



The Gippsland Anglican

Volume 78, No. 6

July 2008

Published in Gippsland since 1930

Bishop's Charge to Diocese

THIS year's Gippsland Anglican Diocese Synod was held in Orbost and was well attended. Following is an edited, summarised version of the Charge delivered by the Bishop of Gippsland, the Rt Rev. John McIntyre.

I can think of no better place at which to begin this address than by reference to what I consider to have been one of the most historically significant actions taken in Australia in my lifetime, the Prime Minister's apology to the stolen generations.

There can be no greater testimony to the power of symbolic action than that moment, just three short months ago, when the Prime Minister of Australia uttered those three short words, "We say sorry". Repeated twice, in an almost liturgical litany of repentance, the response was palpable, even for those of us watching on television. Up until that moment, in the words of Age journalist Tony Wright, who was present in the house, "It was as if the whole place was holding its breath".

And when that word, sorry, was finally spoken, he says, "There was, quite audibly, the exhalation of breath", a release. Those removed from their families and those from whom they were removed wept tears of relief that at last the injustice has been named and their pain acknowledged. No doubt there was a measure of grief in those tears as well, not only for themselves but for those who did not live to see this day, their lives often cut short by despair and hopelessness. Hope was born that day for many, most importantly for Australia's Indigenous peoples, but also for us all, because in acknowledging a past injustice we have laid the foundations for healing finally to come to our land.

Christians have good cause to celebrate that momentous occasion in our nation's history because it manifests a truth that is at the heart of what we believe. Healing, wholeness, salvation itself, comes as a gift in response to repentance and commitment to the ways that make for peace with justice. This is God's way as it is known in Jesus Christ, and here

was an occasion where that truth was emblazoned, for all with the eyes to see, across the life of our nation, and indeed, the world. For international eyes were upon us that day.

I take no small amount of delight in hearing that Kevin Rudd apparently came home from church one Sunday morning to sit down and write that speech, with a biro, in longhand. There is a wonderfully symbolic aspect to the story that only goes to reinforce the truly Christian understanding to inform the shape and substance of his apology speech.

Closer to home, we in Gippsland are still confronted with the lack of acknowledgement of past injustice in the white incursions into these lands, beginning in the 1840s. The continuing campaign to mark massacre sites in Gippsland is hastening slowly to some resolution, mindful of the need for this to be driven by Indigenous people and not by over-zealous non-Indigenous people.

But of course there are more everyday concerns that impact negatively on the lives of Aboriginal people in Gippsland and, in our own small way, we in the Diocese of Gippsland are progressing quite well in finding ways of engaging with local Aboriginal people around those needs. The Aboriginal Ministry Fund is established and growing, with 10% of the proceeds of Parish land sales now committed to it, alongside the contributions of parishes and individuals. Our hope is to establish financial stability for Aboriginal ministry in the Diocese through this fund and build our capacity to employ local Aboriginal people in ministry.

In light of that, I am pleased to announce that Phyllis Andy will be commissioned for Aboriginal ministry in East Gippsland this coming June. She joins Kathy Dalton, who was commissioned as Aboriginal Pastor in the Latrobe Valley and Western Gippsland last year. Together with Rev. Edie Ashley, who has been appointed as the Diocesan Aboriginal Liaison Minister, they will be



Fuzzies an institution at Cowwarr

DID you ever wonder where those 'warm and fuzzies' feelings came from? Every year at Cowwarr, the story of the 'fuzzies' is told and participants are encouraged to make special 'fuzzies' for each person, wonderful affirmations to enjoy during Cowwarr and take away. Some participants, such as Grandpa Cowwarr, Laurie Baker, have more 'fuzzies' than they can count. The original story of the fuzzies is from America and was contained in a book, a magical folk fable for all ages, read many years ago at gatherings of Gippsland Young Anglicans. Past GYA and Cowwarr participant, Lacy Biggs, developed a fuzzies book specially for Cowwarr and the fuzzies boxes have evolved and grown, just as the spirit of Cowwarr has evolved and grown.

Recently, at a GYA reunion, Lacy brought out the original book of Fuzzies, a folk fable for all ages, made at Cowwarr. To re-connect with Cowwarr and re-visit such memories as the evolution of the

fuzzies, make sure you participate in one or more of the 10th year celebrations this year.

On July 9, past Cowwarr group members are invited to attend a service of thanksgiving and celebration at St Paul's Cathedral in Sale, beginning 6pm, followed by a bring and share tea. This will be 10 years to the day of Cowwarr 1. Family and friends are also welcome.

From Friday to Sunday, August 1 to 3, there will be discussions around the campfire at Bermingham Park, to review the Cowwarr program.

A 10th year anniversary reunion camp will be held at A'Beckett Park on Raymond Island, from Friday to Saturday, October 2 to 4. Stay one, two or all three days. For more information on these activities, contact David Chambers, telephone 03 5148 3143 or Laurie Baker, telephone 5141 1640.

ABOVE: Lacy Biggs and Russell Smith with the original book Fuzzies, a folk fable for all ages.

encouraging the growth of ministry by, with and for Aboriginal people across the Diocese.

The other recent initiative we have taken is to begin dialogue with Aboriginal people about the development of A'Beckett Park. It is our hope that, as it is developed as a centre for spirituality and the environment, it will become a place of significance for the Gippsland's Aboriginal population and for the rest of us. Clearly,

Raymond Island has played a significant part in the consciousness of the traditional custodians of the lands and waters in which it is situated, and we are on a journey of discovery together to ensure its place in future generations of Indigenous people in Gippsland. One element of this we have already discussed is how we might reintroduce Aboriginal language in the naming of the park and its environs.

Moving to other matters in the life of the world which demand our attention as Christians, another 'hot' issue (if you will pardon the pun) is global warming and climate change. What was considered to be the hobby-horse of fringe concern groups has now been taken up by government and business right across the globe. And it is a constantly changing field of enquiry.

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