

Church Leaders Voice Statement Mornington Peninsula

General Press Release: *An Open Letter to the Mornington Peninsula Community*

The following statement is addressed to the Mornington Peninsula community and comes from church leaders who are the signatories below. We acknowledge that we don't formally represent all churches and their leaders, nor at some points, the diversity of views within our own congregations.

Since the arrival of white settlers in 1788 to these lands now known as Australia, the Christian Church has had a paradoxical relationship with Australia's First Peoples. Some churches approached the First Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice, considering their wellbeing, culture, and language. However, others shared the values of the emerging colonial society, including paternalism and racism. They were complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture, and their spirituality.

As current church leaders on the Mornington Peninsula, we acknowledge this difficult history, and we make this statement to encourage our church communities and the wider community to engage in the important **community conversation** on the proposed Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

During this time, whilst so much is said and written, we encourage the Mornington Peninsula community to accept the generous invitation of our local First Peoples to engage with them and their planned activities, to carefully listen to their stories and to the voice of their Leaders.

We note that the proposed Voice to Parliament comes not through normal political channels, but as the result of a gracious invitation to the Australian people through the Uluru Statement from the Heart that says [in part],

"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."

"We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future."

It is not our place to advise people how they should vote. However, we wish to encourage the community not to play into the polarised political world, but to rise above it and to engage with respect and kindness, even when we disagree with each other.

Prejudice, violence, and discrimination in any form do great harm to the fabric of our community. Jesus Christ, and others throughout history who have called for justice in non-violent ways, provide us with wonderful examples of how we must always seek justice; to speak out against injustice and to care for the oppressed and the marginalised.

As Christian leaders, we call the Church, in particular, to the way of reconciliation between the first and second peoples of our country and to see this as a sign and symbol of that coming reconciliation and renewal, which is the end in view for the whole creation.

Grace and peace,

Rev Joy Blamires, St Mark's Uniting Church Mornington

Ps Jim Catford, Liquid Church Mt Martha

Rev. Paul Crothers, New Peninsula Baptist Church

Rev Tanya Cummings, Mount Eliza Anglican Church

Rev John Haig, Southern Mornington Peninsula Uniting Church

Ps Sam Hearn Baptist Union Victoria (Jigsaw Community)

Rev Cameron McAdam, The Village Church, Mt Eliza

Rev Nigel McBrien, Western Port Uniting Church

Mr Peter Orton, Coordinator, Mornington Faith Leaders Network

Rev Ross Pearce, Frankston High St, Uniting Church

Rev Liz Rankin, Mornington & Mount Martha Anglican Church

Ps Louise Sutton, Bayview Church Rosebud

Corps Officer (Pastor) Debbie Taylor, Mornington Salvation Army

Ps Simon Warrick, Frankston Church of Christ

Rev Peter Wiltshire, Mt Martha Uniting Church

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