

Wednesday, 19 April 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 10 messages follow.

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

### **Anglican Church of Australia**

At the time of Jesus' death we read in the Bible that a great cloud of darkness covered the earth. Our own times seem to have many dark clouds of threat. Even as many of us live in a world where our material needs are abundantly filled we know that many others, too many others, struggle just to meet their daily needs. As Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross his final dying words were: "It is finished."

Yes, it was true: his earthly life had ended. The indifferent Roman soldiers divided his possessions among themselves, his enemies rejoiced, the disciples despaired and Judas, overpowered by guilt and remorse, killed himself.

Then Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Day, and changed everything. His resurrection was the proof of his definitive victory over sin and death. For Christians, hope can never again be utterly extinguished.

Easter speaks throughout the ages to the condition of human despair. Christian faith shows us the way in which we can share in Jesus' victory over all that pushes us to despair. Human failure remains with us, both inside and outside the church – failure of compassion, failure of virtue, failure to live up to the light that each of us has through our conscience. All of us need to aspire to the best that we know our human nature can be. Human failure, or sin – as it is referred to in theological terms – arises from people's alienation from God. Jesus told his disciples that his mission was about reconciling humanity with God and with each other.

His mission was intensely personal as much as it was universal. That is why Christians speak about having a personal relationship with Jesus and being alive with his Spirit. It is not just a manner of speaking, an odd religious terminology, it is a real and lived experience, as Christians have testified over the centuries. The Saviour cares so much for his people that he enters and transforms their lives, and numbers every hair on their heads.

Easter is also a journey over three days from Good Friday to Easter Day. Christian worship on Good Friday confronts the dark reality of Jesus' suffering and death, Holy Saturday reflects the time Jesus' body lay in the tomb. Both contrast with the joyous celebration of Easter Day, usually a celebration rich with music and colour.

Even if you have never or seldom been to a church, do feel able to join in these celebrations. Any of our churches will be delighted to welcome you. You need nothing more than the awareness that Jesus in his life and death speaks into the condition of our human struggles and shows us the way of peace.

Have a holy and blessed Easter.

*The Most Reverend Dr Philip L. Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate  
Anglican Church of Australia*

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### **Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand**

**"CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, TRAMPLING DEATH BY DEATH AND GAVE US LIFE THROUGH HIS RESURRECTION"** (The Midday Introit)

Once again the Good news of our Lord's Resurrection is heralded by the angels. May it resonate in our souls, enlighten, strengthen and guide us - the children of light in - our path of faith; as the fruit of light is with all goodness, justice and truth.

In our firm and unshaken faith in the risen Lord we may be worthy to utter with St. Paul, "I was crucified with Christ, yet I live, but not I rather Christ lives in me". (Gal. 2:20)

We wish you personally and all the people you work with or are entrusted to you, a Happy and Glorious Easter, wishing you peace in your personal and social life.

In this hospitable and blessed country of Australia may the light of the Risen Lord guide us to preserve what is entrusted to us, keeping us away from all the temptations and pitfalls of evil, so that Australia continues to be a beacon of harmony.

We pray for the peace of the world, especially for peace in the Middle East. May people live as brothers and sisters, may building be preferred to destruction and life to death.

"The night has passed and the morning is at hand, so, cast away the deeds of the darkness and put on the armour of light be vested with our Lord Jesus Christ". (Romans 13: 12)

Christ is risen from the dead.

Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ.

Prayerfully

*Bishop Hagazoun Najarian, Primate  
Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand*

## 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*

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## 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*

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### **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*

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### **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 or 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*

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## **Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Melbourne**

### **FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION**

#### **ENTER THE GATES OF PARADISE**

*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. John 16:33*

On Palm Sunday many of our Coptic brothers and sisters had their lives taken while attending liturgy at Egyptian churches. The gates of Heaven opened wide to receive these Coptic victims of terrorism while angels placed the crowns of martyrdom upon their heads. As many Copts were joyfully celebrating the Feast of the Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, in that very same moment their pure souls were welcomed by our Lord into Paradise.

There were two separate coordinated attacks in Egypt last weekend. The first attack took place in St George's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Tanta, North of Cairo, killing 29 people and wounding more than 70. Shortly after, there was an explosion outside of St Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, the historic seat of Christendom in Egypt, killing 18 and wounding over 40. The cathedral bomb explosion occurred just after our beloved Patriarch, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, finished Palm Sunday services. We thank God that His Holiness was unharmed and is safe.

