



A PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN VOICE AUSTRALIA

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www.progressivechristians.org.au

Entering into the New Year— Moving from 2017 to 2018

2017 has been a significant year in many ways. One of the best things to point towards is the success of the Marriage Equality postal survey. After years of lobbying, rhetoric and discussion, the Australian people can now legally marry for love, regardless of gender and sexuality. However, this is not a reality in our churches. Many religious institutions still uphold marriage between a man and woman. When we look around the world at places like Scotland and America, we can see that it doesn't have to be this way. Changes within our churches cannot occur without the voices and actions of the people. Many have fled churches over the years because the theology of the church, particularly as expressed in mainstream culture has made them feel unwanted, ontologically wrong, outside of the great love of God. As we move into 2018 our purpose is to ensure that all people feel included in the family of the divine, just as loved, just as wanted, as equal children of God. If your church is inclusive, let us know and be sure to go out of your way to let others know—taking the anxiety away for those who are looking for a safe place to worship and a community to love. Organizations like *Equal Voices* and *A Progressive Christian Voice* who exist around Australia are there to continue this journey as we seek to bring this inclusivity into churches and parishes.

As we move into 2018 we remind ourselves of those who are fleeing war around the world. Who are not safe, whose homes have been bombed and ransacked and have made great journeys with their families to find safety. Our dream is for Australia to be better at receiving those who are escaping atrocities. We continue to strive for sanctuary and protection for people in detention, around the world and specifically in Australia. According to the [Refugee Council](#) there are still over 1300 men and women

in Australian detention facilities with almost 300 in detention for over 730 days. [The UN Refugee Agency](#) calls the Australian treatment of Asylum Seekers 'punitive' that erodes the resilience of people who have already endured traumatic experiences before coming to Australia. Describing the government measures as impacting the seekers ability to meaningfully engage with any refugee status determination process.

Our call as Christians is to aid the poor and the needy, to provide hospitality, especially to strangers in foreign lands. 'This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy' (Ezekiel 16.49). We are incredibly blessed by accident of birth to experience the lives that we live - running water, air conditioning, walking safely day and night—it is easy to forget the rest of the world in our comfort. As we journey into 2018 we reflect on what looks like to our brothers and sisters, our neighbours around the world who are in need of our help and hospitality and what we can do with our abundance to assist and to make safe.

We remember our environment, our most treasured gift that we have been given and look for ways to preserve it for the future generations - in the little things and the big.

We hope that you have had a wonderful Christmas and New Year and we look forward to working with you in 2018.

Blessings—APCVA Team.

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/statistics/aust/asylum-stats/detention-australia-statistics/>

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/asylum-in-australia.html>

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

In May last year Australian citizens received a heart felt plea from this country's first nation peoples. The plea was for recognition of the spiritual connection with the land, for constitutional and social change to allow the first nation people to flourish. This statement cuts straight to the heart of the social inequality, poverty, incarceration rates and isolation that so many first nation people experience in their everyday lives. While 2017 saw wonderful changes within our culture with the "Yes" vote winning the day as a public recognition of love, we must remember also other acts of love that we can engage in. When we love, we hear, we listen, we acknowledge, we strive for change, we become agents of hope. As we move into this new year, we should look for ways we can continue to bring out the equal divine love that we believe in, in what we say "yes" to. We have included a copy of the Uluru statement from the Heart for any members who haven't had the chance to read—if you have we invite you to reread, to remember and to listen. Let's keep walking this journey.

"We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a *spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is *the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle.* It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

26 May, 2017."

A PS To Previous Article on 'Thoughts on Economic Equality'

Salvation and economic redistribution.

In *Luke 19:1-9* there is the well-known story of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus. Across the four gospels this is the only time that the noun *salvation* occurs on Jesus' lips in regard to a person's encounter with him. [1] And in using it in this instance, Jesus is referring to economic redistribution from the wealthy to those less well off. For Zacchaeus had said: *Look, half of my possessions I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.* Jesus said to him: "Today *salvation* has come to this house". [19:8-9]

1. The other instance is *John 4:22* with the generalised phrase "*salvation is from the Jews*".

Rev Dr Ray Barraclough—APCVA Executive Committee Member

Dying with Dignity and Juggling Complexity

Since our last newsletter, dying with dignity legislation has come before two different State parliaments. In Victoria the legislation was passed. In New South Wales it wasn't. I think the members of the two parliaments made the right decision on both occasions.

My response may surprise some and I am sure a few of you will disagree. At the conclusion of the [briefing paper](#) on Dying with Dignity which we released earlier in the year, we stated in the concluding paragraph that:

“Whether a progressive Christian will support or oppose “death with dignity” legislation will depend

on whether the proposed legislation is perceived as causing more harm than good for the most vulnerable and whether there are aspects of the legislation that will have unintended consequences.”

