



Initiatives of Change

Apology catches world attention

John Bond reports on the response to the Government's long-awaited "sorry":

In the lead-up to the Prime Minister's Apology to the Stolen Generations, a BBC producer phoned me. "This is a fascinating story," he said. "I want to see how a country attempts to deal with the wrongs of its past."

It was not just the BBC that was fascinated. Media networks on all continents gave extensive coverage. Al Jazeera TV, broadcasting throughout the Middle East, devoted 21 minutes to it. Canada's National Chief, Phil Fontaine, messaged, "This is monumental." I have received enthusiastic emails from Zimbabwe, Malawi, China, the USA. From North East India, Neichu Angami wrote: "We made sure that the apology was covered in our local papers and all our tribes' newspapers." In many countries, people who have suffered as a result of misguided policies have found hope.

And the morale of Aboriginal Australians has soared. They have endured a decade of denigration. Now they are hearing from a Prime Minister who does not blame, but accepts responsibility for the damage done. As an Aboriginal woman wrote from a prison in Victoria: "You could have heard a pin drop while Kevin Rudd was speaking. But if you were really listening you would have heard the sound of the tears falling to the floor as every woman in the room wept her own silent grief and loss. It was the most emotional, uplifting, and incredible feeling I have ever experienced." *

Hundreds of the Stolen Generations came to Canberra for the apology, and as many as possible heard it from the galleries of the House of Representatives. Kevin Rudd and his wife Therese greeted each of them as they entered the chamber. A Tasmanian who had been savagely abused after removal from her family said later, "As the Prime Minister shook my hand, I looked into his eyes, and I felt he was saying, 'Please forgive us'. And in my heart I said, 'I do forgive'."

In his speech the Prime Minister committed his Government to transform Aboriginal health, educational and



Before making his speech of apology, the Prime Minister listened to the story of a Stolen Generations woman, Lorna Fejo. Here he and Jenny Macklin, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, are meeting Lorna (centre) and members of her family at the home of her daughter Christine King (next to Lorna), Co-chair of the Stolen Generations Alliance.

employment opportunities within the next decade. This is a huge challenge. It will take the mobilisation of tens of thousands of people – medics, builders, teachers and others – and this will only happen through a whole new determination, among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, to end the decades of neglect.

Can that spirit be roused? I believe it can. It is already happening.

Hundreds of schools watched the Prime Minister's apology. Many are taking initiatives as a result. One is Palmyra Primary School in Perth. There the Year 7 students researched the Stolen Generations, and then asked for a school assembly to hear from Aboriginal elders and the Stolen Generations. Kathy Stevens, a teacher at the school, describes the day of this assembly as "the best of my teaching career".

"Not often in schools do students encounter events which evoke such depth of emotion," she writes. "Hearing Marie Thorne and Heather Vincenti speak has enabled our pupils make a connection to people who experienced the loss and separation that is part of the Stolen Generations.

"Jeffrey, an Indigenous student, played the didgeridoo and the whole school rose to their feet with voices ringing to the message of Kerry Fletcher's *Sorry Song*. The audience, which included former Minister for Indigenous Affairs Fred Chaney, wiped away tears and applause erupted.

"Chaney wrote the next day: 'Among the many school assemblies I have been to that was the best. The way everyone was so involved made it – teachers, friends of the school and most of all the students. It was Australia as I want it to be. This generation of school children can make it a reconciled community with a respected place for everyone.'"

Many, many who are active in Initiatives of Change have helped bring us to this historic moment. Margaret Tucker's autobiography, *If Everyone Cared* – which sold 20,000 copies and has been on school and university syllabuses – played a crucial role. Now is a time to rejoice, and commit ourselves to the next steps.

* in a letter to her friends, Dennis and Helen Mayor, in Bendigo.

Winds of Change in the Solomon Islands

In his policy statement to the country on 18 January, the new Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Dr David Derek Sikua, said, "If we do not take serious steps to tackle corruption now, it will overwhelm us and undermine any future efforts to build an equitable society. We must commit ourselves to fight it in public offices, in corporate offices, in our schools, churches, in the village, in tribes, everywhere we find it"

Winds of Change (Initiatives of Change in the Solomon Islands) has played a key role in helping to answer a culture of corruption with a culture of honesty. In 2006 it ran a comprehensive national Clean Election Campaign which challenged everyone,

leaders and led, to be part of creating this culture of honesty.

