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Over the centuries, as they have scattered over the face of the earth, Christians have developed different dates for the festival of Easter. This collection of Easter messages from Australian Church leaders is timed for March because Australians mostly follow the Western tradition, when there is a national public holiday. Other Australians, however, following the Eastern tradition, will not celebrate Easter in their Churches until the end of April.

Whatever the date over 2 billion Christians around the globe agree on what Easter is – the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the original Christian festival, and the highest point in the Church's calendar. Easter – or more properly the three days from the death of Jesus on Good Friday to the resurrection on Easter Sunday – is more than a commemoration. Christians really celebrate Easter every week, every Sunday, but this special festival makes sure we never forget what God has done for us. In these few days humanity itself dies and is born again to a new life with new possibilities.

This is a vast claim, and it lies at the heart of Christian faith. Is Jesus really the Son of God? Did God raise him from the dead? All around the world every year, Christians celebrate with a resounding, 'YES'. And they are sure to do it again this year, on March 23 and again on April 27.

*John Henderson*  
*General Secretary*  
*National Council of Churches in Australia*

### **Anglican Church**

The Christian Easter message is a message of new life. This new life is offered to all by God, through Christ, and is to be found even in death.

In recent weeks and months Australians have caught glimpses of new life emerging from situations that have been painful and threatening. Thanks to welcome rains some parts of Australia are beginning to break free from the devastating cycles of drought. Last month's bi-partisan apology to the nation's indigenous people, especially members of the Stolen Generations, was given and received in a spirit of graciousness that prepares the way for the healing of some of the most painful chapters of our national life. Australia's signing of the Kyoto Protocol signals our intention to be part of an international response to the dangers and injustices of global warming.

These are promising beginnings. Much will depend upon actions that are taken now and in the coming months.

My prayer for us all this Easter is that we might know God's life-giving Spirit, even in the darkest places of our own lives and of our nation and our communities. May we be enlivened by that Spirit to participate in

God's transformation of death into life and may we constantly rejoice and give thanks to the Lord our God who gave his only Son that we might have life and have it abundantly.

*The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall  
Primate  
Anglican Church of Australia*

### **Assemblies of God / Australian Christian Churches**

As a committed disciple of Jesus, the scene at the foot of the cross that first Good Friday must have been horrific.

Their promised Saviour, Jesus Christ, hung battered, bruised and dying, and they were left despondent, disappointed and downtrodden by the events that unfolded that day.

But the words uttered by Jesus with His dying breath, 'It is finished' were not those of a defeated man. They were words of triumph and victory because Jesus knew that Sunday was coming.

The pain and anguish He suffered on that dark and lonely Friday would be surpassed by the freedom and celebration that resurrection Sunday would bring for all of humanity.

Friday is only half of the Easter story, and I thank God that we have the privilege of seeing the powerful events of that day through the veil of God's promise fulfilled on Easter Sunday.

His was a selfless act. His blood spilled that each of us could know life, love, hope and freedom.

It's both His sacrifice and supernatural resurrection that we remember and celebrate each Easter.

Wishing you and your family a truly wonderful Easter weekend.

*Brian Houston  
Senior Pastor – Hillsong Church &  
National President – AOG/ACC*

### **Baptist Union**

#### **Easter Message: Don't 'crucify' vulnerable Australians**

Federal and state political leaders should reflect on the Easter story and ensure they do not 'crucify' innocent victims of social and economic injustice, according to the President of the Baptist Union of Australia, Rev Dr Ross Clifford.

In his Easter message, Dr Clifford observed how political leaders in first-century Judea had overlooked injustice and allowed Jesus Christ to be wrongly sentenced and crucified.

He urged policy makers not to make the same mistake and ignore the needs of the poor and vulnerable in Australian society.

“We hear of concerns about government budget cuts, carer bonus payment cuts, acute housing mortgage stress, unavailability of adequate dental health for hundreds of thousands of Australians, macular degeneration growing with little support for thousands of Australians losing their vision, and uncertainty on workplace relations.

“In particular, the housing, health and education needs of Indigenous Australians must be at the forefront of our national and state concerns.

“What Australia needs today is ongoing strong leadership that safeguards economic growth, upholds human rights, and provides better care for the less well off,” he said.

“Jesus came to help the poor and vulnerable, the hurting and the meek in our society. The death and resurrection of Jesus has implications for our social arrangements as well as our spiritual destiny.”

Also the first Easter was a challenge to religious leaders, and it remains so today, Dr Clifford said.

“Surveys indicate that a majority of Australians believe in an actual resurrection of Jesus, and it is time to reconnect with God. Most people I talk with are open to spirituality. The problem lies with the institutional church. The message of Easter is not primarily a call to join the institutional church, but to respond to the person of Jesus and explore the forgiveness and new life that Jesus offers. However, religious leaders need to ensure that the church is free of all forms of abuse and theological uncertainty.

“I talk to numerous people on my weekly radio program who tell me they can’t connect with the church because of the hurt and rejection they have experienced. Some are not sure what gospel resurrection hope the church proclaims today.

“Don’t ‘crucify’ Jesus afresh this Easter. The death and resurrection of Jesus offers an opportunity to experience and share the love, joy and peace of God,” Dr Clifford said.

*Reverend Dr Ross Clifford*  
*President*  
*Baptist Union of Australia*

## **Catholic Church**

“The celebration of Easter every year is a reminder to us that Our Lord’s suffering, death and resurrection gives hope to the world.

