

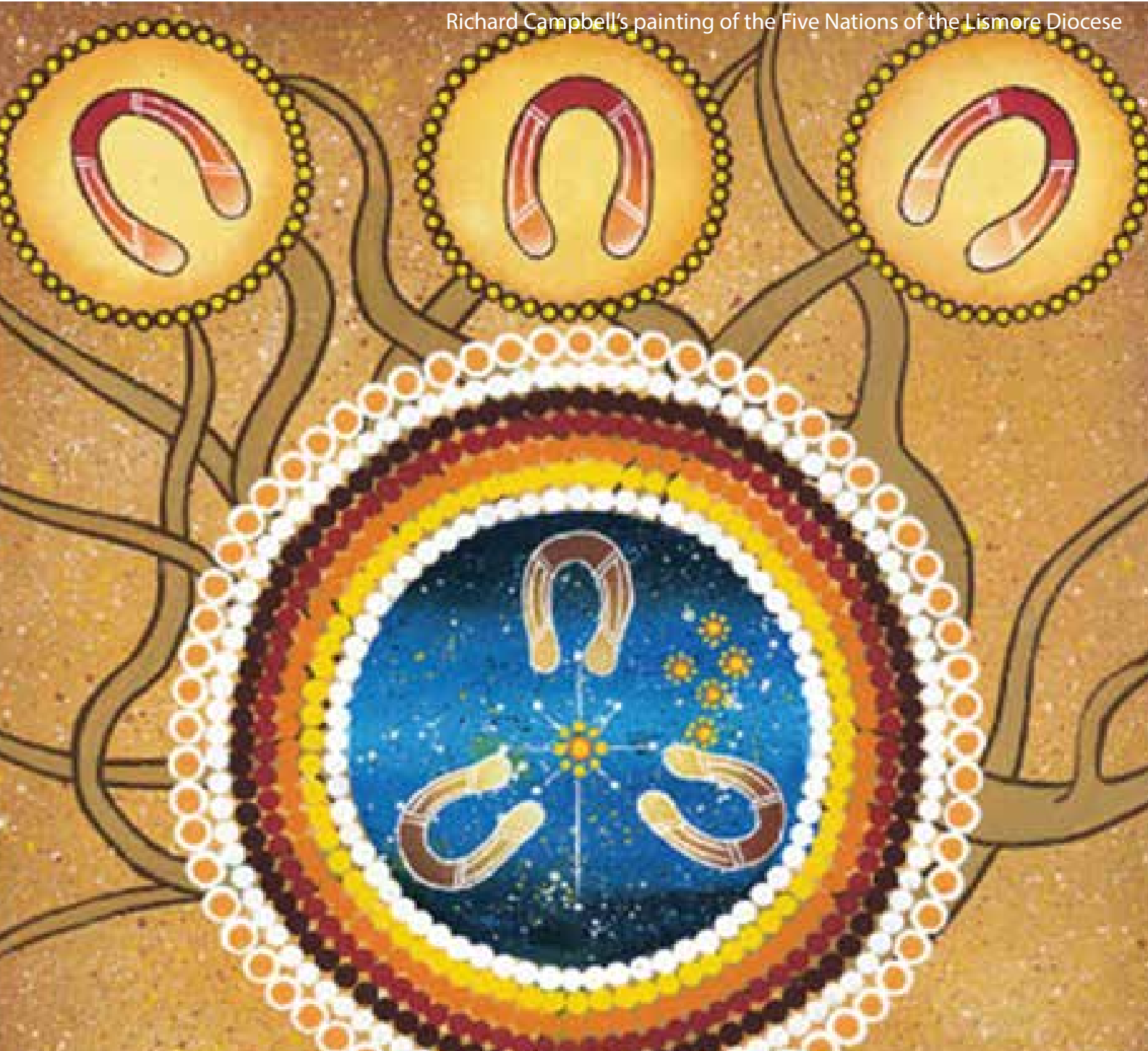


NATSICC NEWSLETTER

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

Quarter 1 2021

Richard Campbell's painting of the Five Nations of the Lismore Diocese



SHARING THE STORIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND
CHALLENGES FACED BY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER CATHOLICS

Readers are advised that this edition contains images of those who have recently passed

Chairperson's Message

John Lochowiak - NATSICC Chairperson

Happy New Year to all!

I start this year with renewed hope and optimism that we may continue to serve Jesus, the Church and our brothers and sisters.

The simple transition into a new year does not automatically make our challenges disappear. The recent turmoil in the US and the continued Covid impact is evidence of that. We will still need to put our faith in Christ and, in regards to Covid, continue to follow the guidelines and restrictions that have protected us in the past year.

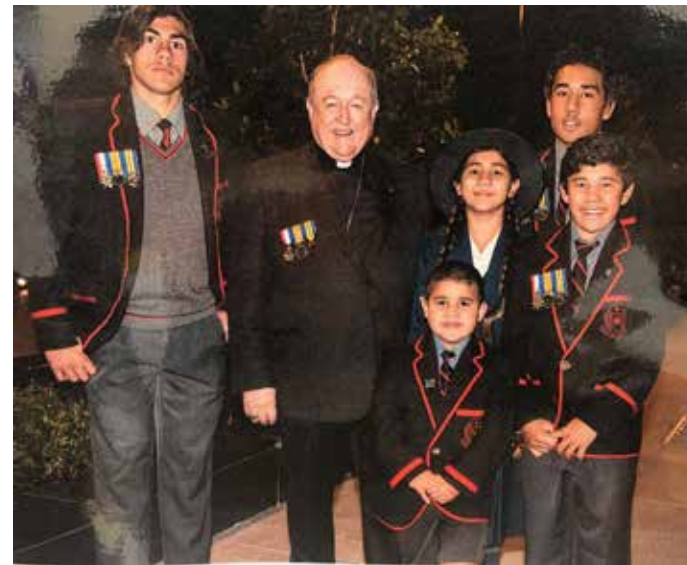
2021 is exciting in that we are hoping to hold the NATSICC Assembly in Townsville in late September. Obviously that is heavily dependent on the state of Covid, but the opportunity to once again gather together is something that fills my heart with joy.

The past 12 months has reinforced the importance of human interactions and our underlying need to be together. Technology has allowed us to continue to meet, but there is nothing like being in the same place to talk, share stories, laugh, and cry together.

This edition of the NATSICC News builds upon the theory that sharing is the basis for understanding and tells the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, the positive programs that have been rolled out this year and gives our perspectives on issues that face our people.

We want to try and continue to share the good news stories that showcase the gifts of Australia's First People. If you know of any projects having a positive impact in the community - let us know!

Yours in Faith,
John



Archbishop Phillip Wilson
2.10.1950 - 17.1.2021

NATSICC wishes to pass on our condolences to the colleagues, family and friends of Archbishop Phillip Wilson, who passed away on 17 January 2021. Archbishop Wilson was a longtime friend and supporter of the ACM in Adelaide.

He is pictured above with Mihail, Mabel Jean, Anzac, Jacob and Jackson Lochowiak at a previous ANZAC Day Service.



The logo of NATSICC depicts a willy willy, the wind force as a symbol of God's spirit in the centre. At the top are concentric circles as symbols of God and life while at the base are depictions of men and women receiving the Holy Spirit.

The logo was designed by O. Boddington

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80c Payneham Rd.
Stepney SA 5069
www.natsicc.org.au
08 8363 2963

Congratulations to our Plenary delegates!

Plenary Council President, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB has announced an additional 15 new delegates nationwide, who have been called to join the existing 267 delegates ahead of the first assembly of the Plenary Council (PC) to be held in October 2021.

The announcement was made in conjunction with another major update, confirming that the first Assembly which was scheduled to be held in Adelaide, will now take place with a combination of online and face-to-face participation, as uncertainty remains over restrictions on travel and gatherings.

NATSICC has worked very hard to ensure that First Nations voices are included in the process and are proud to announce that John Lochowiak (SA), Shirley Quaresimin (WA) and Sally FitzGerald (ACT) will take their place amongst the other national delegates.

We are sure that John, Shirley and Sally will be an avenue for our voices to be heard.



NATSICC Plenary Delegates:
Clockwise from top left



John Lochowiak (SA Councillor and NATSICC Chair)
Shirley Quaresimin (WA Councillor and Deputy Chair)
Sally FitzGerald (ACT Councillor and Secretary)



"Culturally we are called to care for our Elders and brothers and sisters on their journey of life"



NATSICC HAS MOBILISED AN ARMY OF VOLUNTEER KNITTERS AND CROCHETIERS WITH THE NEW PALLIATIVE CARE PROJECT. PROVIDING THOSE AT THE END OF THEIR LIVES WITH SOME COMFORT, THE PROJECT HAS TAKEN ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN AND IS NOW SUPPLYING ALL STATES AND TERRITORIES

NATSICC Palliative Care packages launched!

If you see a need, do something! is the unofficial catch cry of our NATSICC Council. So many of our projects are borne out of the need to address a problem in the most simple and direct way possible. The Palliative Care Packages, which was launched in 2020, is another example of filling a need and as a result it is taking off in so many directions throughout Australia.