As the new Government in the Solomon Islands sets out to implement its bold policies, Christina Mitini reports from Honiara: "The Winds of Change team in Solomon Islands is running

again, after meetings at the end of last year to re-launch the network. A meeting in February approved the constitution and elected a board with eight members, under the chairmanship of Leonard Paia. Since then the board has met twice."

Christina Mitini was elected Secretary.

A different tone of voice

Finding a spiritual director helped Mary Lean to encounter God in a new way:

For most of my life, I have felt a spiritual thirst, without knowing how to address it. I've always known that God loves me, but I've not always been convinced that he has my best interests at heart or that my happiness matters to him. And I've had a nagging fear that if I don't get it right, he'll abandon me.

Some years ago, through an event organised by the churches in my town, I began to see a spiritual director. I've found it a huge help to meet regularly with someone who helps me to find God amid the ups and downs of my daily life. She listens, she asks questions, she challenges my assumptions, and she helps me to step back onto the bedrock of a strong relationship with God when the tides of life sweep me onto shifting sands. It's a role that friends and family can't always fulfil.

My director is trained in the approach of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, who's been described as the first psychologist.

He understood the internal forces which pull good people away from serving God with true inner freedom and devised a programme of prayer and meditation, the "Spiritual Exercises", which I undertook with my director's help. The experience changed me so much that people asked me what had happened to me. I decided to train to become a spiritual director myself, and that was transformational too.

In spite of being a Christian, I'd always been a bit squeamish about Jesus. I associated him with fundamentalist Christians who rejected people of other faiths and told me I couldn't be a

Christian if I didn't do the same, and I associated him with a negative understanding of the Cross, which I had been told was "I" crossed out. The "Exercises" helped me to connect with Jesus in a new way, based on love. I discovered that the Cross is not about saying "no" but about saying "yes".

I have so often mistaken the censorious, judgmental, "there you go again" voice in my head for the voice of God. But, in fact, when I have really felt that God is speaking to me, I have recognised a completely different tone – loving, gentle, even humorous.

"God's patience, love and gentleness are amazing; he does not force me to go against the grain, but waits for the time when I am ready."

This is actually a fundamental Ignatian concept. He says that to those who seek to serve God, God's voice is gentle, like water dripping on a sponge. The noisy voice, like the splatter of water on a stone, comes from the internal forces which want to undermine our trust in God and in ourselves.

Another shift has been to realise that God's love doesn't depend on my getting it right. So prayer ceases to be something I have to do to keep on side with God: it becomes instead the way that I heighten my perception of God's love for me.

This leaves me free to make choices, without feeling that everything depends on my finding the one right path. Ignatius believed that to make a truly free choice, we have to let go of the non-negotiables we put between ourselves and God. The first step is to be real: to admit to God that there are limits to what I am prepared to do, however much I would like this to be different. It's not about pretending to be free when I am not – it's about praying to desire what God wants, or even praying to desire to desire this.

On one occasion when I was facing a difficult decision, I found myself saying to God, "I want to follow you, but what if I just can't?" "Then that's all right," he seemed to reply. "I'll ask you another time." A few months later, the same decision returned to me with a quiet certainty that the time was right.

God's patience, love and gentleness are amazing; he does not force me to go against the grain, but waits for the time when I am ready.

If you are interested in finding a spiritual director, www.sdiworld.org/ offers advice on how to do so, plus lists of directors in different cities. Alternatively, local churches may be able to help you. If you are in Melbourne, the Wellspring Centre runs a referral system: email: kathryn.duncan@wellspringcentre.org.au or ring (03) 9885 0277.

Another option is to "test-drive" spiritual direction by going on an individually guided retreat: one source is: www.cis.jesuit.org.au/program.html/
Mary Lean

Life Matters: the class of 2008

Sothavoth, a policeman from Cambodia, decided to stop giving and taking bribes. Jasper from the Solomon Islands resolved to give up smoking and alcohol so as to have "clean hands" to fight petty corruption in the public service and to promote clean elections in his country. John, a Sudanese living in Melbourne, wants to give a quarter of his time to voluntary work.



