

Interfaith Prayer Service on Blue Knot Day – Pitt St Uniting Church



Photo: Bec Lewis

Caption: Interfaith prayers at Pitt Street Uniting Church

Rituals acknowledge hurt, affirm hope and healing **Maidie Wood**

The first interfaith service held by Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA) was celebrated at Pitt Street Uniting Church (PSUC) in conjunction with South Sydney Uniting Church (SSUC) on October 13. The Blue Knot Day service, in support of the five million Australian adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse, was a significant and moving occasion.

Reverends Margaret Mayman (PSUC) and Andrew Collis (SSUC) led the service.

The representatives of the different groups who gathered to acknowledge the suffering of the young were: Tim Gray (Indigenous peoples), Father Peter Maher (Catholic Church), Kati Haworth (Jewish peoples), Adita Meagher (Buddhist faith), Pundit Nanda Majarajah Das (Hindu faith), Nicholas Ng, representing the many other faiths, and Cathy Kezelman, representing the survivors of child abuse.

They all shared the convictions that by showing a united front they strengthened the sense of community support felt by victims of childhood abuse, increased awareness in the wider community of the pervasiveness of the issue and emphasised the connection between faiths rather than their differences.

The setting was well prepared, with a “cloth of tears” flowing from the altar-table in recognition of the grief of those often hurt by adults from whom they should expect love and

protection. On the tabletop a bowl and a jug of water had been placed, symbolic of the tears of all who have come together to lament the trauma suffered by the abused.

Lengths of knotted blue ribbons both streamed from the altar table and looped over the arms of the pews, symbolising the way in which the emotions and lives of the victims have been tangled and distorted by abuse. Also waiting on the altar were seven candles, each to be lit by a representative who gave voice to different ways in which this dark and knotty social problem might be illumined and shed light on how healing might be achieved.

Later, four readings from different faith traditions gave comfort and assurance to those in pain or despair.

Music played an important and valuable part in the service. Gumbaynggirr man, Tim Gray, who gave the Welcome to Country, set the tone with a haunting and delicate composition. The resonant, lovely voice of singer Meredith Knight made John Bell's hymn, "For All Whose Song Is Silent", movingly set to music and played by Heather Robinson, an inspiration. Nicholas Ng's playing of the erhu (two stringed fiddle) and the hulusi (gourd flute) fostered a reflective atmosphere, very much in keeping with the spirit of the prayers of intercession read by Pamela Briggs as flowers were placed in the bowl of tears.

After the reading of the painful testimony of adult survivors of child abuse as told to playwright Alana Valentine, the wonderful story of recovery told by Karen Synnott made a deep and powerful impression on the listeners. Her personal experience of untangling the knots, recounted with integrity and much gratitude for those who supported her journey from despair to healing, offered hope to victims and lifted every heart in the gathering.

"Depression is not a sign of being weak," Karen said, "but a sign of being too strong for too long."

Councillor Linda Scott, who led the symbolic untying of the knots, summed up the service, commenting that it is a very powerful experience when groups from a larger community come together as one to face a common challenge.

On leaving the service many expressed not only their hope of justice for the victims, compassion for their suffering and hope for their healing, but also as stated by one, "a rediscovered warmth and love for all who suffered, and are suffering still, injustice as children".