After considering both pieces of legislation, I concluded that the Victorian legislation would protect the most vulnerable and that there had been a serious effort to avoid unintended consequences. With regard to the NSW's bill and process, I was most concerned that there was not the same commitment to increasing palliative care services as there was in Victoria, and the issue

was being seen too narrowly as a legislative one.

Of course, as I live in Canberra, my views at the moment are of no real consequence, as politicians from neither Victoria nor New South Wales are likely to pay me any attention. This will change if the ACT is given permission, which it currently doesn't have, to legislate on the issue. I will then have to engage seriously with whatever legislation and surrounding policies are proposed and advise my politicians accordingly.

Len Baglow—APCVA Executive Committee Member

A Tale Of Two Dinners!

One of my most bizarre experiences of 2017 was to find myself at the National Press Club seated at a table of Australian Christian Lobby volunteers. As always, I attempted to enter a dialogue and find common ground.

The person on my right had told me he was a Catholic, so I mentioned that I had recently been to hear Kristina Keneally speak at a Christians for an Ethical Society dinner. He responded by telling me that he couldn't stand the woman and that she was not a real Catholic, and neither was Bill Shorten. Hoping to move to safer ground I mentioned the Pope. This was met by the comment that future popes were sure to revoke his ill-conceived reforms.

Chastened, I turned to my left. Less militant, the conversation was however still curious (and curiouser). I was assured by one, without a doubt, that the most threatened group in Australia was old white males. I tried to point out that I didn't in the least feel threatened. However, having found the exception, the table seemed to think that they had proved the rule.

I was also assured that Christianity was needed in Australia to preserve Western values. I know I should have pointed out that Jesus was middle-eastern, but for the moment I was dumb-struck by the chasms in our understandings.

A few weeks later, I found myself at another dinner: this time to hear the Israeli journalist Gideon Levy. The event was organised by the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, and Australians for Justice and Peace in Palestine.

Levy spoke well on the complex issues that Israel and Palestine face. He had recently moved from endorsing the so-called two State solution to one that emphasises the importance of human rights. Levy, though describing himself as a secular Jew, resonated the emphasis of the Old Testament Prophets, both in his attack on Israel for making security its religion and in calling for Israel to be a place of justice.

At my table I was struck by the cross section of people who were wanting to hear this message, some Christians, (George Browning was there), but also Muslims, Jews and many who would not identify with any religion. It is at this second table that I see hope for our future.

Len Baglow - APCVA Executive Committee Member



Gideon Levy

Promoting public awareness of the politically progressive dimensions of Christian opinion

- A Progressive Christian Voice (Australia): understands Christian opinion to be more diverse and broader than that portrayed by the media
- is dedicated to contributing insights from progressive streams of the Christian faith and community
- seeks to minimise the effect that powerful lobby groups have on public discourse
- is therefore concerned with promoting public awareness of the diversity of Christian opinion
- welcomes fresh and challenging contemporary insights into the interpretation of the Christian scriptures and tradition
- does not speak on behalf of any Christian denomination, congregation, community or organisation
- Our members come from a variety of backgrounds and traditions.



Like us on
Facebook

Our presence continues to grow on Facebook and Twitter. These platforms are important for letting the press know that we exist. If you haven't done so already please like us Facebook or follow on Twitter. Also don't forget to share material that you like or think is important. You can link onto our Facebook or Twitter accounts from the of the webpage.

<http://www.progressivechristians.org.au/>

What is Your Story?

Shout Out For Stories of Progressive Christians!

Your story could change someone's life and help to guide them in hard situations and decisions. APCVA is currently looking at including some members' stories on the website. What is your story of Faith? Many of our members have powerful stories to share of encounters in life, theology and the Church that lead them to progressive Christianity or to be instigators of change. Please email tiffany.sparks@stpaulsashgrove.org.au your story if you would like to share your experiences

Members Needed! Have You Renewed Your Membership? Are You a Member?

Calling out for membership! In order for APCVA to have a wider impact in Australia and for our message to be more easily seen, we need more members. If know anyone who is interested in this movement, please don't hesitate to ask them about membership. Fees are very low and go towards building our presence. APCVA is built and run by volunteers who are after your help and support. In the meantime, if you have not renewed your membership below are details about how you can do it. Renewal fee, and any other contribution, can best be processed either by: Direct Debit to: *A Progressive Christian Voice (Australia) Inc.*

BSB: 633000 Account No: 146392212 OR posting a cheque made out to: *A Progressive Christian Voice (Australia) Inc.* To Ray Barraclough, 25 Buderim Street, Currimundi, Qld 4551

Categories of Membership Fee

Individual: Waged \$20 Unwaged \$10 Student \$5