Participants in the nine-day Life Matters Course held in Melbourne in February

The three young men were expressing their convictions following IofC's nine-day Life Matters course in Melbourne in February. The course drew 17 young adults from around the Asia Pacific region to explore such themes as identity, forgiveness and transforming conflict.

"From an early age I was told by my elders that I should not trust Muslims," said Aashni, a Hindu from Fiji. "This led to a barrier in the way I treated any person who comes from that community. I have been finding faults with other communities when I believe there are plenty of faults in my own. I have decided that when I go back to my country, I will apologise to Muslim people and share my thoughts about the issue."

Her countrywoman, Esita, was returning home to run Life Matters

workshops in Fiji's villages. The course had shown her the importance of taking time in silence to tune in to the deepest within her. For Filline from Cambodia, a highpoint of the course was getting to know Nhung from Vietnam. "Our countries have experienced centuries of

"The course drew 17 young adults from around the Asia Pacific region to explore such themes as identity, forgiveness and transforming conflict."

conflict," she said. "But we hope that we two, through our friendship, can help build a better relationship between them."

During the course, participants helped in a soup kitchen. Lana from Melbourne decided to continue with this work. "Life Matters has motivated me and equipped me with the knowledge to bring about a positive change in my life," she said. "I have also found the courage to repair broken friendships, overcoming my hurt pride."

Yue from China left with two resolves: "to do what I need to do; and to try things that I don't like to do". On her list were reconciliation with her uncles and writing down the life stories of her grandparents.

Three young people from Sydney took part in the course. One of them, James, spoke of their desire to support the Aboriginal community of Redfern. "I learnt that being honest means not pretending to be anything other than who we really are," he said.

Gold Coast weekend

What is the difference between being judgmental and holding one another accountable? What builds and what destroys "community"? What is the difference between an intentional community and a group of friends? What can I do to make my community different? These questions challenged and inspired the 27 participants in a weekend retreat in the Tallebudgera Valley at the end of February. They were all members of the faith community I lead on the southern Gold Coast. - Rev Glennis Johnston

The retreat was facilitated by David and Jane Mills from Sydney, with sessions on Dialogue and listening, Change starts with me, Interfaith relationships and the deeper interpersonal dynamics of being with others in community. On the Saturday afternoon, against the backdrop of rainforest trees, participants stepped up one by one to share some of the most painful and hope-giving moments of their lives. We all valued the opportunity to see

each other through fresh eyes.

The weekend renewed our sense of calling to reach out beyond the barriers that we allow to build up between ourselves and those who appear different. I was encouraged personally to discover that when God asks me to stick my neck out and do something different, people from out of state are willing to support me. That's the IofC team in action.

"The weekend renewed our sense of calling to reach out beyond the barriers that we allow to build up between ourselves and those who appear different."

Imam and Pastor in Brisbane

Brisbane-based Muslim youth organization, AMARAH, screened *The Imam and the Pastor* to an invited audience of mainly younger Muslims and Christians on 10 February, 2008. The DVD describes the work of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and

Pastor James Wuye to reconcile warring communities in Nigeria.

In group discussions afterwards both Muslims and Christians said that the message of the DVD was vital for the world and for themselves. Dave

Andrews, Christian author, lecturer and community builder, supported AMARAH (Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity) in arranging the event.

Brian Lightowler

DVD talk

Two DVDs made during last year's IofC conferences in Caux, Switzerland, are now available. They supplement the report distributed last month as a means of sharing the Caux experience.

Visions for Peace -

Visions for Peace features an interview with Mohamed Sahnoun, President of IofC International, on what it takes to be a peacemaker and on Caux's role as a source of inspiration for world leaders grappling with global poverty, climate change and war. It also includes the speech of Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the

Tools for Change -

UN, at Caux last year. *Tools for Change* features eight short films by participants in the communications learning track of the Tools for Change conference.

The DVDs are available post-free within Australia for \$10 each or \$15 for both DVDs.

Available from -

Grosvenor Books

226 Kooyong Road, Toorak
VIC 3142, Australia
tel: + 61 3 9822 1218
fax: + 61 3 9822 6871
email:
grosvenor.books@au.iofc.org

Payment also possible by direct credit.