Our Church is one that has endured much hardship and suffering for many centuries. She has offered countless martyrs to our Lord and continues to do so until this very day! Yet, as Christians we draw strength and courage from the Word of God which reminds us: We are hard-pressed on

every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. *2 Corinthians 4:8-10*

Our faith will not be shaken because of the cowardly acts of evildoers. Though our hearts are heavy and our eyes are filled with tears, our spirits are joyful as we gain so many more martyrs even until this very day.

This year, the Holy Week journey we have embarked upon is filled with grief and mourning for Egypt. Recent terror attacks have sharpened our focus on the bitterness of the cross and the glory of the Resurrection. Indeed, it is the holiest week of the year, when we gather daily to remember the suffering and death of our Lord and to celebrate His life-giving Resurrection from the dead. Knowing the power of His death and Resurrection reassures us that the passing of the Coptic martyrs on Palm Sunday is not in vain. Rather, our Coptic martyrs from Tanta and Alexandria have been born into the sweetness of eternal life. These martyred souls have completed their mission on earth and have returned home to their Father's House in the New Jerusalem.

Let us use this week of prayer to claim God's mantle of protection over His beloved Egypt. We pray for the countless families affected by this recent tragedy who have lost fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and friends and are enduring indescribable desolation, pain and sorrow. We ask our God, the Prince of Peace, to comfort their hearts in the knowledge they will most assuredly be reunited with their departed brothers and sisters in a new and glorious Paradise.

Several families in the Diocese have lost loved ones in the atrocities and my heart goes out to them at this very difficult time. We assure diocesan families who are in a place of suffering this Easter that we are walking side by side with you by way of our prayers and acts of service.

We give thanks that the recently martyred, our newest saints, have their names forever etched into history. We will continue to celebrate their martyrdom in the Synaxarium - a living book - which respectfully honours the lives of the saints.

The Tanta and Alexandria attacks have been horrific to witness in the media; the images of human carnage and horror seen in the aftermath have shaken our spirits to the core. The community as a whole is outraged and in deep sorrow for what has happened.

As your spiritual father, I wish I could heal your hearts, minds and wounded spirits at this time as you seek to find a lasting peace in a fragile world. We rejoice in knowing Christ can soothe our aching hearts. Today, and every day, I invite you to place your hand in the hand of Christ, and you will become a disciple of peace. And if you trust in the promises of our Lord and Saviour then you will emanate Christ's love. And if you sincerely partake in Christ's suffering, death and Resurrection this Easter, and each subsequent day, you will become a reflection of Christ's light that will eradicate the darkness.

Today, I invite you to be of good cheer and to live in hope. I remind you that we are not of this world. Our Lord, when He completed His mission on earth taught us that He had overcome the world." *John 16:33*

We must overcome this world by choosing to walk even more intimately with Christ who renews our broken hearts and restores our crushed spirits with the grace of courage, forgiveness and love. The Easter story is fundamentally one of joy, peace and hope. We are each invited to be children of the Resurrection and disciples of love who joyfully radiate Christ's light. He is truly risen.

So this Easter, let us embrace the full fruits of the Resurrection – Christ's peace, hope and courage – so that we can bring God's love and light to all we encounter on the journey.

Together, let us serve our neighbours as children of the light. Christ reminds his disciples: I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. *John 10:10*

In closing, we ask the Lord to protect His people and His Church around the world, to support our beloved father and patriarch, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and to restore peace. We also ask the Lord to bless all our leaders with the integrity, strength and wisdom required to eradicate the darkness of evil with the radiant light of Christ.

We press on in hope. And we look forward to the day when we too will sing praises to the Most High in the company of the angels, saints and martyrs whose sweet light has guided us home to the New Jerusalem.

*Bishop Suriel, Bishop of Melbourne  
Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Melbourne*

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### **Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney**

Sydney on Tuesday 11th of April 2017.

Statement from the Diocese about the two attacks in Tanta and Alexandria in Palm Sunday 9th of April 2017.

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35*

On 9 April 2017, whilst Christians around the world celebrated Palm Sunday, the minority Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt suffered yet another barbaric attack in the form of two consecutive bombings targeting them as they prayed: the first attack happened in Tanta and the other was in Alexandria, The first suicide bombing occurred inside the St George Cathedral in Tanta killed 31 adults, children and wounded 71 adults and children.

Families, including children, were enjoying the joyous tunes of Palm Sunday as they prayed at the Cathedral of St. George in Tanta, when the cowardly bomb blast hit causing devastation.