The success of the program is grounded in the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people appreciate the thought that has been put into the whole package – from the initial contact through to the bags themselves. Culturally we are called to care for our Elders and brothers and sisters on their journey of life and NATSICC sees this program as a natural extension to fulfilling our obligations.

Much thought and planning has been given to the packages themselves. For example the blankets are specified to meet the requirements of hospitals and are bright and colorful (many in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colours) The family of the recipient are invited to keep the blanket as a memory of their loss. Another inclusion – beanies – are well received because people often need to travel to the city of regional centres where the climate is cooler than their own home. We want people to know that we are alongside them at this stage of their journey.

We have also designed and produced special notebooks for people to write down or draw their stories. These books have a soft cover and rounded edges to make it easier on the hands. Moving forward, NATSICC is hoping to include a CD or USB of specially recorded hymns and music in the package.

Headed up by NATSICC ACT Councillor Sally FitzGerald, the program is uniting and leveraging the skills of people from all denominations and beliefs across Australia to produce the items that are included in each package.

"People are busy making blankets, squares, beanies and masks for our project. I am receiving parcels daily from far away as Busselton in WA and all parts of Victoria." Said Sally, surrounded by carefully labelled boxes and plastic tubs in her Canberra home.

The response from the people in Victoria, in particular, has been amazing. Whilst the COVID lockdown has been an extremely challenging time for everyone, it resulted in many people with extra time on their hands.

"I opened a parcel this week from Victoria and there were 25 blankets in it for our people. The work that these people are putting into making these goodies is second to none! Each person writes me a note telling me that they are very excited to be part of this project and that they are sending the request on to other interested people." Sally continued. "My challenge now is to all States and Territories to match Victoria!!!!

Although its early days, Packages have been sent out to various parts of Australia-from Geraldton in WA to Rockhampton in Qld, to Minto in Sydney and to several country towns in NSW; Bathurst, Newcastle and Cowra. As word spreads, more and more people are now requesting the Packages and we have plenty to give them.

To streamline the process, NATSICC has decided that all Packages are to be distributed via Organisations that work with our people who are palliative. This ensures that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers will be involved in the handing over and that our focus of ensuring culturally appropriate care for our people is maintained. We will also be able to build strong relationships with these organisations and receive feedback on the bag's inclusions and what we can include in the future.

Sally has a final call to anyone that might be interested in donating to the program "It would be fantastic if people who cannot knit or crochet or sew, but would like to be part of this amazing project, could donate financially to this cause. No donation too big or too small will be rejected! Every cent helps towards helping our people on their final journey. We are not only walking with them, but we are trying to support them with a little bit of comfort while on this journey."

Please visit www.natsicc.org.au/palliative-care-packages.html for details on how to donate.



Take a Walk with a Yamatji Man

ART AND WORDS BY
Reg Carnamah

Aboriginal Catholic Ministry

An Agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth



The Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Perth's Reg Carnamah has had the opportunity to share his gifts of painting and story telling through the Ministry's latest project - Take a walk with a Yamatji Man. Reg has been a constant presence and friend to NATSICC for many years and we are very proud of him.

Well done mate!

By Theresia Titus and Eric Martin (article courtesy of Archdiocese of Perth)

When Reg Carnamah, a Badimia Yamatji man of the Murchison Region, took the challenge to use his skills and personal story and struggles to paint the Stations of the Cross during coronavirus-led restrictions period, the results were not only fourteen paintings, but also acceptance of his past.

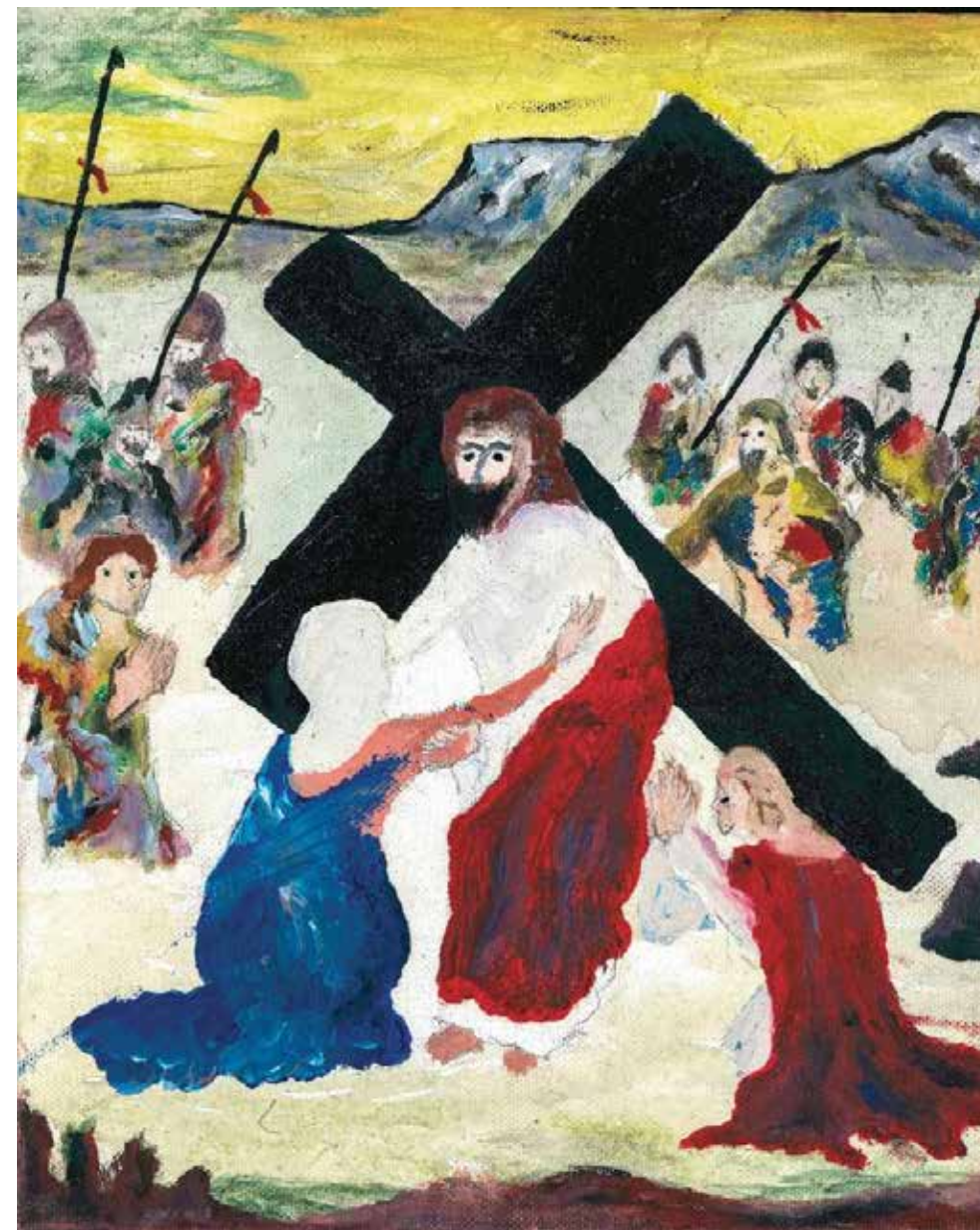
Reg's story was recorded by the Perth Archdiocese's Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) team and produced as a video, Take a Walk with a Yamatji Man, a resource designed to inspire others to enter into a relationship with God and encourage reconciliation between the Catholic and indigenous communities here in Perth.



In the video, Reg describes in detail how each painting has helped him to confront his struggles with addiction and fallouts in life, including reconciliation with his mother.

"When I paint, I wonder how other artists mix their colours. For me, when I paint, I dip my fingers into my heart so that the colours would come from my heart onto the canvas," Reg expressed.

"My life was just black and white, especially when I was going through [hard times] and I could not see myself coming out of it for a long time. I experienced this, and once I come out of the crap the moods changed. The colours of my life changed. This is like my paintings."



"I never told my mother that I loved her. I never came to terms with not telling her I was sorry for all the grief that I had brought her," Reg said, explaining one of his paintings.

ACM Director Donella Brown believes that with each of his paintings, Reg "revisited any aspects of his life that had been painful and in the revisiting he was putting some closure, and reaffirming that he has emerged as a stronger person, able to carry the pain and the joy of life together but also knowing that there will still be challenges ahead".

Born in Yalgoo, Reg has held onto his Catholic faith since the 1970s, which led him to his current job as Pastoral Care Worker at ACM, a role he has held for the past seven years.

"Being Catholic has allowed me to see things a lot clearer which has been life-changing," he added.

"My role enables me to work with a range of different indigenous clients in the hospitals, where we talk to those in hospital, say a prayer with them and support them through their time at the hospital. I am also on special request help organise Holy Communion for those in the hospital.

"My role enables me to visit people in their homes and have a chat with them, at the request of people. If children need to be baptised or receive their first Holy communion, I help to organise that."

