

Friday, 3 April 2020
from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Easter 2020 Messages from Australian Church Leaders

This Easter may the love of Jesus be evermore vivid in all we think, say and do!

There is a saying of Blaise Pascal: “After the resurrection. Jesus no longer wanted to be touched, except through his wounds”.

This was the experience of relieved and delighted Mary in the Garden. (John 20:17).

It was also the experience of Thomas, soon to travel in Holy Spirit towards today’s Pakistan and South India. (John 20: 26-29).

That Jesus still bears those wounds in His Resurrected Body has been an experience since those days.

Relatedly and profoundly, Jesus words in Matthew 25 move us when we absorb their truth: “Insofar as you did it for one of the least of these...you did it to me.”

As St Paul therefore prays, we need strength to comprehend, with all the saints, the extent of this love of Jesus, which encompasses so many simultaneously. (Ephesians 3:18).

We come to know, do we not, how much we need to pray for this strength as the Body of Christ, the Church?

From these past months of bushfires, floods, strange viruses and much other turmoil, we see how much we need to pray now for this strength, as Australian disciples of Jesus.

This Easter may we be so strengthened. May the love of Jesus be evermore vivid in all we think, say and do!

Happy, holy Easter!

*Bishop Philip Huggins, President
National Council of Churches in Australia*

(Note: This year the Western Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 12 April and the Orthodox Churches will celebrate Easter on Sunday 19 April.)

The 10 messages follow.

For more information, contact the **NCCA Secretariat on 8259 0800** or secretariat@ncca.org.au

Diocese of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Christian faith is established and based on Resurrection. The suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross was the pathway to Resurrection. Suffering was the way to destroy every stain we had because of the sin. With His suffering He restored the human nature and He brought it back to its pristine beauty. The fullness was with His Resurrection ***“trembling down death by (His) death.”*** Passing through His crucifixion, we preach the resurrected Lord.

What our Lord Jesus Christ did, is for our sake, and He still offering us His salvation. He comforted our hearts by saying: ***“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” says the Lord (John 16: 33).*** It is the aim of His Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection. God became man to ***“wipe away every tear from their (our) eyes; there shall be no more death, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed” (Revelation 21: 4).***

Do we still believe in that? An unseen virus shook the whole world and made us anxious about our lives, storing things to keep ourselves safe from dying. Yes, we must take care of our bodies because it is ***“the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians: 6: 19),*** without forgetting the soul which gives life to the body. Put your trust in Him who conquered death. Follow the unseen God but seen with our spiritual eyes by coming back to Him in repentance. Let us communicate with Him through prayers and enjoying reading the Holy Scriptures. Let us be united with Him through partaking the Holy Communion – His precious Body and Blood. He is the only One Who has power of giving life. He is our Creator and our Saviour and He cares about us.

May the Resurrected Lord grants you all a healthy and peaceful life crowned with faith and peace of mind and soul. Amen.

His Eminence Metropolitan Basilios, Archbishop

Diocese of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines

Catholic Church in Australia

We have never experienced an Easter like this – with public worship suspended in many places and people confined to their homes.

If ever there is a time for Christians to be together, it is Easter. But social distancing makes that impossible. Yet the term “social distancing” is misleading: it is a physical distancing which doesn’t have to mean social or spiritual distancing. Social distancing would mean an isolation, especially of the most vulnerable; and that’s not what we need to meet the challenge of COVID-19. On the contrary: that kind of isolation will make things worse. Nor does physical distancing mean spiritual distancing: if anything, it may mean the opposite. Or at least it can.

This Easter Christians are called to a new kind of creativity which will allow physical distancing produce new forms of spiritual closeness – closeness to God and to each other. There is a grace in the restrictions of COVID-19, and it’s up to us to discover it.

The Cross of Jesus says that there is no dark place, no depth of human desolation, where Jesus is not present. He is there; it’s only a question of whether we have eyes to see him. I think of those haunting words from the Book of Exodus: **“Moses entered the thick darkness where God was” (20:21).**

Jesus is in the thick darkness of COVID-19. And his Resurrection says that he is the light which dispels even the thick darkness of death. So when we sing *“The Light of Christ!”* on Easter night, even in an empty church, we are speaking the truth to all the world – that the virus may be new but the remedy is not.

