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where love comes to life

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Be reconciled

2 Cor 5:18-19



Learning to reconcile

by CAIN MCDONALD

It is always enlightening to discover something new in God's word that we have failed to understand previously. Or we may be drawn into a deeper understanding of something, due to a specific need or call to God.

This has been the case for our school community at Tatachilla Lutheran College, south of Adelaide.

And this is what Paul's letter challenges our thinking with – reconciliation is a ministry! As he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19: 'All this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them, and has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation'.

It has been empowering for our community to understand that reconciliation is a ministry that we are called into creating and living with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Tatachilla has long held Indigenous perspectives as central to its purpose, however this has taken on greater meaning in recent months.

For us our journey to formal reconciliation began about two years ago under the leadership of Mrs Dolroes Amos, our Indigenous Education Coordinator.

Working with our Indigenous Education Committee and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, our team began to explore the requirements and purpose of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). A dedicated working party of staff, students and

parents initially developed our 'Vision for Reconciliation', stating that:

'Tatachilla Lutheran College is a Christian, co-educational college with a vision for building community and enriching lives. Our mission is to encourage every person to have an experience which values self-worth, pursues excellence and serves others.

'Our vision promotes a culture that honours and respects the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia. We aim to do this through rich and inclusive relationships and learning opportunities that deepen knowledge and understanding of the diversity within and across Australia. This is founded on our strong belief that all people have inherent worth and value regardless of their cultural background.

'We aim to build relationships, respect and opportunities in the classroom, around the college and with the community so that we can confidently and more knowingly stand with our Indigenous brothers and sisters to acknowledge their culture, heritage, language and beliefs and ensure that every student learns of the spiritual and ancestral history of our country. We must forge new understandings and relationships.'

The team worked with the Narragunnawali framework, which 'supports all schools and early learning services in Australia to develop environments that foster a



Above: Pastor Jon Goessling blesses the launch of the Tatachilla RAP, while Principal Cain McDonald, Indigenous Education Coordinator Dolores Amos and student Steed Carter light the Reconciliation Candle, and school parent Damien Weber takes part in the ceremony. Left and below right: Tatachilla makes an annual service learning trip to the Northern Territory.

higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions'.

Our RAP development concluded in 2018 and consists of more than 30 action items around the key concepts of Relationships, Respect and Opportunities, which can occur in the classroom, around the school or in the wider community.

Such actions are focused on better integration of Indigenous perspectives and culture in teaching and learning, respectful and significant visual evidence around the college, stronger partnerships with local Kurna people, inclusive school policies, and evidenced based school-wide positions on current affairs such as Invasion Day.

Our RAP was officially launched at a whole-of-college event, attended by dignitaries and local Kurna elders, which included a moving Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony by elder Allan Sumner. The launch, blessed by College Pastor Jon Goessling, also saw the lighting of our new Reconciliation Candle, which symbolises our ongoing commitment to Indigenous reconciliation and burns brightly during each formal worship gathering of our community.

Our RAP has become a central driving document to guide our thinking and actions to ensure that what we seek to undertake in reconciling the past is meaningful, respectful and continuously improved.

Our dedicated team meets each term to review current actions, timeframes and the ongoing appropriateness for our community of these actions. This intent and desire to make the RAP a 'lived' document is critical to ensuring reconciliation and our understanding of Indigenous perspectives is maintained and authentic.

In essence, formalising the RAP has given permission for members of our community to ask questions, be inquisitive and know that not having the answers right now, is okay. We recognise we are all on this learning

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journey and that collectively we will come to a deeper understanding through the guidance of our RAP. Importantly it has also allowed individuals to reflect on their own hearts and actions, both historically and as they walk into a new path today and tomorrow.

We believe our Indigenous students have also grown through the development of our RAP. While only small in number here in southern Adelaide, these students have demonstrated a greater willingness to share their culture and heritage, and embrace their stories, so that they may be leaders in our community learning.

Tobias Turner, College Dux in 2018, flourished through his involvement in the RAP working party and in his community involvement with Kurna elders. One of his proudest moments came as he provided his first

ever public Welcome to Country in Kurna language, at the LCA SA-NT District Convention of Synod held at the college last year. Not only was he a keen contributor, and still is, to our RAP, but he was also recognised for his contributions at the end of Year 12, being the first male student in South Australia to receive two Governor of South Australia Commendations for SACE – one for Outstanding Achievement in SACE and the second for Indigenous Student SACE Excellence.

While we are not the first school to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan, we have been blessed to live and work in a time where there is greater acceptance and willingness to draw closer in friendship, knowledge, understanding, grace and love with our Indigenous neighbours. This relationship has been truly reciprocal and we know that our students and wider community will benefit where reconciliation love comes to life.

Cain McDonald is Principal of Tatachilla Lutheran College, McLaren Vale South Australia.

Tatachilla's RAP is online at: www.narragunnawali.org.au/raps/25236/tatachilla-lutheran-college



Other Lutheran Education Australia schools which have a RAP include Immanuel Primary School and Immanuel College, Novar Gardens South Australia, and Concordia College, Highgate South Australia.