Reg hopes that through what he does, he can inspire and "show other Aboriginal people, especially the younger men, how faith and culture can have a positive impact on their lives".

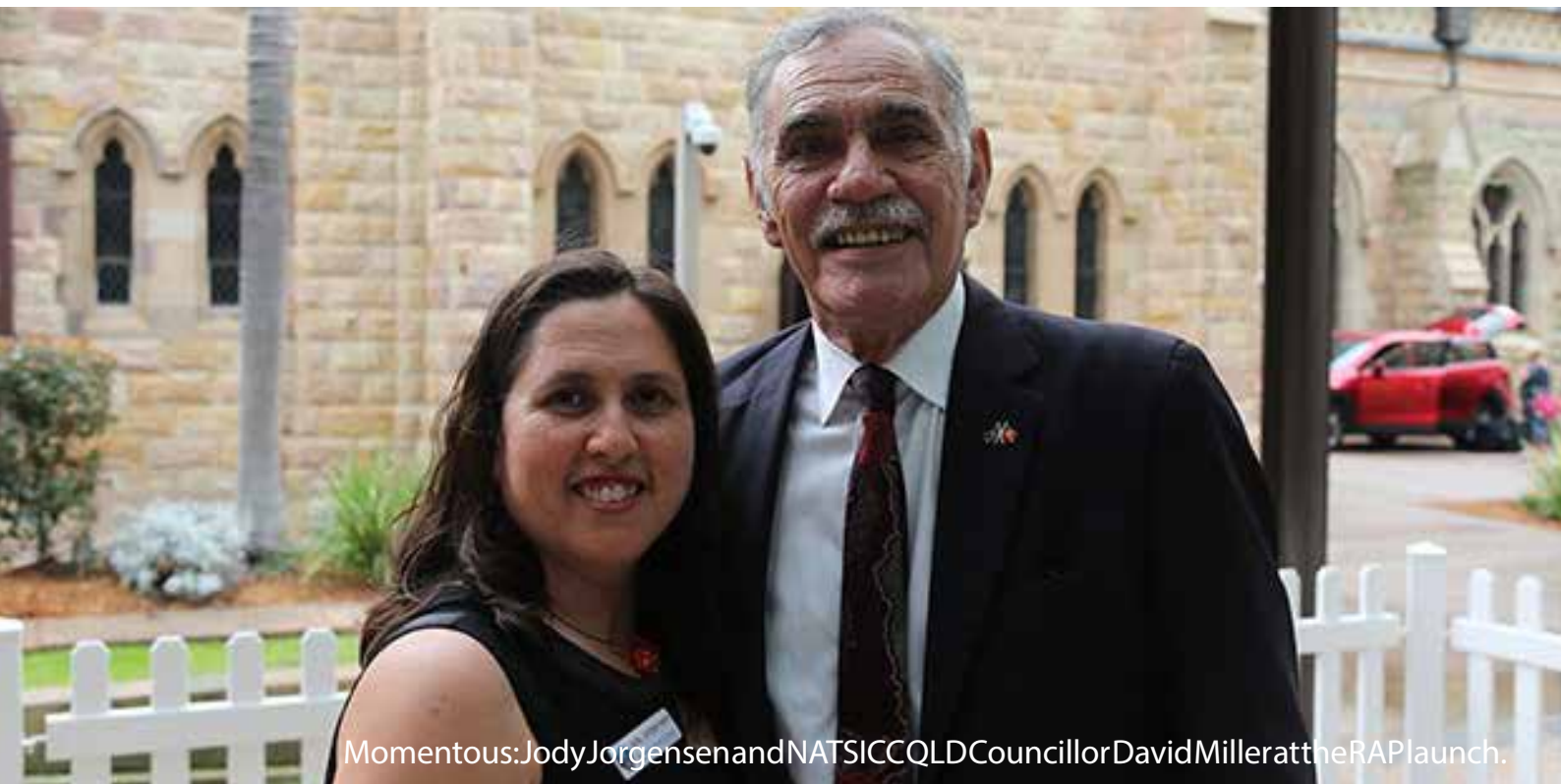
"It would be nice to see more young men join the Ministry and become more involved with the ministry and the community, with the hope of seeing more young indigenous men become acolytes and deacons. Allowing these young men to see how faith and culture impact their lives."



Watch the video on YouTube - search 'Take a walk with a Yamatji Man'

Brisbane Archdiocese launches Reconciliation Action Plan after three years in the making

Article Courtesy of The Catholic Leader



Momentous: Jody Jorgensen and Natsicc QLD Councillor David Miller at the RAP launch.

BRISBANE archdiocese has launched an historic Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) that aims to correct “past injustices” by promoting new and stronger relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Those injustices remain a running sore at the heart of the nation,” Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge said, introducing the plan after an Aboriginal corroboree and smoking ceremony performed outside the city’s St Stephen’s Cathedral on November 17.

The Brisbane RAP sets specific targets for creating more Indigenous jobs, and for adopting Indigenous cultural perspectives in the daily activities of parishes, Church agencies and schools.

“This RAP is the fruit of deep listening to Indigenous peoples ... and if we can really learn from what we hear there is a future for Australia as a united people,” Archbishop Coleridge said. Developing the plan has taken more than three years of consultation.

It is already being piloted in several parishes, and is considered a model document that could be adapted and used by Catholic agencies, schools and parishes across Australia.

“It is a time to speak up and have a voice within the Church,” Indigenous elder and co-chair of the Reconciliation Reference Group David Miller said.

“It is a time for recognising and acknowledging the valuable contribution that we have made to the life of the Church. It is a time to address past wrong-doings and injustices suffered by many of our peoples.

“It is time to address racism and prejudice in our society. And it is a time to act.”

The RAP commits the Brisbane archdiocese to carry out cultural awareness training for employees and parishes within the next year.

This could be done in workshops or through cultural immersion.

Within two years, all parishes and agencies will be encouraged to include Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country where appropriate at public events and major liturgies.

And all parishes and agencies will be encouraged to install Acknowledgment plaques in consultation with Traditional Owner groups.

There will also be a review of all brochures, pamphlets and posters promoting archdiocesan agency services to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture where possible. More than 700,000 Catholics live in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, and about 15,000 people identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

The archdiocese employs 16,140 people.

Only 75 identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people – just 0.5 per cent of the overall workforce.

The RAP commits to double Indigenous employment within the next two years.

There will also be a review of procurement policies and procedures to identify barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses supplying goods and services to archdiocesan agencies.

Under the RAP, Brisbane Catholics would also aim to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders including Link-Up Queensland, Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation Elders and Minjerribah Moorgumpin

Elders in Council, Cherbourg Elders, Inala Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, Brisbane Northside Elders Group and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.

Executive directors of Brisbane’s Catholic agencies and schools signed the RAP document that commits to “doing what we can to heal the wounds of the past and taking action in a spirit of mercy, love, justice, truth telling and peace”.

“We echo the words of Pope John Paul II who said in his address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in Alice Springs in 1986, ‘(W)e long for the day when we are fully the Church that Jesus wants us to be, a Church where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make their contribution to her life, and that contribution is joyfully received by others,’ the document reads.

“It means making changes across our organisation in many areas from the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to the revision of preferred suppliers.

“This document enables the kind of cultural change that empowers and supports reconciliation across the archdiocese.”

Archbishop Coleridge said it was important to set modest targets at first and go “step by step together” in achieving progress.

“Sometimes in the past targets and goals have been set that have been over-ambitious and they’re a recipe for failure,” he said.



Joyful day: Artist Shara Delaney, who designed the artwork for the Reconciliation Action Plan, and Evangelisation Brisbane Reconciliation Action Plan project manager Cynthia Rowan at the RAP launch Mass at St Stephen’s Cathedral on November 17.

Catholic environmentalist says Australia has failed as God's caretakers of Earth following interim report

by Peter Budgen (The Catholic Leader)

CHURCH representatives have backed calls for stronger environmental protection laws and standards in Australia.

Professor Graeme Samuel, recently released an interim report for his review of Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, saying the act was "ineffective" and "is not fit to address current or future environmental challenges".

"Australia's natural environment and iconic places are in an overall state of decline and are under increasing threat," he said in the interim report.

"The current environmental trajectory is unsustainable. Fundamental reform of national environmental law is required, and new, legally enforceable National Environmental Standards should be the foundation."

Prof Samuel said a "strong, independent cop on the beat is required".

"An independent compliance and enforcement regulator, that is not subject to actual or implied political direction from the Commonwealth (Environment) Minister, should be established," he said.

Co-founder of the Global Catholic Climate Movement Jacqui Remond backed those particular recommendations.

"Environmental law is in need of great reform and we need an effective and ambitious Act to work within Australia," she said.

"There's a need for clear environmental standards, there's a need for an independent regulator, or an environmental watchdog, to enforce everyone to comply to those – businesses, governments, decision-makers and everyone ..."
Federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley has rejected the call for an independent watchdog.

However, pre-empting the review's final report, she said she would introduce draft laws to Parliament this month (August) to change the EPBC Act.

