



## Sorry Day 2008 *Action Resource: Overview*

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### Why Sorry Day was Established

From the beginning of the colonization of Australia, Indigenous children were separated from their families and communities. Some were forcibly removed for their labour, or to try to assimilate them into European society. Others were separated from their families in settlement and mission dormitories for education. Until the 1970s government policies allowed the separation of children from their Indigenous families simply because they were of mixed descent. The children who were taken away are known as the Stolen Generations.

National Sorry Day is observed on 26 May each year to commemorate the history and effects of forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their Indigenous families and communities.

The establishment of this day was recommended by the *Bringing Them Home* report. This report was issued in 1997 following the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*.

### It Concerns All of Us

Governments and those who implemented their forcible removal policies were acting on behalf of us all – we are all implicated. Such laws and policies would not have been possible without widespread racist attitudes and beliefs among our community.

The consequences of those policies are still being felt today. Many of us have no direct responsibility for past policies, and none of us can change the past. But we are all responsible for addressing current suffering and disadvantage which has its roots in past injustices.

### The Theology of Reconciliation

As Christians we know that it is possible to be reconciled with God and with one another, even after great injustices and much harm have been done. The dynamics of the sacrament of reconciliation show us the way. Saying sorry, asking forgiveness, and seeking to address the harm done are all part of this dynamic both at a personal and at a collective level.

### The National Apology

The national apology made by the Federal Parliament to the Stolen Generations on behalf of us all on 13 February 2008 is an important step towards healing and right relationships. Now we must all take the next steps. Sorry Day is an appropriate time to consider our commitments.

### Making Our Response

Many actions by State and Federal Governments will be needed. We can encourage and support such actions, and hold governments accountable to the will of the public. But much more than government action is needed.

Individuals, families, communities and groups can all work towards the implementation of the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home Report*. Apart from the recommendation that a national apology be made, there are 53 other recommendations.

This action resource is intended to assist parishes, schools and other faith groups to take the next steps beyond saying sorry. Our commitment to building up right relations in the face of past injustices will be shown more in deeds than by words.

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### Action Resource Sheets

- Overview
- Getting in Touch with Experience
- Understanding Structures of Sin
- Stolen Generations Track Home
- Giving the Apology Flesh & Bones