Happy Easter!

*Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane,
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Coptic Orthodox Church – Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions

Christ is Risen, Truly He is Risen!!

The Glorious Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the feast of feasts.

Christ's Resurrection gives us hope in times of tremendous difficulty and hardship, which the world is experiencing at present.

There is widespread fear and apprehension across the whole world due to the vast spread of the Coronavirus.

Our Sovereign, Risen Christ assures us daily, **"My peace I leave with you, My peace I give you."** He also says, **"Let not your hearts be troubled"**.

We pray for all those who have lost loved ones from this virus. We further pray for those who are ill, that the Risen Lord grant them healing.

May the Risen Christ fill the hearts of all with his peace particularly many who have lost their jobs in these painful weeks.

May the light of the Risen Christ dispel all darkness from our world and fill every family with renewed Spirit.

May the joy of the Risen Christ permeate across our Australian society.

May Christ bless Australia in abundance, its Government and its people, filling it with grace.

Bishop Daniel

With the Grace of God

Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church - Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions

Greek Orthodox Church of Australia

*“Come, all faithful; let us venerate the Holy Resurrection of Christ;
for behold, through the Cross, joy has come upon the entire world”*
(From the Resurrection Service)

“It is the day of the Resurrection, let us shine brightly....”
(Doxastikon from the Matins of the Resurrection)

“Christ is Risen; Truly He is Risen”

Throughout the world and indeed throughout all time, Orthodox Christians continue to greet one another with these words, and in so doing express their faith in the joyous and life-giving event of Christ’s victory over death. By extension, this ‘feast of feasts’ proclaims, on a cosmic level, the death of death rendering creation incorruptible; it announces the immortality of all life, becoming for us—and indeed the entire world—the promise of life beyond death. In this way, far from being a past folkloric custom which ought not be forgotten, the Resurrection of our Lord, ushers into our daily life the sublime taste of eternity within time!

Moreover, in this state of jubilation and joy-filled wonder at Christ’s ‘trampling on death by death’, all of creation is filled with light, the true and unfading light of Christ—and certainly, not only the earth and the heavens, but also the deepest recesses of darkness. And what is more, all of us are called to partake of this light; indeed, to become the true light of Christ which shines with resplendence upon all and which dissipates all darkness and death. Becoming this light, we are thereby called to give witness to the hope of this liberating gift of a light-filled life—indeed, the gift of eternal life in and with Christ.

In these difficult and unprecedented times posed by the pandemic of the new coronavirus, called Covid-19, amidst the many trials and tribulations that people throughout the world are currently suffering—both health related and financial—let us firmly anchor our hope in that everlasting and resplendent light of our resurrected Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Clinging to this promise of a Christ-like *life* and *light*, let us especially be consoled and encouraged by the message of the Resurrection: namely, that just as joy came into the world through the Cross, so too in this case with us, by the grace and power of our resurrected Christ, this virus will not prevail; on the contrary, life as we knew it will be *restored*, *rebuilt*, and even profoundly *renewed*. With these thoughts, I remain,

In Sydney, on the 30th day of March, 2020

Prayerfully yours

*Archbishop M A K A R I O S, Primate,
Greek Orthodox Church of Australia*

Lutheran Church of Australia

This year Easter arrives at a time of lock downs and physical separation across the whole of society. We cannot hold our usual family and religious Easter rituals. This is not life as we know it.

St Paul wrote, in an early letter to Christians in Corinth, ***'If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else.'***

When we are prosperous and comfortable, able to get anything we want when we want it, we can easily mock this hope in the life to come. Even Christians can sometimes abandon it in favour of the good things we can have right now.

The result is to make us worse off, not better. No matter how hard we try in this life, large parts of it remain outside our control. This time, a virus has knocked us sideways in a big way. We will fight it with all our ingenuity, and eventually it will pass. We don't know yet how much that will cost, but right now it's a matter of whatever it takes.

Whether for this life or for the life to come, Christians are people of hope. Easter is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is our hope, not just for now, but beyond death into life. Through faith in Christ, we believe we also die and rise again. So, whatever happens now, it cannot take away our new, risen life in Christ.