Her new laws would allow bilateral agreements with states and territories to devolve approval powers, and include national environmental standards proposed in the interim report.

Ms Remond was not in favour of rushing decisions or devolving approval decisions to the states.

"Firstly, this is an interim report ... so it presents us with a great opportunity for reform and I think that needs to be celebrated and taken forward in a very thorough way and not raced into but to go slow and steady with it," she said.

She said more detail was needed around the proposed national standards. Ms Remond said she had concerns about the recommendation on the decision-making authority.

"I'm very, very cautious about devolving decision-making to the state level because in many cases this could seriously, on a regular basis, result in even greater destruction," she said.

"We don't need to fast-track approvals that would fast-track extinctions. That would be the exact opposite of what this regulation was set up to do."

Ms Remond said Australia needed "a great set of laws that would stop extinctions from happening and to look after God's Creation here".

"We're really blessed in Australia; we have such an incredible diversity of unique and precious ecosystems and what this report tells us, which I think people who have been paying attention would clearly know, it's in decline," she said.

"So, as God's caretakers on Earth, I think we'd be receiving an 'F' on Australia's report card right now, and this is what the report's really telling us."

Prof Samuel said in his report the operation of the Act in relation to Indigenous Australians reflected "a culture of tokenism".

"Indigenous Australians' traditional knowledge and views are not fully valued in decision-making, and the Act does not meet the aspirations of traditional owners for managing their land," he said.

"A specific standard for best-practice Indigenous engagement is needed to ensure that Indigenous Australians that speak for, and have traditional knowledge of, Country have had the proper opportunity to contribute to decision-making.

"Indigenous Australians seek, and are entitled to expect, stronger national-level protection of their cultural heritage."

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council chair John Lochowiak said the Council welcomed the interim report.

"The Samuel report recognises the desperate need for better measures to protect the environment and heritage in Australia," he said.

"It draws attention to the vital importance of perspectives from First Nations Australians in ramping up protections in both these areas of environment and heritage.

"NATSICC sees a need to implement all of the reports interim recommendations, importantly including those directed to stronger Indigenous engagement.

"Indigenous engagement is seen as a means to utilise First Nations knowledge and perspectives on country and as a means to better maintain the strength of our ancient culture in this land."

Mr Lochowiak said this finding had "strong parallels with dawning recognition of a desperate need to properly recognise the perspective and input of Indigenous Catholics in Church life and culture".

"Realisation of the need for 'Care for Our Common Home' is now a major feature of Christian responses to the global ecological and other related crises we are experiencing in Australia," he said.

In a general comment, Catholic Earthcare Australia director Bernard Holland said we failed to see that business and economy was "the result of the natural environment at the end of the day, and vice versa".

"It's only when we realise we can't derive an income from what is left from the natural environment that we understand (that), and then we move to a new place and exploit that one," he said. "But eventually it runs out and the trail of destruction behind is devastating, as we see – bushfires and floods and droughts ...

"We're working out of an ever diminishing pool of natural resources, which we can't see at the moment – because it's not going to hit us for another 50 to 100 years or whatever – but it's increasingly getting smaller all the time because of that."



A portrait of Aunty Judy West, an older woman with short dark hair, wearing a red and black patterned jacket over a black turtleneck. She is looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a softly lit interior with framed pictures on the wall.

My Story

Aunty Judy West

Thanks to The Aurora Magazine

I understand the discontent around the world because we all have so much in common. We share a deeply fraught history of white supremacy, so we are all asking to stand as one human family, creations of God, regardless of our age, infirmity, creed or colour.

We need to focus together in laying the foundations of trust and try to create a better future. We must try to provide opportunities to incorporate the stories, hopes and dreams of all so that our people too, can be empowered and take a rightful place in their own country. So in that spirit I'd like to share with you my own personal story in the hope it may help the vital process of reconciliation.

One of the darkest chapters of Australian history was the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Children as young as 6 month old babies were stolen from their families to be placed in girls and boys homes or with foster families.

These aboriginal people are now collectively referred to as the 'Stolen Generation' because several generations were affected by this process which commenced in the 1890s and continued till as late as the 1970s. Many Aboriginal people are still searching for their families, but sadly due to the passing of time and the deaths of family members, some Aboriginal people may never find their relatives.

In removing Aboriginal children from their families, white people stole the Aboriginal people's language, traditions, knowledge, dances, spirituality and importantly their future because all of these things can only live on if passed down through the children. In breaking this circle of life, white people's hope was that within a short period of time they would 'get rid' of the Aboriginal problem. The forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families was official government policy for over 100 years and, in fact, not only did Governments play a major role, but churches and welfare bodies as well all took part in this systematic destruction to breed out indigenous people.

Today, as a member of the stolen generation I would like to share with you the real face of this part of our history. It will probably surprise you to hear that I had to wait 56 years to discover my story, the story of being stolen from my parents and my brothers and sisters who lived peacefully on a Mission at Karuah.

In the later part of 2010, when my husband retired he applied for his birth certificate in order to finalise some financial matters and I decided that I would apply for mine as well. When the certificates arrived, I noticed that they were quite different. My birth certificate was signed by the Register General on the 8 August 1960, yet I knew I was born on the 15 August 1955. I was perplexed as to why this was different and after speaking with a friend

wondered if I may have been adopted. We did some research and I contacted Human Services. About 6 weeks later I received a letter confirming that I had been adopted and that I was part of the Stolen Generation and that I had siblings. You can perhaps imagine my shock - I had lived for 56 years as part of a white, middle class family in a country town, totally disconnected from my Aboriginal heartland - the Woromi people.

As the story unfolded I discovered that in 1956 I and my two sisters Jennifer and Betty and my brother Peter had been taken away from our mother while our father was away working. I was about 12 months old. There was about 12 months between us all - Betty around 2 years old, Peter was about 4 years old and Jennifer was about 5 years old. We were very quickly declared Wards of the State. Research shows that there was no reason for us to be taken, we were not at risk but the perception was that Aboriginal people could not correctly care for or raise their children.

My sisters and I were placed in a home for children - the Georgetown Shelter in Newcastle. As Wards of the State we were now under the guardianship of the Minister for Child Welfare and this meant we could be sent anywhere the government decided. As siblings we were split up and we never saw each other again. I was sent to Corelli, a government run home in Marrickville in Sydney. I stayed there until 1957 when I was fostered by a young couple from Kurri Kurri, Des & Patsy Williams. I was two years old. In 1960 the Williams' officially adopted me. In terms of the adoption, I was lucky because not only did they give me a very good life, they loved me. My foster parents gave me a good education and encouraged me to pursue my love of music, resulting in my classical training in piano and to this day my work with the Conservatorium is a blessing in my life.

Personally, though, I have had to come to terms with many complexities in relation to my stolen life. I have experienced the heartache of not only finding out that I had a different identity to what I had always believed, but that I had siblings who lived within two hours' drive of my home. I have had to come to terms with the fact that because Des and Patsy never told me that I was adopted, I never had the opportunity to find my parents or two sisters and brother, for by the time I found out about being stolen they had died.

Despite this great sadness, I made a choice at that point to become part of the Government's Open Register which meant that agencies could match me up with any person or relative who may have been looking for me and facilitate a meeting. About 4 weeks after placing my name on the Open Register I received a phone call to say, 'I have the most beautiful news for you - we think we have found your youngest sister'. That day the agency told me they would organise a phone call between me and Margo. I was stunned and even more so when I found out that Margo lived in Raymond Terrace, we could have been passing one another in a shopping centre and not even have known one another. I nervously waited for the call and had all sorts of thoughts chasing around in my head - how would I feel when we spoke, what would she be like, would she look like me?

A couple of days later Margo drove to Kurri, that moment of recognition is blurred by memories of tears and hugs. Finally after 56 years I had found part of my stolen family!

Finding Margo was the first step in my journey back to my identity. Through Margo I found and met cousins, aunts and uncles. I have been introduced to my country in Karuah; I have been able to go back to the Mission where it all began, I have been able to learn some of the story of my parents and importantly I have been able to learn about and reconnect with my people and culture. I continue to learn about and understand my identity, and to explore what it means to be an Aboriginal woman. I am learning about the kinship of the Woromi people, the circle of the Land Council and am growing in my understanding of my culture and spirituality.

Working with Aboriginal children and sharing my story is part of my healing process. Talking about what has happened, sharing experiences, meeting relatives, crying and laughing are all part of the journey of healing for the Stolen Generations.

All Australians can take part in this journey by listening to the stories of the Stolen Generation and acknowledging this sad event in our history. Our journey towards understanding and reconciliation may not be as long or as hard as the journey of Molly, Gracie and Daisy along the Rabbit Proof Fence, but if we take the first steps to understand what happened to the stolen children we may ensure that the same thing will never happen again.

God's Blessings

ON THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR ORDINATION

Fr Leo Weardon!



**MAY GRACE AND PEACE BE YOURS IN
ABUNDANCE THROUGH THE
KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF JESUS
CHRIST OUR LORD.**

2 PETER 1:2

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
OF DARWIN



Wadeye Priest Fr Leo celebrates 40 years of ordination!

