

PUBLIC STATEMENT

The Marist Brothers in Australia and their ministries endorse the statement below concerning the "Sorry" statement of the government of Australia to be made in Parliament on Wednesday.

Marist Brothers have been working in the community and school at Alice Springs and also among the Arrente people of Santa Teresa in the Northern Territory for the last thirty years. They also spent a number of years at Milikapiti on Melville Island and on Palm Island Qld. They have been responsible for schools at Bourke NSW (1988-2002) and Murgon Qld (1987-1998; 2007-) which serve a number of aboriginal families. Children from a large number of aboriginal families attend Marist boarding schools at Forbes, Campbelltown and Hunters Hill in NSW, Ashgrove and Cairns in Queensland. Aboriginal children are also present in a number of Marist schools in metropolitan and regional areas and in community programs such as Marist Youth Care in western Sydney. We join with these families and their communities in applauding this significant move towards reconciliation in our nation.

Letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd, from the Acting President of the Conference of Religious of Australia, Sr Christine Burke, IBVM:

Your Government is preparing to offer an apology to the Indigenous peoples who have been named "The Stolen Generation". It is clear from the findings of the earlier Commission into this devastating experience, and from the desire of so many non-Indigenous Australians to officially voice our sorrow at what happened in our name, that this is a much needed symbolic action by our national leadership. It is fitting that this statement will be made as part of a full parliamentary sitting.

The leaders of Religious Congregations across Australia support this move to publicly say "Sorry" to those indigenous people who were forcibly removed from their families at various times since white settlement of this country. The policies of that time failed to recognize the rights and relationships of families whose way of life differed from the accepted western norms. Incredible pain and dislocation resulted for those immediately involved, and the effects are still being experienced in succeeding generations.

We applaud this official Federal response. We also hope that your Government continues to work in close collaboration with Indigenous leaders to find a way to improve the quality of life of many communities, families and individuals who have been traumatized as a consequence of these policies.

Sr Christine Burke IBVM, Acting President CRA



Provincial Sydney



Provincial Melbourne

11th February, 2008