NATIONAL FORGIVENESS WEEK FOR AUSTRALIA

TOP-DOWN APPROACH – THE MOST EFFICIENT WAY TO DO NFW



National Forgiveness Week (NFW) can be approached from several different onramps. Here is a suggested plan for the most challenging and ultimate version of NFW: Federal Government# and all major Christian denominations working together to spread the message of one-on-one forgiveness across the nation.$^{\Delta}$ Although more localised and simpler versions of NFW^{+} can be undertaken, they may eventually evolve into a full-blown national event over time.

As the denominations in Australia operate fairly independently from each other it is important to get some of the denominational leaders together to discuss holding NFW. Once consensus is reached, a think-tank can be convened to further discuss the structure and practicalities of NFW for Australia. Ideas could be put forward to create a draft plan of action.

After the think tank has completed its task, a delegation could approach the Prime Minister to request that the government collaborate with the denominations to hone the details of NFW. If government is agreeable, a *NFW Organising Committee* can be formed comprising of delegates from denominations, government and Aboriginal* leadership (selected from those who understand the value of forgiving one another). This committee can then prepare and submit a detailed plan and budget proposal to government.

A prayer team should also be created as soon as possible to pray for a clear pathway as planning for NFW progresses. This dedicated prayer team might link with the various state government prayer teams, and the federal government team in Canberra.

Once government has given formal ascent to NFW, with dates and venues finalised, churches and denominations can disseminate information on NFW throughout their own networks and via press releases.

Depending upon the agreed structure for NFW the *NFW Organising Committee* can create working groups to look after …

- Charity and Parachurch involvement
- Events Management
- Media liaison and publicity
- Safety and security
- Logistics
- Financial accountability
- Stakeholder government departments
- NFW March arrangements

Suggested Structure for Australia NFW

- NFW is to be launched on the first Sunday in both churches and parks across the nation.

- A march through the streets of cities and towns could precede a formal public opening of NFW in a park. The Prime Minister or Head of State would make an introductory speech, followed by a prominent Church Leader giving an oration on the value of forgiveness in relationships.

  Here is an opportunity for Christian Aboriginals to have a real voice to the nation by offering a forgiveness response to the Apology and Sorry Day.

  Some personal testimonies about forgiveness, followed by a music presentation would complete the formalities. Attendees would then purchase lunch from food stands, choosing from a variety of different culture's traditional foods.

  Aboriginals could showcase their culture and interact with many who may have never come face-to-face with Aboriginal people. This is a good opportunity to *Close the Gap*.

  Some free items can be given out. For example, wristbands, lapel badges, posters, *How to Forgive* pamphlets. And other promotional items could be sold from the stalls, such as T-shirts, hats, books, etc.

- During the ensuing weekdays the local church can take the initiative to bravely venture out into the community to promote relational forgiveness.

  Sitting in congregations are men and women of influence in the community who might open doors to representatives of the church to address a convened gathering within civil establishments.

  Such establishments may include …

    - Schools, colleges and educational institutions
    - Sporting Organisations
    - Government Departments
    - Prisons and Corrective Services
    - Emergency Services (Police, Fire, Ambulance, Rescue etc)
    - Commerce/Industry
    - Aboriginal groups and institutions
    - Military (Army, Navy, Air Force)
    - Clubs and community groups
    - Hospitals, Mental Institutions and Palliative Care
    - Music, arts, culture and entertainment venues

  Pastors and capable lay preachers can, by invitation, can go into these civil establishments to educate employees on the value of practising forgiveness in the workplace and family relationships.

  Members of the congregation could be called upon to accompany the pastor to tell their forgiveness story.

    - A few dedicated days might be assigned to weekdays, specifically Aboriginal Day, Women's Day, Family Day, etc. Here, church leaders may speak to groups about forgiving from the heart.

    - On the Saturday, may be assigned as NFW Sports Day where a high-profile sports competition could be held where a minister might speak about forgiveness to spectators and award the NFW Cup to the winners.

    - Throughout the week, broadcast, print and social media could report on NFW and publish some of the personal testimonies about forgiveness.

    - On the final Sunday, churches are encouraged to hold closing celebrations in their services, sharing testimonies and praising God for the outcomes of NFW.

A key means of reaching the community is through the involvement of existing charities and parachurch organisations already working in community.

