

# RECONCILIATION: SEEDS OF PEACE

## **Prayer:**

In the midst of conflict and division.  
we know it is you  
who turns our minds to thoughts of peace.  
Your spirit changes our hearts:  
enemies begin to speak to one another,  
those who were estranged join hands in friendship,  
and nations seek the way of peace together.  
Let your spirit be at work in us.  
Give us understanding and put an end to strife,  
Fill us with your mercy and overcome our denial,  
Grant us wisdom and teach us to learn  
from the people of the land.  
Call us to justice. Amen.

## **1. Elder's story: Djarla Dulumunmun - Healing**

## **2. Henri Nouwen Behold the Beauty of the Lord**

*'How can we live in the midst of a world marked by fear, hatred and violence, and not be destroyed by it? During a hard period of my life in which verbal prayer had become nearly impossible and during which mental and emotional fatigue had made me the easy victim of feelings of despair and fear, a long and quiet presence in this icon (Rublev's Old Testament Trinity) became the beginning of my healing. As I sat for long hours in front of Rublev's Trinity I noticed how gradually my gaze became a prayer. This silent prayer slowly made my inner restlessness melt away and lifted me up into the circle of love, a circle that could not be broken by the powers of the world. Even as I moved away from the icon and became involved in the many tasks of everyday life, I felt as if I did not have to leave the holy place I had found and could dwell there whatever I did or wherever I went. I knew that the house of love has no boundaries and embraces everyone who wants to dwell there.'*

## **3. Pearl Wymarra and "Recreating our Campfires"**

One of many Indigenous women offering inspiring leadership in addressing the crisis of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is **Pearl Wymarra** from Penrith, a distinguished teacher and researcher in the restoration of people's emotional health and social well-being. Born at Old Mapoon Presbyterian Mission in North Queensland, she grew up on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and has worked in a variety of capacities in the healing and teaching of others. She holds a Masters degree in Health Science (Primary Health Care), a Diploma in Primary Teaching and is an Honorary Fellow at the University of Western Sydney.

For Pearl, spiritual health is the secret of how we find love, joy and peace, and such spiritual health is found in reconnecting with the strength and power of our richest human and cultural experience. Like many who have grown up in the Torres Strait therefore, Pearl draws in her life and work upon a typical deep variety of family and cultural influences. Pearl's mother Marjorie, for example, was a descendant of the Stolen Generation with Aboriginal, Filipino, Japanese and Irish heritage, whilst her father, Nicholas, had both Aboriginal and Scottish ancestry. Between them they had ten children and later adopted and raised another child. Pearl is thus able to tell the story of powerful models of unconditional love which she saw demonstrated by her parents and community, encouraging others to seek and demonstrate the same models elsewhere.

Pearl's vision for healing is hence centred on what she calls '*recreating our campfires*': renewing strength through cultivating the spirit, supporting community, and focussing on maintaining the good and proper ways of culture. As she puts it: *In every community be it urban, rural or remote, we are all struggling to live with the tensions of the times. We search and research for the answers, we adopt and adapt, some of us survive, some of us physically die, some of us spiritually die. Some of us in the spiritual death are reborn and in the process of rebirth discover our umbrellas, our safety nets. Indigenous Australians have weathered and are still weathering the storms; we do not have all the answers, but we have certainly had all the experiences. Together in our shared experiences, we will seek and find the answers.*