In the world today, violence seems to be on the increase and the possibility of peace seems ever more distant as the days go on.

Everywhere we turn, senseless violence is influencing the lives of poor and innocent people and one can be tempted to think that in the midst of all this there is no way for us to make a difference.

But at the same time, there is another message, another story and we see that exemplified in the lives of so many people who in the ordinary circumstances of their daily lives are peacemakers. People seeking reconciliation within their own family life, people seeking to make peace with others, people engaged in humanitarian works and charitable works.

Such actions make the world a better place and are what the Lord requires from those who honour him in his death and resurrection. These actions are true to the power of His love which was revealed so clearly at His death and so resplendently at the moment of His resurrection.

So while we wish everyone a very happy Easter and all its blessings, we must see it also as a call to us to belong to Christ, to renew our commitment to him and to work for peace in the world.”

*Archbishop of Adelaide Philip Wilson  
President  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

## **Churches of Christ**

Australia proudly celebrates a multicultural society in which many customs and traditions merge. We declare that Australia is a religious country where several faiths also merge. Christians declare at this time the uniqueness of Jesus who claimed that His death and resurrection provided the way to God. Christians believe that by putting one's faith in this Jesus we can be saved from an eternity of punishment for our sins and given an eternity with God.

Christians do not seek to impose their faith. In fact we acknowledge a common heritage with other faiths. But as we claim a unique message in and through Jesus who died for the sins of the world. We claim a special relationship with the Son of God is possible if we acknowledge him as Lord and Saviour because of his sacrifice. It is through this relationship we are given access to God the Father.

At Easter it is this Jesus we celebrate and it is in acknowledging His death and resurrection we find the answer to the world's problems.

*Richard Menteith  
National President  
Churches of Christ in Australia*

## **Lutheran Church**

An empty tomb on Easter morning does not prove that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified on Friday, rose on Sunday morning. A physical resurrection however, would demand an empty tomb.

History has never argued about the empty tomb. What has been postulated through the ages is that the body was stolen. Obviously a concern from the beginning as a guard was placed at the tomb in case someone got brave and took the body.

From a stolen body theory to a wrong tomb theory, there were those who suggested that it was another tomb, mistakenly visited, which was empty that caused the excitement for those who went early to the grave on Easter morning. Of course there was no satellite navigation facility at the time!

Perhaps Jesus only appeared to die or under a narcotic spell looked like he was dead.

Or maybe the discoverers so wished for an empty tomb and for a resurrection they deluded themselves into believing it.

Or was it the gardener who, tired of his plants being trampled, removed the body and buried it elsewhere?

When the followers of Jesus claimed he had risen, no one took them to the tomb and said 'there is the body, you are wrong!'

This resurrection, the most incredible claim in history, is no mystery for Christians. Christ is risen! Everyone is now invited to celebrate new starts, new life and hope as he rose not for himself, but for us.

*Reverend Dr Mike Semmler  
President  
Lutheran Church of Australia*

### **The Salvation Army**

We tend to identify Easter with symbols of the cross, and rightly so. It represents the extent of God's love for humankind. It reminds us of His plan that all might be saved.

Every believing Christian can look beyond the cross to the empty tomb. It represents God's power over death. It brings to us the hope of eternal life.

May you be challenged by the price Christ was prepared to pay for your sin and may you be encouraged in your faith journey as you realise the hope of the resurrection.

May God Bless you,

*Commissioner Les Strong  
Australia Eastern Territory*

*Commissioner James Knaggs  
Australia Southern Territory*

### **Seventh-day Adventist Church**

**EASTER IS ALL ABOUT LOVE BEING STRONGER THAN HATE and it is about God's love at that!**

At such a time as this with global turmoil, you and I need God's love.

Human hatred brings death. Human hatred brought about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Yet it was love that drove Jesus to allow men to kill Him.

If there were no resurrection it would mean hatred had conquered God's love.

But Jesus is alive! Death could not hold Him. Jesus has risen from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus is the triumph of God's love over all that human hatred could and can do.

Why not, right now, call on God to cover you with His love.

*Pastor Ken Vogel  
General Secretary  
Seventh-day Adventist Church*

## **Uniting Church**

### **Easter Impacts on People of All Faiths... and of None**

Despite walking this earth 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ continues to make more impact for good on people in the world today than any other human being.

This Easter it is worth noting that the stresses that can occur between those of different religions are generated by a very few people. The far more common story is the good relationships that are being nurtured by the vast majority of people of faith.

In the Indian city of Machilipatnam, thousands of Hindus and Muslims come to the city cathedral every Christmas Eve to pray, in respect for the Christian faith. Their offerings that day make up more than 10% of the cathedral's annual budget.

In Jerusalem last year, a new Council for Religious Institutions was established, with members from Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, to work on the long-term future status of Jerusalem.

In Australia the leaders of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths are planning a joint visit to Israel and Palestine in 2009, to consider how faith leaders may contribute to peace in the region.

None of these things would be happening were it not for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to live and teach God's love for the whole world, not just for his particular followers.

This Easter we encourage you to give thanks for Jesus; a man who promoted peace and advocated for justice for all humans; and the man whom we Christians worship as Son of God and Saviour of the world.

*Reverend Gregor Henderson  
President  
Uniting Church in Australia*