For the Bible also says, ***'I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!'***

Bishop John Henderson

Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Let him Easter in us

Recently, during the deep silence of Quaker Meeting, five words ‘Let him Easter in us’ entered and remained with me through the hour.

The words come from Gerard Manley Hopkins poem *‘The Wreck of the Deutschland.’* Hopkins reminds us that Easter need not be a noun, referring to a long-ago mysterious event. He uses ‘Easter’ as a verb in the present-continuous tense. Easter might be an experience that continues to transform our present lives: to offer hope.

Over the past two weeks, through an unprecedented period of COVID 19 chaos and change, many of the emails and text messages I’ve received have concluded with a quote, poem or message offering hope, courage and meaning. They are Easter messages—intended or not.

Responding to Easter as a verb, living with hope and courage, I find myself becoming more fully spiritually alive—contacting friends and neighbours as, when and where I can, listening deeply, offering support, sharing my own experience. I am changed and changing in the process.

‘Let him Easter in us’ is my ongoing prayer. In peace,

Ann Zubrick, Presiding Clerk

Religious Society of Friends in Australia (Quakers)

The Salvation Army, Australia

Hope from heartache

It is true to say our world in recent weeks has changed dramatically. Many will question what the future holds, and we are adjusting each day to living in a new way.

While we wrestle with questions and uncertainty, some things remain constant. We can depend on them. The Easter message is one that has never changed and will never change; it's as relevant today as ever. Easter reminds us that even in our darkest days, hope shines.

The Australian landscape, as it regenerates from catastrophic fires only months ago, is a powerful picture to us of God's Easter promise.

Out of devastation – burnt stumps, dry ground – new life springs forth in the bush and in the paddock, even as we face yet another crisis of far greater proportions.

This rebirth of nature reminds us of the resilience God has built into the human spirit. In our heartache, there is always hope for renewal and growth. Our landscape represents the promise we hold to that – even in our most difficult or devastating times – God promises he is able to work out a good plan.

What has this got to do with Easter?

On the day we remember as Good Friday, Jesus died on a cross. Hope in him being the Saviour of the world seemed lost for the people who followed him.

But on the Sunday, Jesus rose from the grave, overcoming death itself. He burst forth to new life and he offers this same gift of new life to us all today. It's a quality of abundant life that starts now and continues forever, into eternity.

The good news of Easter is that even though Jesus' followers could not see a way forward, God was at work. Likewise, even when we cannot see the future, we can place our hope in Jesus, ***"hope of all the world" (Matthew 12:21, NLT).***

God still wants to meet us in our challenging places and help us rise up out of heartache and into hope. In a world of uncertainty and anxiety – Jesus promises peace and he promises us we are never alone.

His promises are for anyone and everyone who believes. No one is outside the love of God and his offer to bring wholeness, salvation and hope.

This Easter, as for others, Salvation Army churches won't be able to physically gather to celebrate. We would love for you to join with us for an online church experience if you're not already involved somewhere – details (and words of hope) available at <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/our-faith/easter/>

*Commissioners Janine and Robert Donaldson,
The Salvation Army, Australia*

Uniting Church in Australia

Over the past weeks, our world has been turned upside down, as we respond to the global pandemic of coronavirus, COVID-19. Our Easter observances this year are taking very different forms, as Christian communities seek to respond in ways that will slow the spread of the virus, and keep vulnerable people safe. It has been heartening to see the creative ways our churches are connecting with our communities, continuing to pray, pastorally care for one another, and advocate for those who are experiencing disadvantage and injustice.

Across Australia and around the world, during the Christian festival of Easter, we celebrate that Christ is risen, and continues to be present with us today. As we come to Easter this year, we are conscious of all those who are affected by the catastrophic and unprecedented events in Australia, of bushfire, flood, and drought, as well as the global pandemic. Christians believe that through his life and ministry, Jesus identifies with, and comes alongside us in our suffering, and offers comfort and compassion. In our churches and wider communities, we are witnessing acts of enormous sacrifice and love as people reach out to their neighbours. In the midst of grief, we see emerging signs of hope and new life.

