

# Service of Lament for Asylum Seekers

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**Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture**

**Thursday 15 August 2013**

We cannot simply stand by and watch our fellow human beings treated with such indignity. May we show the depth of our concern for those seeking refuge from persecution and war.

**Prelude:** Lament (words Glenda Cloughley, music Judith Clingan)

Open the doors of the chambers (of your hearts)  
Open your minds to our song  
We sing for peace through the power of love  
Hear the wisdom of women, hear our song

Weep for our sisters in danger  
Weep for our brothers and children  
Sound the cries of grief and despair  
Sound the lament for the dead.

## **Welcome**

### **Gathering of the People**

With respect and gratitude for the original custodians of this land, the Ngunnawal People, we gather together to affirm in hope and faith, that we can create a space for friendship and respect across diverse ethnicities and cultures, across unrecognized divides and painful histories.

***This is who we are, many people of great diversity,  
one community in the unity of humankind.***

Source of love and life  
enable us to reverence each person,  
to reach out to anyone in need,  
to value and appreciate those who differ from us,  
***to celebrate the gifts of our cultural diversity, and  
to share the resources of our nation.***

Grant that we may always promote justice and acceptance  
that ensures lasting peace and racial harmony.  
***Help us to remember that we are one world and one family.***

**Lament:** Lest We Forget (music: Glenda Cloughley, words of the verse: Johanna McBride)

There is need to view our nation's current treatment of asylum seekers against the backdrop of our response to such people at desperate times in the past

*(The Chorus will sing the refrain and then we are invited to join in after each petition)*

***Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget***

De hát mért sírsz, kis lány (*But why are you crying, little girl?*)

Ich kann kein Wort verstehen (*I can't understand a word*)

I lost the language of my pain

I need to sing it all the same

***Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget***

Back in 1956 we poured across the Hungarian borders.

Nearly a quarter million Magyars into Austria – a small country of 8 million people –

itself just liberated, but still impoverished and bearing the scars of war.

They didn't doubt that we were genuine refugees.

They opened their hearts.

After all we had taken the agonising decision to leave our country because we no longer felt welcome or safe at home.

***Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget***

In 1975 they poured into rickety boats to escape Vietnam.

More than 100,000 embarking on a perilous journey to Australia – a country of freedom, safety and opportunity.

We didn't doubt that they were genuine refugees.

We opened our hearts.

After all they had taken the agonising decision to leave their country because they no longer felt welcome or safe at home.

***Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget***

The rickety boats are coming again,  
Carrying people from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and other  
war-torn countries.

Now we doubt that they are genuine refugees.

'Close your hearts,' our leaders say.

'It is dangerous for us, that they left their homes in this irregular  
manner.

Let's lock them away. Out of sight.

Pay our poor neighbours to take care of them.'

How did it happen that we no longer feel safe to welcome them?

***Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget Lest we forget***

**A Word from the Hebrew Tradition:** Leviticus 19:1-2, 18, 33-34

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of  
the people and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your  
God am holy... You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge  
against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as  
yourself... When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall  
not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to  
you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself,  
for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

### **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable  
rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of  
freedom, justice and peace in the world.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.  
They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act  
towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. (Article 1)

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security. (Article 3)

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any  
discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to  
equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this

Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.  
(Article 7)

Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state... to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country. (Article 13)

Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (Article 14)

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (Article 18)

### **“Were you there?” a litany of lament**

*(The soloist will sing the refrain and we are invited to join in after each petition of lament)*

Soloist *Were you there when the boats were turned away?  
Were you there when the boats were turned away?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;  
Were you there when the boats were turned away?*

Celebrant *(pours water into bowl)*

Hear the cries of your people, Source of Life.  
***The darkness is never so distant  
for those who know the pain of grief***

An asylum seeker who survived a tragedy at sea remembers

Refrain: *Were you there when those lives were lost at sea?  
Were you there when those lives were lost at sea?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;  
Were you there when those lives were lost at sea?*

Celebrant      *(pours water into bowl)*

Hear the cries of your people, Source of Life.  
***The darkness is never so distant  
for those who know the pain of desertion***

