

We are all connected



Relations with Other Faiths (Uniting Church) Convenor Rev. Michael Barnes stood in solidarity with other religious leaders supporting the Grand Mufti of Australia, Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed, when he addressed the media over the tragic shooting of Curtis Cheng in Parramatta.

Also present, Fr Rod Bower of Gosford Anglican Church addressed the media calling for all members and sections of the community to remember how we are deeply connected as part of the human family.

His address is below.

I am grateful for His Eminence's invitation and wish to acknowledge that we walk together in the land of the Eora Nation. I honour elders and wise ones of the past and seek the council of their descendants in the present.

We are called together because of a tragedy that has shocked our entire community. Our response to this tragedy will determine how we live as a community for generations to come. These conversations are of ultimate importance.

I come with a personal commitment to participate in a conversation, but not in the narrative that has in some ways contributed to this tragedy. That is the dualistic storyline of “them and us”.

I once asked Dr Ibrahim, in a public forum, to tell the group something of his story and he responded by saying he comes from a very large family, his father was Adam and his mother was Eve. No matter how you interpret or understand that story, it echoes an indisputable truth; we have a common ancestor, we are all related, we are all brothers and sisters.

The Great Narrative continues quickly into tragedy with the story of two brothers and the taking of one life by another. Last Friday that story was retold once more and we would do well to remember that both Farhad Jabar and Curtis Cheng are our brothers.

If we ever wish to cease contributing to tragedies such as this we must choose not to participate in the dualistic narrative of "them and us".

It is not they who must speak out but us, so I am here to join my voice to the Mufti's so that it is never them but us.

We choose to use language that includes rather than excludes, that incorporates rather than marginalises.

I am grateful for the noticeable change in language that Prime Minister Turnbull has brought to the conversation, but if we are to transform the narrative it requires commitment and participation by the whole community, and that includes the media.

The language we use, as a society, to frame this conversation is important. It is a choice. We have in the past chosen to use one kind of language, that of division. Why can't we choose another? It is within our power to do so. The question we must ask is; who benefits for the use of divisive, sensationalist language? It is clear who does not; and that is our society.

The authorities need to be allowed to do their work, and be assisted in every way. We as community need also to do our work, and that is the task of naming the illusion and deception of the doctrine of them and us.

Two of our brothers died last week. We do not know for sure what motivations prompted this heartbreak, and speculation is often a symptom of dualistic thought, but it is not speculative to suggest that one had forgotten that the other was a brother.

It is the highest calling of a society to remind itself that all are connected, all are one, there is no "them", separation is an illusion, when one suffers all suffer, and when one finds wholeness all are made whole.

We can change our language or we can return to this place and tell the same tragic story once again.

Fr Rod Bower