In addressing the pain and legacy of violent memories in Indigenous hearts and lives, Pearl has thus used the concept of ***Circles of Healing*** in a very practical and spiritually refreshing way. Looking at modern Indigenous Australian experience as a whole, Pearl suggests that it may usefully be seen as made up of a series of circles of violence and hurt: from an inner circle of experience *before European contact*, or pre-invasion, through successive circles of *contact*, '*protection, missions, reserves*', *assimilation, integration* and more latterly, (halting steps in) *self-determination*. To experience healing, there is therefore, Pearl affirms, the need to peel back the layers of Indigenous experience, which can be done on a personal level also – journeying in and out on this, over the 217 years of modern Indigenous Australian experience or personal/family lifespan. The process of doing this then becomes a process of *Recreating Campfires/Reconciliation/Resurrection*. As people walk/travel inward and outward, so they meet others on their paths across. As the process continues, so the layers are peeled away, leaving reconnection and fresh possibilities of travelling onward. Nonviolence, she believes requires the 'two hands': one to stop, as well as one to offer partnership, being crucial. Nonviolence involves being assertive, though not aggressive: 'discipline but not harm'. Or, as Pearl expresses it, using a metaphor from the Torres Strait, we can't walk with everyone if they are blocking; we have at times to walk away and leave them to God's time. We need to '*follow the wave*' like the TI ferry pilot: just as older people are frightened by speed on the ferry in bad weather, there is the need at times to slow down/not go out .

#### **4. Rev. Colin Griffiths - Truth-telling**

Colin draws on his experience of ministering in Southern Africa, where he was inspired by the examples of how to overcome violence with reconciliation lived out by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Crucially also, Colin learnt the importance of truth-telling as demonstrated so

practically in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. The 'Bringing them Home' report (of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families) was therefore for Colin a particularly vital example of 'truth telling'. As he says: A painful part of our past was examined and people affected were given the opportunity to tell their story. Many people were upset because this was an episode in Australia's story which had not yet been told. That is the point. 'Truth telling' can often be dangerous, it can be upsetting, it can certainly be controversial, but if we are ever to be a mature nation it is so important that all stories are told, not only the nice and sociably acceptable stories.

What worried me as a pastor was that when people tried to tell their stories about forced or unforced removals from their families, people would often interrupt them, saying 'yes, but you had a good education', 'yes, but you were able to learn a trade and make a valuable contribution to society.' I wanted to provide an environment where people could tell their stories without being interrupted or made to feel that it was all their fault for not being mainstream, for being different. For me reconciliation does not mean we agree on everything, but it does mean is that we learn to understand and to respect the other person's experience.

Dullar Omar, South African Minister for Justice, on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's aims:

1. Instead of revenge there will be reconciliation
2. Instead of forgetfulness there will be knowledge and acknowledgement
3. Instead of rejection there will be acceptance by a compassionate state.
4. Instead of violation of human rights there will be the restoration of the moral order and respect for the rule of law.

(from *To Remember and to Heal* ed. H.Russel Botman and R.M.Petersen)

Quote:

*'It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.'*

(Mahatma Gandhi)

## Sharing

## 5. Meditation: Seeds of Peace

### **Matthew 13:31-32**

He put another parable before them, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches.

A meditation:

*Think of the smallest seed you can imagine...*

*This is a seed of hope.*

*Think of a situation in our nation's life about which you feel powerless...*

*Take the tiny seed of hope and plant it in the field of that situation...*

*Imagine it beginning to grow and put down roots...*

*Feed and water it with your loving attention...*

*See it take shape as a sturdy shrub... and then a tree...*

*Imagine all who shelter beneath it and within it...*

*Now imagine the birds who take shelter in the spreading branches of this tree...*

*Appreciate the variety of the birds- the different sizes, different colours of plumage, different calls – and give thanks for them...*

*They are like the different races and ethnic groupings in our nation.*

*Give thanks for their diversity and for the harmony which already exists...*

*Now think again of the great tree which grows from the mustard seed of hope...*

*This tree represents your hopes and dreams for healing and reconciliation in our land*

*- give thanks for it. Promise to bring it often to mind, and to keep it in the forefront of your mind when you think of situations of violence in our land.*

### **Concluding Prayer:**

Lord of all cultures,

born among us in every time and place,

your image dwells in every person who walks the earth,

your dignity in each race and gender.

Grant to us eyes to see, ears to hear, arms to link, and tongues to tell,

the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Strengthen the threads of love between us,

and weave a fresh tapestry that cannot be unravelled,

that we may walk ever onwards together

in the freedom of your transforming Spirit. **Amen.**