An asylum seeker reveals the trauma of detention (Sally  
Neighbour, 'The Monthly', June 2011)

Refrain: *Were you there when our nation turned its face?  
Were you there when our nation turned its face?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;  
Were you there when our nation turned its face?*

Celebrant      *(pours water into bowl)*

Hear the cries of your people, Source of Life.  
***The darkness is never so distant for those  
who know the bitter taste of division and fear***

Lamenting the fear and division fuelled by the debate regarding  
treatment of asylum seekers

Refrain: *Were you there when our hearts were led by fear?  
Were you there when our hearts were led by fear?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;  
Were you there when our hearts were led by fear?*

Celebrant      *(pours water into bowl)*

Hear the cries of your people, Source of Life.  
***The darkness is never so distant for those who know  
the reality of our complicity through silence***

The pain of complicity

Refrain: *Were you there when we knew not where to turn?  
Were you there when we knew not where to turn?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;  
Were you there when we knew not where to turn?*

Celebrant      *(pours water into bowl)*

Hear the cries of your people, Source of Life.  
***The darkness is never so distant for those  
who know the emptiness of despair***

The despair of not knowing how to respond

Refrain: *Were you there when their hopes were crucified?  
Were you there when their hopes were crucified?  
O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;  
Were you there when their hopes were crucified?*

A time for silent prayer and reflection.

**If We Only Knew** (words adapted from Luke 19:42, music: Judith Clingan)

“If only you had recognised on this day the things that make  
for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”  
Luke 19:42

If we only knew  
the ways that lead to peace,  
but alas, they are hidden from our eyes.

**Gospel from the Christian tradition**

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not  
overcome it.” (John 1:5)

**Reflection:** “Finding our way forward” Rev Professor James Haire

## **We name our hope**

And there it is,  
Australia,  
stretching as far as the eye can see in its dry glory.

We call it ours  
but it is its own, and the Creator's.  
It chooses its gifts and gives in its own time,  
the eternal time of all the ages of creation.

***Here we live.***

***Here we have built our towns and our cities.***

***Here we have our being.***

***We give thanks for the wonder of this land.***

Here we hope for a gathering of life.  
Here we hope for healing  
between those who were here for countless years  
and those of us who came more recently.

Here we will form a new nation from people of different beginnings,  
***welcoming desperate people fleeing  
to our shores  
in search of refuge,***  
a community of justice, truth and peace.  
***Thanks be for the wonder of this new possibility!***

## **Lighting of the Flame of Hope**

*(We are invited to come forward and light a candle  
as a sign of our hope and commitment to create a better world)*

## **The Tree of Life**

*(arranged by Judith Clingan,  
Spiritus Sanctus – words and melody Hildegard von Bingen,  
Tree of Life – words and melody from an Afro-American song)*

Spiritus sanctus  
vivificans vita  
movens omnia.

Spiritus sanctus  
Holy spirit, spirit holy

Vivificans  
Quickener, quickener, life giver, giver.

Movens omnia  
You move all things, all things living.

You got a right, I got a right,  
We all got a right to the tree of life.  
You got a right, I got a right,  
We all got a right to the tree of life.

Esperamus, Esperamus, Esperamus, Esperamus (we  
hope)

## **Ubuntu** (Johanna McBride)

'ubuntu' is an ancient Zulu word which means 'I am who I am  
because of you'

*(The Chorus will sing the chant and we are invited to join them)*

***I am who I am because of you.  
We are who we are because of each other.  
Ubuntu***

**Dismissal:**

In our life together under the stars of the Southern Cross,  
may we, as a nation of justice and holiness,

***seek to reconcile our history and our future.***

Let us go forward giving thanks for the gift of our nation, Australia,  
***seeking to be a community of harmony and peace open to all.***

**We are the People** (Johanna McBride)

*(Recessional sung by the Chorus of Women)*

We are the people,  
So many different voices.  
Citizens gather,  
Singing together we make our home.

We depart in peace and hope that the quality of compassion  
may find a home in the heart of our nation

## **Acknowledgements:**

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**Acknowledgements re Chorus of Women.**

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