



the grainery church

POSITION PAPER

Justice and Reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians.

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Introduction

The Grainery Church is a community of Christian believers of many backgrounds and several generations from across the Hunter Region, committed to bringing Heaven to Earth: within every person, among us as a community, and beyond us to the world around us. This paper looks to outline our Church's beliefs and motivations as we go on a journey towards reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians and seeking justice for the historical sins of our nation.

The Context and the Land

We believe that in this context of Australia, we live on land that was taken from the original dwellers. They had a relationship with land/country that was integral to their identity, their sense of belonging and their responsibility to care for it.

As people who are increasingly becoming aware of the detrimental effects that colonisation had on First Nations Peoples, and the significant stumbling blocks to the gospel that were created in that period, we seek to understand this better so as not to repeat, in the current context, the type of mistakes that have been made in the past or to make new mistakes through ignorance or indifference and a failure to learn. This foundation enables us to share more effectively the Good News of Jesus, and helps us to live out the practical love of God in helping improve life outcomes together.

Truth-telling

We believe that as a church, we need to hear the voice of First Nations Peoples with regard to their history since colonisation. We need to hear how it has affected them and the legacy it has left. Truth telling requires listeners as well as speakers, and in listening we need to be open to hearing things we may not like. We need to acknowledge in humility that the version of history we have been told from a non-Indigenous perspective is not necessarily the whole truth and can be selective in its reporting. We need to listen in order to hear and understand the truth.

We believe that Jesus cares about the people who are suffering, and Aboriginal Australians have suffered significantly and in so many cases are still suffering.

Statistics regarding the inflicted and ongoing trauma caused by removal from country and removal of children from parents in the deliberate efforts of some to erase identity and culture and ultimately destroy ethnicity reveal severe ongoing impacts seen in incarceration rates, domestic violence, alcohol addiction, unemployment, and suicide rates. We believe, as Christians, we have a role in bringing about healing and restoration.

We acknowledge the good work of those who had a true understanding of the gospel and a true desire to understand Aboriginal Peoples, and we are saddened that many of their good efforts were overshadowed by the negative impacts of colonisation.

Repentance

We believe repentance involves acting differently; being different; different from what we were before we repented.

In the context of our relationship to Aboriginal Australians, we believe that godly sorrow and repentance means we may need to change our mind regarding how we think about our history and past actions, and their ongoing effects in the light of historical truth.

We believe that as a church, we need to acknowledge the sins of our community and our ancestors, in order to lead the body of Christ to be the change makers in our society. This does not mean attributing guilt to anyone, but exposing the darkness with the light.

Justice

We believe that God is a God of justice, as clearly attested to throughout the Old and New Testament. God calls us as Christians to act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with Him. This means taking action to stand against what is clearly unjust and advocate for what is just.

We believe that a failure to act justly on behalf of Aboriginal Australians can make us guilty of sins of omission. Complicity takes the form of solidarity in sin with our ancestors. We may not be guilty of their particular sins, but we reap the fruits of their deeds and perhaps unintentionally but almost inevitably perpetuate the culture which their sins brought into being.

Culture and Respect

We believe that although showing respect does not mean agreeing with all that we see and hear, it is crucial to listen to and understand the voices of Aboriginal Australians. To do so is to seek to redress the terrible disrespect that was perpetrated in the past. This enables us to be more effective leaders and people of influence in the name of Christ.

We believe it is important for us as Australians to recognise that we live in a land that was inhabited by others before us who were good caretakers of the created world that God brought into being.

Reconciliation

We believe that the ministry of reconciliation is the mission of the church. We see in God's reconciling work the shape of all true reconciliation—where the source of the enmity or hostility is accurately recognized as arising from human sin, where the cost and consequences of sin are dealt with, and where forgiveness and the restoration of relationship is thus made possible. The Bible often connects the saving, reconciling work of God with the restored relationships that we should seek with each other. The love of God in Christ provides the essential shape and basis of reconciliation in human relationships.

Christ is the mediator not only of reconciliation between us and God, but of reconciliation between alienated and hostile people. The hostility and division between these historically alienated groups is dissolved at the cross, and a new humanity is created in which mutual love, gentleness, unity and peace are realities to be sought and maintained.

Unity

We believe that unity of the spirit means having a godly attitude and desiring God's way on important matters, and as a diverse church, whilst our views will not all be uniform, we must be united in our efforts to pursue reconciliation and justice for Aboriginal Australians.

We believe in pursuing friendship and collaboration, valuing the contribution of Aboriginal people to everyday society and our shared community.

We believe that unity is ultimately achieved when we all discover our identity in Christ, which transcends race and culture.

Conclusion

In essence, our journey towards reconciliation should involve three key steps:

- 1) A clear recognition of the negative impacts of past actions and wrongdoings.
- 2) Adopting an attitude of godly sorrow and repentance, and a desire to set things right.
- 3) This attitude can then lead to the restoration of relationships and actions to move ourselves, our community and our nation forward, to build the Kingdom of God within individuals, amongst us as a community, and reaching beyond to the nation in the name of Jesus.

Indigenous Working Group

The purpose of this paper is to form a foundation for action towards justice and reconciliation. Whilst this paper is theoretical in nature, the Grainery is committed to actions and initiatives that strive to bring about actual change across Newcastle, The Hunter Region and throughout Australia. To ensure this takes place, the Grainery has a dedicated Indigenous Ministry Taskforce, comprising of Grainery Church members, who work together to plan opportunities for engagement and action. This includes the formation of a Reconciliation Action Plan, financial support of a local public school with a high percentage of Indigenous students, partnerships with key local Indigenous leaders, organising awareness-raising events and providing speaking opportunities for Indigenous educators, and planning for key dates such as Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC week.

**This paper is an abridged version of a longer paper which provides further background and context to the beliefs expressed here and includes Bible verses and text from books to support. To see the full paper, visit <https://www.grainery.org.au/mission/reconciliation>*