On August 16, the Darwin and Wadeye Catholic communities celebrated a very special milestone - Fr Leo's 40th Anniversary of his Ordination. Fr Leo Weardon is currently serving as Parish Priest in Wadeye, a position he took up in 2005 having cut short his sabbatical study to fill the vacancy. Fr Leo has served on the Tiwi Islands, Papua New Guinea and East Timor, places in which he retains strong interest. He is a member of the Diocesan College of Consultors and Council of Priests and plays a significant role on the Diocesan Aboriginal Council. In addition to these roles, he is on the Provincial Council for the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Congregation (MSC) in Australia, and is the Religious Superior for the MSC's in the Northern Territory.

Congratulations from all of us at NATSICC!



Painted tiles from the 2018 Perth NATSICC Assembly

COVID news from the First Nation Peoples in the United States

NATSICC has developed a strong relationship with the Native American Ministry and Tekakwitha Conference and have kept in touch during the COVID Pandemic. It is important that in times like these we become ever closer. The message below shares the suffering that the pandemic has caused Native Americans. We will keep our Native American Brothers and Sisters and, indeed, all peoples in our hearts and prayers.

// Dear NATSICC,

So good to hear from you! Unfortunately, our First Peoples are suffering very much from the virus... especially the nations out west in the Four Corners area (Arizona, New Mexico, Utah & Colorado).

Some of our Reservations closed to visitors early on and were able to contain a healthy environment. If someone did test positive, that member was isolated, to curb the spread.

Of course, the Annual Conference had to be cancelled, but we've managed to bring some presentations online at our tekconf.org website. If you get a chance, you can view them. How are you and all the People faring there in Australia? You all are in prayer for good health and safety.

Who would have imagined a virus crippling our world?!

We are firm believers that the Lord has a plan and that there are lessons for all of us to learn. God's continued blessings and warm hugs across the globe.

Gail //



Left:
A carving featuring St. Kateri Tekakwitha - the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. She was born in 1656, in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 21, 2012. She is the patroness of ecology and the environment, people in exile and Native Americans.

DIOCESE OF LISMORE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE WELCOME TO COUNTRY PROJECT.

Respected Gumbaynggirr Aunty Doreen Flanders said "that this project is significant because our enrollments of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students are ever growing and it is so important that their stories are told' within our education and communities.

The Welcome to Country project involved consulting, Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs) throughout the five Traditional Nations of the Lismore Diocese, to plan and coordinate the project. Advice, permission and further consultation was gained by the IEW's, Elders, school's Aboriginal families, community members and organisations, who willingly shared their knowledge, wisdom, stories and gave their blessing for the film and the sites to be filmed.

The collaborative efforts of the IEW's involved many hours meeting, planning and consulting before the filming took place.

The WelcometoCountryVideo aims to:

- Reveal the riches and uniqueness of our ancient culture within The Five Traditional Nations.
- Immerse everyone in the structure that is 'Welcome to Country.'
- Inform viewers of the uniqueness of People, Culture, Stories and Totems of the Traditional Nation they are on, championing unity and mutual respect as we come together and connect



Students teaching & learning about Dunghutti Mob

- with one another.
- Celebrate Traditional Customs, so we can be a people of reconciliation and inclusion with our shared history and our shared humanity.
- Intentionally promote a sense of welcome and belonging, and gain a greater respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Explore The Five Traditional Nations, Bundjalung, Yaegl, Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti and Birpai, within the religious borders of the Diocese of Lismore.
- Incorporate the significance of Land, Sea/Water and Sky and significant features within the geographical boundaries of the Five Nations.

The video supports the Diocese Action Plan for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples document by:

- Promoting and embracing the Aboriginal and Torres

- Strait Islander Culture in developing Cultural Competency
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by raising student and community profiles
- Engaging and connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, youth, families, school and Nation communities

Each schools package includes:

- The local Nation's Video
- A mandatory set of protocols to be enforced before the video is screened.
- The local Traditional Nation's Songlines - this document explains the Songlines, sites and their significance, featured in the video.

For those involved in the filming - LUCID- Media, CSO staff, students, school staff, families and Elders - we all gained more than expected from the many memorable experiences each day presented.



Richard Campbell's painting of the Five Nations of the Lismore Diocese

Sabrina Ann's letter to Year 12 Students completing studies in this difficult year

Eternitynews.com.au invited NATSICC Youth Councillor Sabrina Ann Stevens to pen a short letter to Year 12 Students completing their studies during this COVID Pandemic.

Sabrina Ann joined many other Christian Leaders - including Fr Rob Galea, TV and Radio host Ash London and more - in sending their advice suggestions and encouragement to students. To view the full article - <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/dear-year-12-student/>

Congratulations on making it to year 12, and for all your efforts in getting this far!

High school is a difficult time as you juggle the pressures of assessment, family, friendships, part-time jobs and the expectations to do well. It is a lot to balance, but you are doing an excellent job! Even if you feel uncertain about how you're going, you're most likely doing better than you realise, so give yourself some credit!

I was once that year 12 student who lacked interest in striving for good grades as I struggled to balance the worries of home life and uncertainty after high school. I had no comprehension of life after year 12, nor what I wanted to do, so it was easier to lower my aim to simply passing so that I could 'breathe' again.



"You're most likely doing better than you realise, so give yourself some credit!"

Growing up in regional Australia, I found post-school career opportunities to be limited. However, completing year 12 provided me with flexibility and choice in pursuing further interests.

It wasn't until seven years after high school and attempts at different study paths, I finally enrolled at university where I now study a Bachelor of Arts with double majors! I also sit on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council where I focus on the youth side of Indigenous faith, spirituality and contribution within the Catholic Church of Australia.

So whether you are aiming towards the top echelon of the ATAR, or are simply trying to successfully pass year 12 – your goals are your own and you are doing a commendable job in challenging times. I encourage you to strive to do your best in all upcoming exams and future endeavours. Find your key support circles and be kind to everyone you meet.

I wish you all the best and may you achieve everything you set your heart upon!



NATSICC set to launch first online Cultural Competency Course with a Catholic focus

For many years NATSICC has received requests for assistance to bridge the cultural gaps between remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Priests working in those communities.

The Council would usually respond to those requests on an individual basis - by either visiting, talking on the phone or involving the local Councillor in discussions. During these discussions, it became clear that there was a deep need for people working in First Nations communities to develop at least a foundational level of knowledge to enable them to engage more effectively with our people. It also became clear that this was true in many other areas of the Catholic Church.

From this understanding the Cultural Competency for Catholics (CCC) was born. As the course was being developed, more and more stakeholders within the Church made contact asking for access to the resource. This provided us with the opportunity to broaden the scope of the course to include anyone working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The CCC includes sections on the ongoing impact of Colonisation, Kinship systems, Catholicism through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lens and, importantly, practical tips for ministry. NATSICC views the course as the first step on the journey of knowledge and strongly encourages participants

to meet with and genuinely engage with local Traditional Custodians.

Additionally, a core facet of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP), being adopted nationally by Parishes and organizations, is the embedding of Cultural Competency Training in organizational planning. The CCC will assist those groups to meet the requirements of their RAPs.

It is our vision that every member of the Clergy, Religious Orders, volunteers, staff and lay ministers undertake the course alongside other key trainings. For example, in a school context this means the teachers, groundskeepers, Principal, canteen staff etc. Many issues can occur in day to day interactions and providing everyone with understanding and knowledge means that we can be proactive and avoid issues before they arise. The more we learn about each other, the more we respect each other.

We have partnered with Catholic Church Insurances to deliver the program using existing E-Learning Manager. We will be able to facilitate the adoption of the Course through any organisation within the Catholic Church for a minimal cost.

If your organisation is interested in utilising the course, please email craig@natsicc.org.au to register your interest. We hope to officially launch the course in mid 2021.



Saying Yass to Reconciliation

The Parish of St Augustine's Church in Yass acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

On Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, the 5th July this year, St Augustine's parishioners were privileged to have Michael Bell, a proud descendant from the Woollabalooa clan of the Ngunnawal Nation, welcomed the parish to his country. Michael stirred the hearts and minds of many of our parishioners with his eloquent description of the historically good relationship between the Ngunnawal people of Yass, Father Lovat, the parishioners of St Augustine's parish and the Sisters of Mercy. However, it also became evident that there were elements of our shared history that were not so positive particularly the establishment of the original St Augustine's Church on the site of an Aboriginal Bora Ring.

"The journey begins with thorough research and a process of Truth-Telling"

A week later, as a result of this disturbing revelation, Michael met with Father Mick and members of the Parish Pastoral Council to discuss the best approach to a healing journey. Michael explained that if we can use this history to now bring the community together we can start healing process. The journey begins with thorough research and a process of Truth-Telling designed and led by the Ngunnawal people. This should lead to the community taking responsibility for some form of healing action which builds a pathway for both communities.

