday give way to the resurrection of Jesus in a glorified form, God’s only Son, who came back to life to show us all that life cannot be extinguished if we are in Jesus Christ.

We know that Jesus came back to life by his own power as God and in so doing reminds us that death, suffering, tragedy and the burdens of our world are not the end. Rather if we believe in Jesus and in what he offers us, life takes on a new and fuller dimension. Darkness gives way to light, despair to hope, and the realisation that Jesus is with us brings us to share in his glorious victory over sin and death. In Jesus our world, our life and our community are transformed.

Our world is burdened by material, moral and spiritual destitution. God is greater than our sinfulness. He freely loves us at all times. We are made for communion and eternal life. The Lord asks us to be joyous heralds this Easter of the message of mercy and hope. May it be so.

### **SALVATION ARMY**

James Condon , Commissioner Eastern Territory, and Floyd Tidd, Commissioner Southern Territory

We all make plans from time to time. We look at the plans for a new house, we plan a holiday, some of us have a fitness plan. Easter time reveals to us God's redemption plan.

Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ was willing and able to pay the high price necessary to free us from the power of sin. And because of his redemptive love we can experience hope and freedom. If Jesus had not died, the world would be in a hopeless state.

Redemption involves buying back or repurchasing something that belongs to someone else.

That is why Jesus is referred to as the Redeemer, because His redemption plan was that He gave His life as a ransom for the sin of the world when He died on the cross. His blood was the purchase price as the ultimate plan of redemption.

Our Redeemer reversed and broke the curse of sin and death and freed us from the powers of evil. Jesus bridged the gap between sinful humanity and a holy God and provided a way for us to be united with God forever.

Ann Spangler said – “through a divine transfusion of his love and mercy we have literally been transferred from death to life”.

So as we celebrate this Holy time, let us give thanks to our Redeemer for removing the burden of sin and making it possible for us to live in freedom.

## **SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

+ Irinej, Bishop of the Metropolitanate of Australia and New Zealand

Let us purify our senses and we shall see Christ  
Shining in the unapproachable light of His resurrection.  
We shall clearly hear him say rejoice, as we sing the song of victory.

### **CHRIST IS RISEN!**

In order to encounter the Risen Christ, who shines in the unapproachable light of His resurrection, in order to choose God that we may live according to the Gospel, all this does not mean the renunciation of happiness and satisfaction in this life, as we can clearly hear Him say: Rejoice! How will we be able to rejoice if we do not experience the transfiguration of happiness and satisfaction? Joy can be considered the ability to live here and now in this happiness that is yet to come, to feel and taste it. Unlike mere satisfaction, joy is essential happiness and everlasting satisfaction that does not depend upon the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In this world there are many objective difficulties and adversities that we cannot influence. However, there are those which are subjective, that we create, either of our own volition or inadvertently which thereby depend on us. Many dilemmas, the solution and responsibility of which we relegate to others or expect others to solve, are most often are within our own might and domain. If we did everything in our power, no matter how impoverished, it is certain that our life would be more bearable, meaningful and certainly more beautiful. Anyone can be joyful in small things if they purify their senses by placing their mind in their heart.

As much as the life we live seems difficult, it truly has its sense according to Divine Providence. The Lord did not bestow life to anyone for the simple sake of life. Our life has been given an exalted sense and we Christians see this sense primarily in the revelation of the Word of God and the greatest sense we see is in the person of the Risen Lord. For Christ, who "conforming to the body of our lowliness", according to St Basil the Great, is the image of our expectations. Therefore, our whole life will conclude in the victory of life by resurrection.

### **TRULY, HE IS RISEN!**

## **SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.**

Pastor Ken Vogel , General Secretary

EASTER IS ALL ABOUT LOVE BEING STRONGER THAN HATE and it is about God's love at that!

At such a time as this with global turmoil and fear-mongering terrorists, you and I need God's love.

Human hatred brings death. Human hatred brought about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Yet it was love for you and me that brought Jesus to allow men to kill Him.

But Jesus, though having died, is alive! If there were no resurrection it would mean hatred had conquered God's love. But Jesus is alive! Death could not hold Him. Jesus has risen from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus is the triumph of God's love over all that human hatred could and can do.

Why not, right now, call on God to cover you with His love.

### **UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

Reverend Professor Andrew Dutney, President

The meaning of Easter is summed up like this by St Paul: "...in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace...and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."

Paul's message of reconciliation remains as relevant and radical today as it did 2000 years ago. It was not just a specially favoured clan, class or community who could become people of God... All people were people of God through Jesus' death on the Cross and his resurrection.

For Paul, this equality surpassed the bounds of race, class and gender: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

So too the Gospels describe Jesus constantly transgressing the barriers between people – between the righteous and the sinners, between men and women, children and adults, the rich and the poor, between the racially-defined "people of God" and the foreigners who were routinely excluded, mistrusted and feared. Jesus was remembered as gathering together people who, by definition, had to be kept apart. He was making a new community of reconciliation and peace in the name of the Kingdom of God.

This is the consistent message of the New Testament that echoes to us down the millennia: In the risen crucified Christ, God gathers people together who don't belong together, and have no history of getting along together. God puts divided people together and says to them, You are all my children, and sisters and brothers together. Love one another.

There's nothing easy about this. And churches throughout the centuries – the Uniting Church included – have struggled to express that kind of reconciliation and mutuality in their own communities. Christian institutions and societies have fallen short of the goal too.

Nonetheless, we persevere with the call of God: In the name of the risen crucified One, love one another. And from time to time we get glimpses of the promise of Easter here and now.

This Easter I ask you to think about reconciliation where you live – be it with family, neighbours, or any around you from whom you are divided –and how you can receive the peace that Christ gives and seek the justice he promises in your own life and community.

**END UPDATED MESSAGES**

***Posted on NCCA website – 7 April 2015***