Whilst dealing with the shock and devastation of this attack, a second attack hit at St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria a short time later in the same day, where His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria & Patriarch of the See of St Mark, was praying. This further barbaric attack saw more innocent lives of families and children catastrophically lost. This second suicide bombing attack occurred right outside St Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria killed 17 adults, children and wounded 40 adults and children.

The recent suicide bomb attacks on Coptic Churches in Egypt are a tragedy. They strike at the very heart of what we hold most dear – the freedom of worship.

The Coptic community of Sydney, and the wider Coptic communities, is saddened by the magnitude of this loss and devastation, in particular the loss of lives and the undoubtedly permanent damage caused to those injured, and those families who have suffered a loved one.

The Coptic Orthodox community, all the Christians and other religions around the world are united, as Coptic Christians, grieve again the loss of innocent lives, caused by cowardly acts of terrorists.

“The multitude had come to the Feast and took branches of Palm Trees and went to meet Our Lord crying “Hosanna” instead the Lord welcomed them in His Heavenly Bosom....”, Quote from Media Release of Council of Bishops of Eastern Churches in Australia & New Zealand.

We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ may keep the life of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, His Grace Bishop Paula, Bishop of Tanta and all the members of the Holy Synod, and comfort the hearts of



those families affected, and grant peace, patience for all Christians and all our brothers in humanity.

We pray to God to support the president of Egypt His Excellency Mohamed Abdel Fatah El Sisi for his immediate actions after the events, we pray to God to grant him the power to continue building new Egypt full of love and peace. May the Almighty God keep Egypt – the blessed land-, safe always.

These suicide bombings are an abomination and we condemn these cowardly attacks in the strongest possible terms. The evil perpetrators behind this sadistic hatred stand condemned for these shocking atrocities as no real religion call for killing people.

We ask that the Lord may forgive those responsible for these heinous crimes, and open the eyes of anyone who supports such terrorist barbaric acts, to repent and to see the unintended effect of their actions and the suffering they cause to those families who have lost a loved one.

The persecution and suppression of Coptic Christians is tragically not uncommon. For centuries, we have been targeted but our resolve will overcome the most testing of times. We will not be broken.

We pray that they see that these actions will only build the resolve of Christians to continue strong and united in their faith.

The Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions express thanks to the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, to the Leader of Opposition The Hon Bill Shorten MP, to The Primer of NSW, The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, to the Leader of the Opposition in NSW, The Hon. Luke Foley, MP and to all those who expressed their love and support to Egypt and to the Coptic Orthodox Church.

As we mourn and share in the feelings of loss of our brothers and sisters, the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions, this Easter will only celebrate the ritual celebration of the Resurrection Feast on April 16, 2017. As a mark of respect to the victims, there will be no other celebrations or congratulations for the feast this year.

While we are celebrating the joyful Feast of Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ on Sunday 16 April 2017, we will be mourning the innocent lives that were lost in Egypt by receiving condolences from 11am-1 PM at St Mary & St Mina Coptic Orthodox Cathedral at 339 Forest Road, Bexley.

We lift our hearts in prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ may bestow His peace upon Egypt and the whole world.

*Bishop Daniel*

*Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions*

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## **The Salvation Army, Australia**

Greetings Friends

It's good to come back once again to Easter, to the days that changed our world. To share again the dreadfulness that is the suffering of Jesus, his betrayal and his abandonment. I particularly this year have a sense of the abandonment of Jesus. From the quiet word to Peter about his coming denial through to the loud cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We know how easily we can slip down into a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. How quickly we resort to our fallen and flawed selves where we abandon people and divide ourselves up into "us and them". Where we accept the thinking that people can't change, the worst will happen, and that this is probably as good as it gets.



Is it not at Easter that we discover again the joy of knowing this isn't true? Where we witness the strength and power of Jesus; in his choices, his words, and his actions? Lasting power, real victory, comes from seeming weakness and defeat. We can be changed, people can be healed, and all things are coming together. Perhaps gradually, perhaps painfully, but all things are coming together.

It's good to come back once again to Easter, to share the days that continue to change us and change our world.

This Easter, may we receive a fresh revelation of all God is and all we can be in Christ Jesus. As a result, may we choose again to see the image of God in the most broken of people, and believe that the Creator God redeems all things. May we rest in His love, and find hope and confidence for the unknown days ahead.

*Floyd J Tidd, Commissioner, National Commander  
The Salvation Army, Australia*

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## **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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