As well as building strong and respectful relationships within our church and community, "The ultimate goal," said Michael, "is to tell the true story of Yass through the Aboriginal and parish history." Following the meeting, Fr Mick Burke reached out to the Ngunnawal elders inviting them to lead the parish through a Truth-Telling and healing process. The parish looks forward to walking this pathway with the Ngunnawal people so that the true story of our parish is heard and reconciliation is strengthened.

Feasts and Saints

By Teresa Hartley OCV

CONVERSION OF ST PAUL 25TH JANUARY

*Patron saint of Gentile Christians,
missionary bishops, theologians, tent makers,
Catholic action, authors, and more.*

Known as a great Apostle, St Paul was born a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin at Tarsus in Cilicia. Eight days after his birth, he was circumcised and received the name of Saul. His father was a Roman citizen and by sect a Pharisee. Due to history in regards to land and privileges and emperors, Saul was a Roman citizen by privilege, gaining distinction and exemptions according to Empirical law. He was educated in Jerusalem and instructed with strict observance of the law of Moses by Gamaliel, who was probably a member of the Sanhedrin. The Pharisee sect, which he embraced, was the most severe of all, and opposite to the humility of the Gospel by its pride.



Jewish children had to learn a trade with their studies, and so it is probable that Saul learned how to make tents in his youth.

Saul was very zealous when it came to Jewish law and their traditions. Believing this to be in the name of God, he became a persecutor, blasphemer and the most outrageous enemy of Christ (Gal 1:14).



He combined with others to murder St Stephen, the first martyred deacon. Saul looked on while Stephen was stoned to death. "If Stephen had not prayed, the Church would never have had a St Paul" – St Austin.

After the martyrdom of Stephen, Saul led the charge by power he had received from the High Priest, and he dragged Christians out of their home, loaded them with chains and threw them into prison. He had them scourged in synagogues and tormented them to compel them into blaspheming against Christ.

Saul's name became everywhere a terror to the faithful. His zeal was such that he requested of the High Priest and Sanhedrin a commission to capture Jews at Damascus, who confessed to Jesus, bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem to serve as a public example to others.

He was almost at the end of his journey to Damascus when, about noon, he, and those who were with him, were surrounded by a great light from heaven, a light brighter than the sun. They all fell to the ground in amazement. Saul then heard a voice, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Saul answered, "Who are you Lord?" Christ said, "Jesus of Nazareth whom you persecute" (Acts 9:3-5). Saul was instantly converted. He was also blinded.

Christ appeared to Ananias, a Christian respected by the Jews, and he was commanded to go to Saul. He was filled with fear at the name of Saul, but Christ allayed his fear and commanded him, "Go, for he is a vessel of election to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, and I will show him how much he has to suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15). Ananias laid his hand on Saul and prayed over him and "immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he recovered his eyesight" (Act 9:18). Ananias prayed further and instructed Saul to be baptized and invoke the name of the Lord. This he did.

His name changed from Saul to Paul after his baptism, and he embarked on apostolic missions, which are described in the Acts of the Apostles. He quickly became a leader and was now zealous for the cause of Christ, a total about-face from his former life.

The story of St Paul is one of the greatest miracles performed by Christ, and offers to the faithful, and indeed the unfaithful, the promise that all is not lost, even in what may be the most extreme and seemingly impossible circumstances. We must never forget that 'Nothing is impossible to God' (Luke 1:37).

We are called to continue to live our lives by the example of the spirit of St Paul, remembering the virtues he expounded during his missionary teaching of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which 'yields a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, forbearance, gentleness, faith, courtesy, temperateness and purity' (Gal 5:22).

St Paul was martyred in Rome in 67 AD.

Sources:

- The Holy Bible
- Catholic Encyclopaedia – St Paul
- The Conversion of St Paul – Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)

Words of Wisdom – St Mary of the Cross

"We feel our crosses hard at times, but our courage should rise with them." (1882)



MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

PROUD TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CATHOLIC SAM FAULKNER SHARES HER JOURNEY OF FAITH AND THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE CHURCH HAS PLAYED IN HER LIFE

My spiritual journey and relationship with the Church, began decades ago on Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait. One of my earliest memories is that of going to not one but two churches. One week my family would attend the Catholic Church and then the following Sunday, Mum, Dad, my two sisters and I would attend the Anglican Church.

The Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church was a huge imposing white building and to reach it you had to climb a number of steps. Once inside it opened up to reveal a number of pews leading to the altar. They were framed by large glass windows to let the cool island breeze in. A long aisle led to the altar with a colourful background of angels in heaven. Statues of Mary and Joseph were on either side and as a child there was a lot to look at.

The Anglican Church was the All Souls St Bartholomew Quetta Memorial Church and this was a memorial to the Quetta disaster. The church was named in memory of 133 people who lost their lives when the RMS Quetta, a merchant ship struck an uncharted reef in the Torres Strait on 28 February 1890. A life ring

from the RMS Quetta is hung on the wall along with other shipping paraphernalia. So there was a lot to look at. Island hymns were sung along with the shaking of kulap seed pod rattle and the beat of the warup, island drum. The music was loud and lovely. After church we played with friends.

Both Nana (Carmen Villaflor) and Grandad (Ali Drummond), were strong Catholic Church supporters. Nana would have a stall at the catholic fete held every October. She would crochet the edges of handkerchiefs and pillowcases months before and bake cakes and slices to sell. Fete night was a big community event and I enjoyed playing hoopla and eating sweets. Nana and Grandad would often go fishing and drop off fish for the Sisters of Mercy also.

I attended Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic School on Thursday Island and was taught by the Sisters of Mercy. I made my holy communion and confirmation with the Catholic Church on Thursday Island.

When my family moved to the mainland (Australia) in the early 1980s going to church remained a constant in my life. We went to church in a city building in Sydney, an Anglican church in Brisbane and Salvation Army Sunday School in Elliott Heads. A favourite memory was after church in Brisbane city, we would go to the Queensland Museum and visit the dinosaurs in the garden. It was a Sunday family outing that was enjoyable.

I got married in Cleveland, over twenty years ago. I read my grandfather's eulogy in the Catholic church on Thursday Island in recent years. In 2019, my nephew was baptised at St Benedicts, Narrabundah.

"Upon reflection the church has played an important role in my life and in my family's life, from grandparents to parents, my siblings and I, and now to the next generation."

I have been a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Ministry in Canberra for several years. We are a small but strong group who meet monthly to celebrate Christ. Both Father Steve and Father Dan have been supportive and encouraging of the group. Sally has been the rock for everyone and kept us together. I've really enjoyed the friendships and supportive environment. Sally has encouraged me to introduce Torres Strait artefacts to our mass and is continually looking for ways to showcase both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

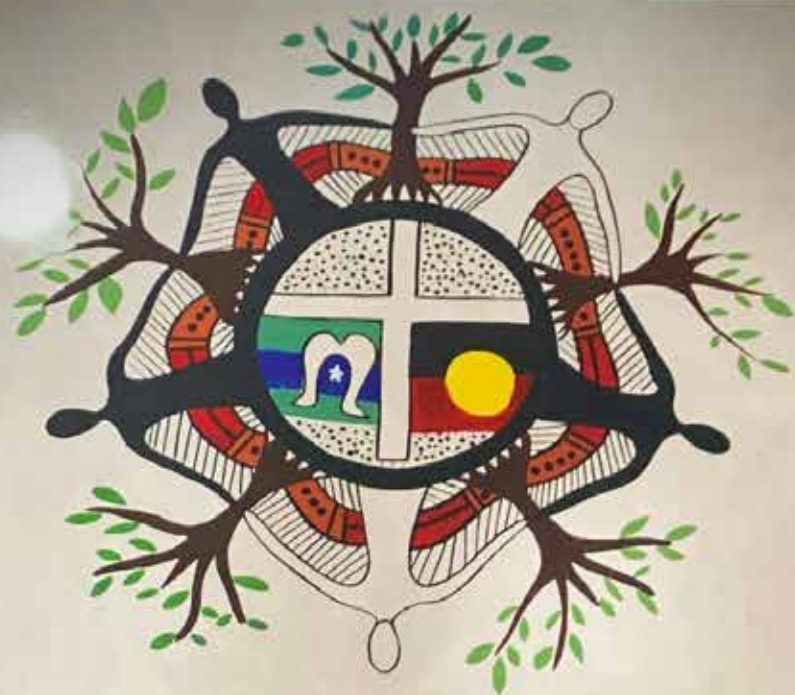
In 2018, I was one of the 300 delegates who attended the National Assembly of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Church in Perth. This was an enjoyable experience and I was encouraged to meet other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young and old with similar experiences.



Above: Samantha and her family with ACM Canberra Chaplain Father Dan Benedetti (MGL)

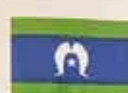
The next National Assembly is due to be held from 27 September to 1 October 2021 in Townsville. I am looking forward to attending and hope that my Aunty can attend with me.

My spiritual journey is a personal one. It's an internal one but an external one as well. I am still learning about Christ and I am still learning about me. I hope that by sharing my experience I can encourage others to join me on my journey.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years.