Chaplaincy Australia has endorsed NFW and has offered assistance through their 600 chaplains to spread the message of forgiveness into their extensive spheres of influence.

NGOs and charitable institutions such as *World Vision*, *Headspace*, *Lifeline*, or as are listed in the *ACNC Charity Register*, could be approached for their complementary support during NFW.

Other Suggestions

- Multicultural events where church ministers have opportunity to speak
- Awarding a NFW Medal annually to someone who has forgiven in a particularly difficult situation.
- Letterbox Drops
- Forgive Story Cards (forgivestories.com)
- Outdoor movie on forgiveness

For Denominational and Church-Initiated NFW refer to … *Bottom-Up Approach*

Footnotes

 # The Value of Government Involvement

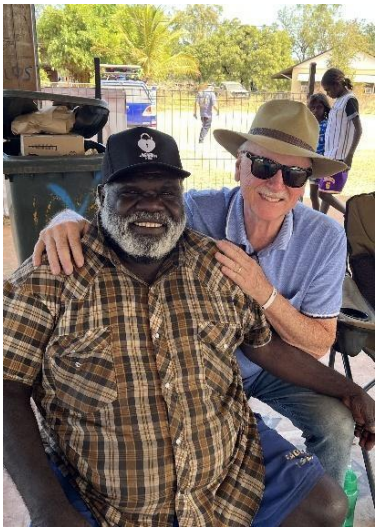
Some degree of government support would be helpful. Government recognition and endorsement would give credibility to NFW. And active governmental involvement would greatly assist with organisational aspects and funding to advertise, promote NFW on a truly national scale.

The basic idea is for government to lend its organisational support to rolling out NFW across the nation and to fund the event with a manageable budget. Church involvement is paramount as they carry the message of heartfelt forgiveness, so pastors and competent lay people could speak when opportunities arise.

* *Aboriginal Involvement in NFW*

The practice of payback within First Nations communities is their traditional response to crimes and offences. Put simply, payback is eye-for-an-eye revenge. The message of one-on-one forgiveness is gradually seeping out into Aboriginal communities to replace payback, as Aboriginals start to apply it to their daily life situations.

The message of forgiveness, framed within NFW and carried by the Aboriginal people, is part of the solution to the friction within Aboriginal communities, and in a broader sense, for the rest of Australia. As Warren Mundine said in his 2014 speech, "We've had the SORRY; now it's time for the FORGIVENESS."



The goal of NFW is to eventually bring the forgiveness message to all Australia as a truly national event, giving Aboriginals the microphone to speak to our nation on the power of forgiveness. Much controversy arose during the *Voice Referendum* but here is an opportunity for Aboriginals who carry heartfelt forgiveness to have the voice of forgiveness and real reconciliation to Australia.

There are two key aspects to consider … Firstly, the simple unadorned message of relational forgiveness reaching into hearts and homes to affect the atmosphere over communities and relationships at all levels. And secondly, this may be a response to SORRY DAY. It most certainly represents a step towards *Closing the Gap*. Aboriginal activism cannot achieve lasting reconciliation because it is not a work of the heart.

Δ *NFW and the Judeo-Christian Ethic*

Churches have largely lost their voice to the nation because of the horrific child abuse cases that have come to light over the years. This has caused many to see the Church and its message as hypocritical, sadly lacking in love and integrity. This is not an unfair assessment given the unholy state of many of our Christian institutions today.

However, our nation decays as its Christian base fractures. People are pursuing freedom from society's religious constraints. They flee from belief in God, thinking that brings freedom, but it invariably leads to believing anything and everything. Our society is rapidly heading towards this precipice of unrestrained immorality like lemmings hurling themselves off cliffs.

The once strong Judeo-Christian ethic is waning as governments legalise this new 'immoral morality'. Genuine morality should never be a matter for the law; but for the Church. The message of forgiveness is only one piece in the jigsaw puzzle of national righteousness, but it is a foundational piece.

If forgiveness fails to reach people's hearts, the best we can expect is to paint people in Judeo-Christian colours – an unsatisfactory outcome. The practice of forgiveness has the potential to change hearts, refocusing some of the population back on godliness and God's righteous morality, for righteousness exalts a nation.

For more information see …

nationalforgivenessweek.com