



# Baptist Union of Australia

## MEDIA RELEASE

### For immediate release

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### A CALL TO PRAYER FOR OUR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Baptist Union of Australia, in partnership with Global Interaction, encourages your prayerful support of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, in light of the recently announced Federal Government policy to intervene in Northern Territory communities.

The communities with which Australian Baptists have particular links are Yuendumu, Ali Curung, Murray Downs and Willowra (north and north-west of Alice Springs) and Kalkaringi / Daguragu and Lajamanu (south west of Katherine). Global Interaction has had staff living in these Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory for many years. Some of those staff members have gained a considerable understanding of the situation and the culture of these particular communities.

Specific items for prayer include the following:

- 1 For the past 200 years, various experiences of Indigenous communities have left deep scars of pain, grief, loss of respect and dislocation.

*Pray for inner renewal which brings transformation in the lives of individuals and communities.*

*Pray for a growing movement of God's spirit to bring whole-of-life healing and hope.*

- 2 There are levels of dysfunction in many of the communities, and well-intentioned and well-funded programs by governments of different persuasions have done little to reverse the difficulties in the past.

*Pray that the present government intervention will in fact bring positive, sustainable change which empowers Indigenous people into the future.*

- 3 Among the medical, police and other authorities who are called on to implement the present government policy, only personnel who have a positive, sensitive and supportive disposition to Indigenous people will be able to contribute positively. The same applies to teachers, missionaries, medical, development and social workers and other non-Indigenous people who live in the communities.

*Pray that God will provide people of his choosing to live and work among Indigenous people for their long-term benefit.*

*Pray for a Global Interaction initiative to encourage Christian professionals (teachers, medical workers and others) to serve in Indigenous communities, to help such workers gain an understanding of cross-cultural dynamics and to form a network for mutual encouragement and learning.*

- 4 Non-Indigenous people who live among Indigenous people (even those such as long-term Global Interaction staff) lack total awareness of the complexities of Indigenous life and culture and the pressures of living between two cultural worlds.

*Pray that people appointed by the government to assess community needs and to recommend appropriate measures to improve the situation will have a capacity for sensitivity, perceptivity and careful listening and observation.*

*Pray that they will be able to avoid misinterpreting situations or imposing values and biases that are not culturally relevant and which lead to false conclusions.*

- 5 Minister Brough has stressed that each community must be treated differently, according to the situation. The levels of social health and dysfunction vary considerably in different communities. But by their nature, government programs tend to be strongly bureaucratic and to provide formulated, one-size-fits-all services.

*Pray for key leaders in the government intervention, that they will give adequate attention to the particular needs of the different communities, and genuinely help each community develop ways to improve their situations.*

- 6 Long-term Global Interaction staff worker, Ivan Jordan, believes that there is little evidence that child sexual abuse is worse in Indigenous communities than in other Australian communities. There are levels of sexual promiscuity among young people, including children. Ivan and other Global Interaction staff witnessed some child neglect, but not to the extreme levels at times suggested by the media.

*Pray for the safety and healthy development of young people growing up in Indigenous communities. In particular, pray for those children who do experience child sexual, physical and emotional abuse or neglect.*

*Pray that young people who have children when they are not yet ready for the responsibility of parenthood will have adequate support from experienced members of their communities.*

- 7 Dysfunction in Indigenous communities is often evidenced in inter-family disputes and fights. In the past, such disputes were usually resolved quickly by the culturally appropriate leadership which operated within the kinship structures. Disputes, often fuelled by substance abuse, now tend to persist, often paralysing to a great extent the whole community, including the effectiveness of health and education programs and school attendance.

*Pray that Indigenous communities will be empowered to develop culturally appropriate ways of reducing inter-family disputes and substance abuse, and resolving issues quickly when they do arise.*

- 8 One of the most significant issues for Indigenous people is their intense connection to their tribal lands. Yet, over the decades, people of various tribal groups have been brought together into multi-tribal communities. For example, Warlpiri people live with Gurrindji people on Gurrinji land, and with Alyawarra, Warramunga and Kaititja people on Alyawarra land. Not surprisingly, this increases the sense of dislocation and the potential for disputes.

*Pray that government representatives assessing community needs will be sensitive to land-related issues, and that, in co-operation with Indigenous leaders, ways of promoting harmony will be developed.*

- 9 Church leaders on the communities are growing in their capacity to adequately lead their congregations and to influence the wider communities for good. They are now far less dependent on missionary presence and help.

*Pray that leaders will demonstrate increasing Christ-likeness and experience God's wisdom as they serve him and their people.*

*Pray for growing confidence for church leaders in God and in their God-given gifts and abilities for leadership.*

- 10 During the first half of 2007, there has been a significant movement of God's Spirit, especially at Lajamanu, where many people have been baptised.

*Pray that the mini-revival that has begun at Lajamanu will be sustained, and replicated in other communities.*

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