In Jesus' life and ministry, we see and experience God's love for all people, for the creatures of the earth, and for the land itself. In Jesus, we see the compassion of God - One who knows our suffering and is acting to bring comfort, healing and hope. In the Easter Story we see the power of God's love to overcome hatred and prejudice. From death and despair, new life and hope are born. Christ is risen and is present with us in all we face. This Easter and in the year ahead, may you experience God's renewing love and hope in your life and communities. Have a blessed Easter.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

*Dr Deidre Palmer, President
Uniting Church in Australia*

Australian Baptist Ministries

Bleak Holidays this Easter...

As we watch our worlds being torn apart and are not at all sure of how the new normal will look, there is a very deep sense of communal and personal anxiety. A health crisis leaving significant sections of our community at great risk of premature death has now morphed into an unimaginable economic crisis unparalleled in our recent history. We are finding ourselves asking a set of questions about work and food and shelter that we thought belonged in an era long past.

We are returning to the bedrock question of a way through the darkness of a desperate situation. Perhaps more than in previous Easter seasons that this generation has experienced, the simple yet profound narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus speaks poignantly and profoundly to a troubled nation.

“Darkness came over the whole land” is the summary of the Gospel writers as the death of Jesus was imminent. **(Mark 15:33-34)** The betrayal, abuse and mockery had reached its climax. Where was the hoped-for bright future for his followers, who like us today, stared into a cataclysmic abyss?

So much promise had come to a sudden halt. The sound of hammer on nails of the crucifixion ritual rang out the end of the life of Jesus. His cry of **‘My God my God why have you forsaken me’**, could well be the cry of us all captured by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But this is not the end, we have not been forsaken. God the Father had not deserted Jesus or us. The sure hope of the resurrection of Jesus stands as the eternally guaranteed promise that the darkness will come to an end. Death with all its anguish and pain will not triumph. The Easter story is the message of hope. Ned Trickett, Australia’s first world champion discovered the journey from despair to hope. You can see his account here www.crossover.org.au

The apostle Paul understood the power of the resurrection of Jesus as he wrote to the believers in Rome, **“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-9)**

This is the sure hope of the love and presence of God is on offer to us again this Easter.

*Rev Keith Jobberns, National Director
Australian Baptist Ministries*

Australian Christian Churches

TOGETHER. HUMANITY. KINDNESS.

Easter this year is looking a little different from the traditional gatherings and services at church. We are living in unprecedented times, as across the planet, there is a fight against the effects of Covid-19. Along with sickness and disease, and an imminent economic crisis, people around the world are facing isolation, desperation and uncertainty about the future.

In these dark days, we are starting to understand that we have much more in common with our fellow man than many of us realised. In the midst of shared danger, we are seeing a universal language emerge, where words are used like:

TOGETHER. We are suddenly much more aware of our need of each other. Even though social isolation is demanded across society at this time, there is greater intentionality to connect and support our ‘neighbours’.

HUMANITY. Modern man has been lured into a false sense of security, believing that science and technology will deliver us a degree of invincibility. Now, in a moment, we are all aware of our mortality.

KINDNESS. A pandemic like this has the potential to bring out the best in people. We are discovering that small things do make a big difference, and simple acts of kindness bring hope.

As we approach Easter, we can reflect how the three days summarise not only the Passion Story, but all the emotion that is in the human experience.

FRIDAY. The lonely, isolated death of Jesus on the Cross was for our **togetherness** – our reconciliation and relationship with God. Before He faced the Cross, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that we **“may be one.”**

SATURDAY. The day when Jesus’ followers felt numb, confused and hopeless reminds us of our humanity, when we find ourselves helpless in the face of adversity. Jesus embraced all of the challenges of humanity so we can live.

SUNDAY. The completion of the Easter story is the resurrection of Jesus – a reminder of the new life He gives. It is through the kindness of God **who ‘so loved the world that He gave His only Son’** that we may face the future with hope.

For all of us walking through this season, Easter brings the message of hope in the face of hopelessness. These three days changed everything. So why not consider the invitation by a risen Saviour to embrace the wonder of all THAT Sunday brings.

*Pastor Wayne Alcorn, National President
Australian Christian Churches –Released 31 March 2020*

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