

On Peaceful Relations:

Against Australia's rich and diverse cultural and ethnic background (in which we all share) the recent riots in Sydney have shocked many of us. It is not what we ever expected on Australian streets. Even more shocking to me has been the response from members of the Australian community and the Christian church.

Leaders of the Islamic community in Australia have condemned the organisers of last weekend's violent protests. Other Muslims have added their voices in support of their leaders, deploring the way the violent actions of a few fundamental Muslims have affected the way other Australians now treat them.

It is no wonder that they are concerned, if they have read the same bigoted, inflammatory and ill informed comments from non-Muslim Australians that I have read in the past few days. I hope and pray that these comments are not from anyone who claims to be Christian.

The voice of the Christian Community in Australia has been regrettably quiet. If as Christians we are not incensed by such prejudiced community reaction, then we need to go back and rediscover the gospel principles on which our faith is based. Jesus Christ welcomed the outsider, and condemned prejudiced voices in his world. He preached unconditional love, forgiveness and reconciliation. He forbade judging and condemnation. As Christians, love for all people whatever their faith, both within the Christian church and outside the church in the community, is never optional.

There is no question that we deplore the violence of a handful of reactionary Muslims. But are we going to stand by and let the vast majority of Australian Muslims be tarred with the same brush? Shouldn't we stand in solidarity with Australian Muslims and work with them to denounce violent and reactionary behaviour within the Australian community, both Muslim and non-Muslim?

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