We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

Dear Kodi,

I am pleased to be able to offer a NATSICC Acknowledgment plaque for installation at the Coonabarabran Yarning Circle.

Please accept the plaque as a token of appreciation for the work that you do as an individual in your community as well as a symbol of support for the anti-suicide initiatives that are being undertaken by the Coonabarabran Suicide Prevention Network.

As stated by the network in a Facebook post - a yarning circle is a harmonious, creative and collaborative way of communicating to: encourage responsible, respectful and honest interactions between participants, building trusting relationships, foster accountability and provide a safe place to be heard and to respond and all have an equal space to share.

We think that all the principles enshrined in the Yarning Circle should form the core of all interactions, consultations and relationships in Australia.

We are so proud of your work and would appreciate the opportunity to share the story of the Yarning Circle as well as highlight the communities fight against the Narrabri Gas project via our various social media and mailing list networks. I will be in touch to discuss.



**Yarn, Support, Connect -
Coonabarabran Suicide Prevention
Network**

August 23 · 🌐

A lovely gift and gesture from our friends at **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council** All the way from Adelaide. Acknowledgement of Country plaque for the Yarning Circle.

NATSICC was blessed to be have the opportunity to contribute to the YARN, SUPPORT, CONNECT - COONABARABRAN SUICIDE PREVENTION NETWORK. It is such a meaningful project.

Local area Councillor and friend of NATSICC Kodi Brady made us aware of the great work that is done by the network.

Acknowledgement Plaques

The St Aloysius Parish, Cronulla, Social Justice Group has recently installed 3 NATSICC Acknowledgment Plaques. Frank O'Driscoll (Convenor) shares the story and some other Reconciliation initiatives that the group has implemented.

Our Social Justice Group has established a wonderful relationship with the Reconciliation Parish at La Perouse and continue to build on that for the future.

The plaque was placed in our main parish church, St Aloysius, Cronulla, after a wonderful Mass, blessing of plaque and reception for visiting members of the La Perouse Reconciliation Church community.

After the ceremony our PP Fr James McCarthy and Parish were presented with a handpainted cross by Uncle John, from the La Perouse community. The plaque was installed immediately however the cross took more time. It was only installed last week as we held a preChristmas stall of handmade items from the La Perouse community. It was very successful and we were so pleased.

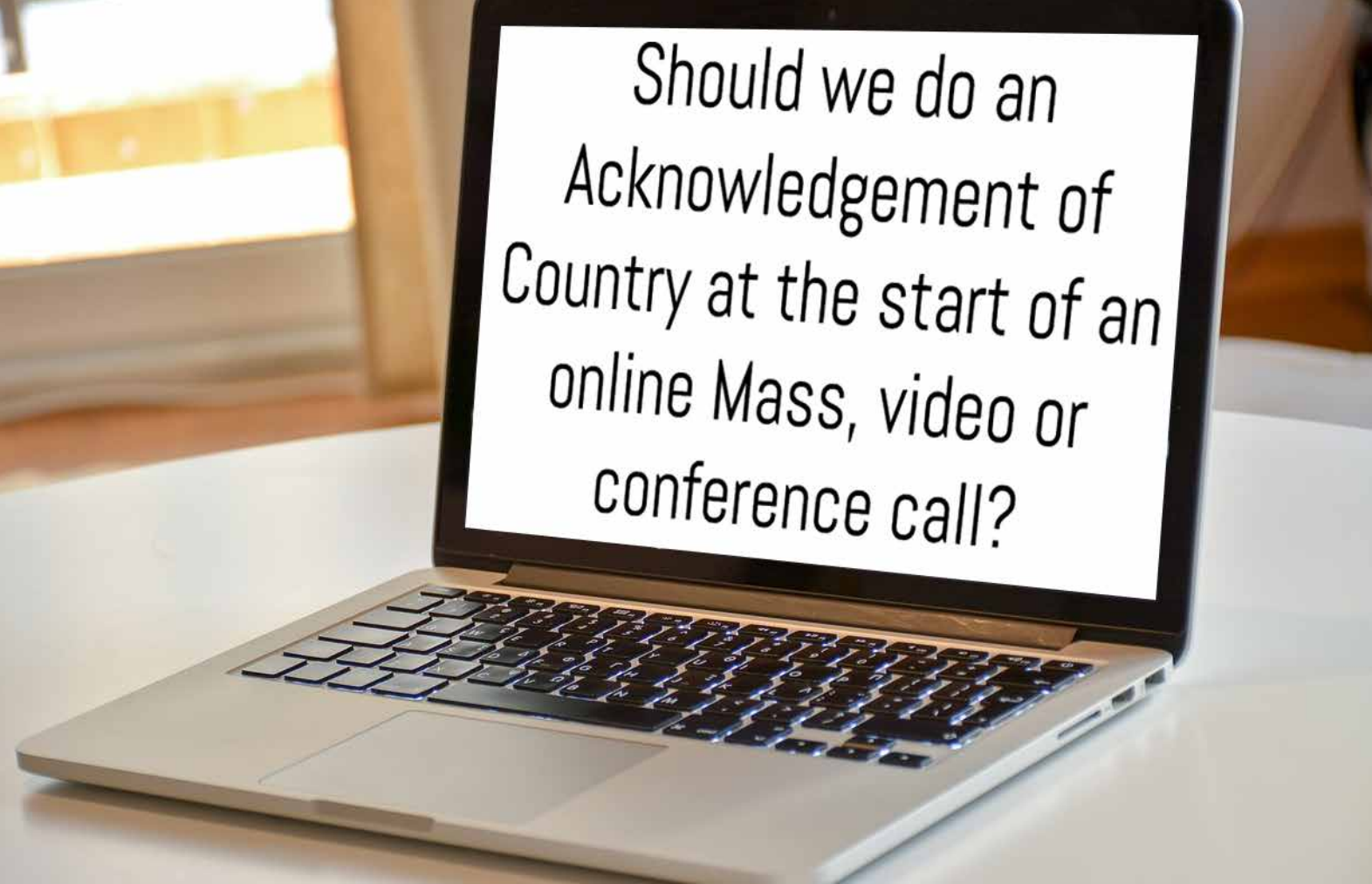
The blessing of the plaque took place on International Indigenous World Day. Fr Daryl Mackie, Chaplain to ACM, concelebrated the Mass with Fr James and was invited to offer the Homily. I have attached some of the photos of the day and the photo of the Acknowledgement plaque and cross which are located in the entrance foyer of our church.

I would also like to point out that we have an 'acknowledgement' statement on the front of our Parish Bulletin each week. Also we celebrated the rescheduled NAIDOC Week in November and presented the acknowledgement statement on our overhead at the start of each Mass that weekend and Fr James invited the congregation to read the statement aloud together. This was a first for our parish.

There is a photo of our original Acknowledgement erected by our Social Justice Group in 2005. The tri-colour banner was made by one of our parishioners, especially for the day, and there are some photos of artworks designed and painted by students of our Primary School for display on the day.

We would hope you can include our parish in the 'Partners in Faith'.





The simple answer is yes! An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for all participants in the meeting to pay their respects to Traditional Custodians, and we think it brings us all closer together as Australians.

Just as technology has allowed us to be together virtually, an Acknowledgement brings us together as a society and as a Country.

Option 1 - General Acknowledgement

Although we are meeting virtually, we continue to Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians that have, for thousands of years, walked upon and cared for the lands upon which we are all individually located.

We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Option 2 – Specific locations and Language Groups

(Individually acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which each meeting participant is located):

Although we are meeting virtually, we continue to Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians that have, for thousands of years, walked upon and cared for the lands upon which we are all individually located.

We respectfully acknowledge: The _____ peoples in (location 1), the _____ peoples in (location 2), the _____ peoples in (location 2) and so on

We acknowledge each of these Nations and the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and we commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

In Memoriam.....

Vale Cathie Wilson



In August last year we lost our former Northern Territory Councillor and dear friend Cathie Wilson. Cathie was a Traditional Custodian of the Darwin area and a member of the Larrakia Language group. She represented the Northern Territory on NATSICC for many years.

Her constant smile and down to earth outlook on life was the exterior of a person who, on the inside, was deeply spiritual and faith filled.

She had the ability to weave her Culture and Catholic Faith into one and was an integral part of the Council that hosted the 2012 NATSICC Assembly in Darwin.

As we lose our Elders, we lose their stories and their knowledge. We are deeply saddened by Cathie's passing but are comforted in the knowledge that she is in the arms of the Lord and her ancestors.

Funeral Notice

For the Late



Leonie Kelly

Date of Funeral: Friday 26th February 2021

Venue: Our Lady Queen of Peace

Catholic Church, Weld Street, Broome

Time: 3.00 pm

Dress Code: Black & White

Rosary: Wednesday 17th February 2021

Venue: SSJC Heritage Centre Broome

Time: 5.00pm



Continued from back page.....

Emerging as a more equitable and caring Nation after COVID-19

After suffering together through the pandemic, Australians should forge forwards with humble hearts and a unity of mind and armed with a renewed sense of equality and care for one another.

