

I Bring to You: A Liturgy of Acknowledgement and Courage

I bring the christian indigenous community, who in the 1970s placed their trust in many clergy and religious who promised to stand with them. They were there in the fight for land rights and in demanding the acknowledgment of the injustices imposed on our indigenous people in overtaking their land, their culture and their spirituality. The lives of some people were shattered and their dreams for justice were stopped when a clergyman misused his power and sexually abused members of the community. We acknowledge the violation to the community and the individuals who were abused.

We light a candle in recognition of the courage and determination of the women, both indigenous and non-indigenous, who have demanded justice through the criminal justice system. We affirm the dignity of indigenous women who can witness to us their unique connections to the spirit of truth and survival grounded in a spirituality of mother earth.

I bring to you the members of the Neerkol Action Group and other ex-residents of institutions including children who suffered the trauma of leaving their homeland England and Ireland through the British government child migration programs and who lived their childhood in institutions run by churches and governments. We acknowledge the violations which they have demanded to be heard calling on our church, our state, federal and international governments, to be accountable for their policies and actions of the past.

We light a candle acknowledging the determination, the dialogue, the distress and the pain, which have contributed to the vigilance and willpower of the members of the committee and other ex-residents who are demanding justice. We affirm their call to a society which will place children in a position of honor and value, and which essentially must be reflected in the social policy of our governments, our legal system, and in the teachings and practices of our churches and other social institutions.

I bring to you the trusted friends of clergy, the parents whose children have committed suicide, and adults who were once children in private schools who today learn of the sexual abuse which occurred. We acknowledge the depth of

betrayal and the pain of disclosing for people who trusted in a church or school community, only to be violated.

We light a candle for the adults today, men and women who are walking the path of healing and wholeness, who in the face of disbelief stand firm and embrace their vulnerability and pain knowing it will lead them on beyond survival of abuse to embracing life which was so often taken from them.

I bring to you the adult men and women from many denominations and professions who in seeking guidance and relief in their emotional or spiritual distress, have found themselves engulfed in confusion, betrayal, secrecy, discomfort, fear and dependency. They have had their experiences of pain, and often experiences of childhood sexual abuse ignored and replaced by a sexualized relationship with the pastor, psychiatrist, counselor, teacher, who promised them comfort, joy, spiritual enlightenment, union with God. We acknowledge the violation which occurs when people in positions of trust abuse that trust to meet their own selfish needs.

We light a candle for these women and men who despite enduring the judgement of immoral behavior, of being a consenting adult, of ruining the good name of promising clergymen or professionals, of having an affair, find the resilience to continue. We affirm their dignity as people who are seeking truth and accountability, compassion and redress for the wrong that has been done to them.

I bring to you the institutions which create the ground on which our humanity can be valued and respected or violated and abused. These are our churches, our schools, our childcare centers, our homes, our neighborhoods, our counseling rooms, our caring agencies, our work places, our leisure places, our hospitals, our prisons. These are the places where respect for power must be valued and not denied, where what is personal is also political, where our accountability to each other must be made clear, where redress will occur when harm is done; where any group of people has to stop making decisions for others without involving them; where dialogue is created to protect, care and enable people to experience relationships based on respect and openness and not domination, control and secrecy.

We light a candle in accepting our challenge: how do we remove the stigma and blame from victims for what has been done to them and accept responsibility for the way we create our families, our relationships, our professions, our churches, our work places, our neighborhoods and our institutions.

Liturgy adapted and printed with permission of the author, Karyn Walsh, Project Esther, Brisbane, Australia, celebrated at the 1998 Breaking the Boundaries Conference in Melbourne, with Tjanara Goreng Goreng voicing a traditional aboriginal wail.