Amid an unmitigated global disaster, we were compelled to come together (metaphorically - certainly not physically) to protect ourselves, our friends, our loved ones and importantly others in society. We were like the trees that St John Paul II referred to - standing together amongst a sweeping bushfire. No one was immune as the COVID-19 virus spread across Australia. International news broadcasts chronicled the indiscriminate march of the pandemic across the world and made it clear that the postcode in which you live, the balance of your bank account and the language that you

speak are all peripheral. We were and are one as a global community, united by our human vulnerabilities and our reliance upon one another for the greater good.

COVID-19 - a disaster that resulted in an incomprehensible loss of life across the world - showed us that we need to begin to grasp and consider the challenges experienced by others to ensure better outcomes for all. Further, understanding that we need to care for those in vastly different situations meant that we all had a better chance of surviving the pandemic. Peter, in his First Letter to a marginalised Church, said, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (1 Peter 3:8). For 10 months we have

successfully united to fight a common enemy, we need now to unite in love for one another to fight the enemies of hatred and injustice.

We need to see everyone in this Country for what they are - as a brother or sister in Christ. Peeling back the layers, we share more similarities than differences. We are one and need to 'rebuild' on a foundation of unity, honesty, and care for one another. Let us tell our young people the truth about the history of our Country so that we can begin to heal and emerge as a better society.

Continue to empower and acknowledge the dignity and worth of individuals, created equally in the image of God, through the extension of assistance schemes and the provision of a living wage.

Just as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture values and utilises the skills, gifts and experiences of individuals, a pillar of Catholic Social Teaching is recognising that each person possesses an inherent and immeasurable worth and dignity. Further, we, as Catholics have a responsibility to maintain and nurture that worth.

Via the JobKeeper/JobSeeker initiatives, the Government provided *most people a living stipend. An individual's worth to society was decoupled from the dollar and provided them with an opportunity to provide for themselves and their families without a series of dehumanising and demoralising stipulations.

(*most: Migrants and Refugees on Temporary Protection Visas were excluded from both the JobKeeper and JobSeeker schemes. In May 2020 NATSICC joined 50 other Catholic Organisations and wrote to the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, pleading for help on behalf of the ones we saw as being abandoned during the COVID-19 pandemic)

An unexpected benefit was that the payments eased the load on community-based charities, many of whom experienced a marked decrease in requests for food and other necessities. People were provided with the resources to provide for themselves and their families, and charities were able to refocus their efforts

"We need to see everyone in this Country for what they are - as a brother or sister in Christ.

Peeling back the layers, we share more similarities than differences. We are one and need to 'rebuild' on a foundation of unity, honesty, and care for one another. Let us tell our young people the truth about the history of our Country so that we can begin to heal and emerge as a better society."

on proactive and preventative programs.

By providing broadened and accessible financial assistance packages to those in need, the stigma around helping the less fortunate was subsequently eroded as we were forced to think outside of our own bubble. Suddenly the possibility of needing assistance was very real to all and layers of emotional insulation were pared back by the realisation that 'it could happen to me'. We were all in the same boat, floating along the same river and lacking control over the destination.

The ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods estimated that the JobKeeper/JobSeeker Schemes lowered the number of people in poverty by 32%. Importantly

it found that the additional support also flattened out poverty across the wealth spectrum with only modestly lower poverty in higher wealth households compared to lower wealth households. The resultant redistribution of wealth is something to which we should aspire. We are reminded of the words of John the Baptist - "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise" (Luke 3:10-11).

All Australians should acknowledge, in our actions and in legislation, that Elders/Old People are valuable and contributing members of society and that we are responsible to care for and love them - just as they did for us.

Major COVID-19 outbreaks and loss of life in Aged Care Facilities triggered lockdowns

and restrictions across Australia. With the passing of our Elders / Old people, we also lost their stories and their knowledge. The term 'Old People' is used in the Torres Strait Islands (and some Aboriginal Communities) in the same way that 'Elder' is used in Aboriginal Culture – and it is how we express and show our love, respect and reverence for those that cared for us and guided us through our youth.

Although we lamented our inability to visit our Elders/Old People, we adhered to the rules to keep them safe. Newborns were presented to matriarchs and patriarchs via Zoom or introduced at a distance and through the safety and separation of windowpanes.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, supported by State and Territory Governments, closed their borders to all but essential workers to protect our Elders/Old People and Custodians of Culture and Knowledge. Early action prevented the virus from ravaging our people who are already suffering from poor health, and in many areas a lack of healthcare facilities and resources. We all placed an emphasis on ensuring the safety of our old people.

As we move into a time where Euthanasia / Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) is being debated and potentially legislated in Parliaments across the Country, we want the same level of compassion and care for our Elders / Old People that we strived to employ during COVID-19 to be applied post COVID-19. Culturally, First Nations People are conditioned and taught to cherish our Elders and Old People. We are horrified at the concept that those most at risk – the Elderly, the poor, the sick – are somehow seen as less valuable and a burden on Society. Catholic Social Teaching again echoes this sentiment, and we are all called to cherish, protect, and serve those in most need – "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2)."

Rather than legislate the ability to end the lives



Sand Art at NATSICC's Stradbroke Island Retreat 2017

of those at the end stages of their lives, NATSICC advocates the need for more advanced, compassionate, and authentic Palliative Care that considers not only physical wellbeing, but also spiritual wellbeing. In 2020 we displayed our love for our Elders and Old People and their inherent value to us as a Society by the measures we put in place to protect them. It is concerning to us that VAD sends a very different message to our Elders and Old People, a message that might be construed as their lives being a burden for others. Bishop Tim Harris, (Bishop of Townsville) in his November 2019 Homily articulates this well:

"I further fear that the elderly and frail and people with disabilities and other chronic conditions may feel pressured to prematurely end their lives. Who would have thought such a possibility has been raised, but I am afraid when society provides a 'way out' – a quick death – then anything is possible."

On average, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders / Old People die earlier than non-Indigenous Australians and we need to ensure that improved and Culturally informed health outcomes remain a priority of Federal and State and Territory health providers. In 2021 and beyond, Australia will be a better place if we embrace our old people, love them, seek out their knowledge and stories and thank them for toil of their youth by providing them with every opportunity to contribute and experience the continuing journey of their lives.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gifts, skills, and knowledge to be utilised for the betterment of First Nations Peoples and Australia as a whole.

The Blackdog Institute's Mental Health Ramifications of COVID-19: The Australian context states that between 25-33% of the community experiences high levels of anxiety, stress, worry, anger, and uncertainty during pandemics. Many of these symptoms may be attributable to isolation, financial uncertainty,

concern for self and family, diminishment of self-worth due to unemployment and loss of hope.

As a contemporary Western Society, it is time to realise and acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have experienced these same symptoms (due to a very different cause), not for months, but for generation after generation since colonisation. The associated and subsequent outcomes are evident in all socio-economic and health metrics experienced by Australia's First Nations Peoples. Through all these struggles, and against all odds, we have maintained our systems of kinship, our relationship with the land and some of our languages to remain the oldest continuing Culture in the world.

Our gifts of acceptance, tenacity, perseverance, and faith in a Greater Being are what we want to share with Australia and what we want Australians to embrace. These attributes are evident in every line of the Uluru Statement; they are embedded in the very fibre of Community-led Organisations that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and are evident when we conduct Cross cultural learning to help others better understand our point of view.

In times of struggle, we have always come together to cry, laugh, explain, and console. Our burdens are shared throughout our Communities and our unique extended families.

As we enter 2021 with a sense of hope and 'rebirth' we ask that, for the first time in post-colonial history, Australians stand together to lift one another up. Stand alongside the Traditional Custodian. Stand alongside the migrant striving for a better life. Stand alongside the grandmother that has lived through so much. We are much stronger, and much better when we are together.

Emerging as a more equitable and caring Nation after COVID-19

We find ourselves pondering whether Australia will ever be the same after COVID-19? It might be more useful to ask whether it should be the same after the pandemic. Australia can continue to learn from the challenges of the virus and embrace the gifts of First Nation's Culture to make it a better place for all.

Whilst we should be talking about these things all year, Australia Day is often the trigger for discussions around moving the date, what our Country stands for or changing the National Anthem.

For the record:

- Yes, we should change the date to May 27 (the day that Australia voted to grant citizenship to us Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and to remove us from under the Fauna and Flora Act in 1967),
- Australia should stand for equality, respect, and compassion for all and,
- Yes, the National Anthem should be representative of all.



This year is different. As we approach Australia Day 2021, in addition to the questions above, we find ourselves pondering whether Australia will ever be the same after COVID-19. However, it might be more useful to consider whether we should arise from the pandemic the same after COVID-19?

With COVID-19 a continuing threat across the world, the following words of St John Paul II to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Alice Springs 1986 may never be more timely nor resonate more strongly for all Australians:

"If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now!"

We indeed are scorched and damaged, but we are still here, and we are still strong. What lessons can be taken from the pandemic, and our response to positively shape our collective morality, legislation and perspective towards others?

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