



NATSICC NEWSLETTER

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

1st Quarter 2020



COVID-19 Information inside

FAREWELL TO AUNTY JOAN HENDRIKS

On 26 January 2020 we lost Aunty Joan - a friend and much respected Ngugi Elder from Stradbroke Island. Pictured here with NATSICC Deputy Chairperson Shirley Quresimin at the 2017 NATSICC retreat, Aunty Joan was a former Deputy Chair of the Council. Shirley puts it best when she says:

"JOAN WAS A PROUD INDIGENOUS WOMAN AND ELDER OF HER PEOPLE, BUT ALSO A DEVOTED CATHOLIC. SHE PUT SO MUCH INTO WHAT NATSICC IS TODAY. MANY A NIGHT WE SPENT IN OUR HOTEL ROOM WORKING ON POLICY. SO GLAD TO HAVE SEEN HER ON HER COUNTRY ONE LAST TIME. JOAN YOU HAVE EARNED YOUR REST, REST NOW WITH YOUR GOD."

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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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Chairperson's Message

We have endured an amazingly difficult start to the year so far. Obviously the Covid 19 situation is totally new and challenging for everyone. We are all concerned for our people and our communities. We are a strong people that have endured against the odds and we will draw upon our strength to get through this also. NATSICC is trying to support communities by distributing information and sending out toiletry bags for those that need to go to hospital. More information on these initiatives is included in this newsletter.

Additionally, we are still mourning the passing of our friend Joan Hendriks. Aunty Joan was a pioneer and an integral part of the establishment of NATSICC.

Alongside David Miller - our QLD Councillor - I was proud to represent NATSICC at Aunty Joan's funeral in Brisbane and the wake on Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island). It was a beautiful tribute to a beautiful Elder.

At the funeral I spoke about how Aunty Joan reminded me of my mother - Matriarch to my family - and our community. Our women are the foundations and strength in our families. It is the same for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Ministries across Australia. Aunty Joan, and many other like her worked, and are still working, tirelessly to support our people, our Culture and our Faith.

Aunty Joan's passing has helped me to reflect on the roles that our Elders play in our lives. In communities around Australia we are losing our Elders, and with them their stories, experiences and knowledge.

We need to remember to ask questions, listen to stories and support our Elders to continue to contribute and enrich our communities, schools and organizations. We must continue to move forwards and build upon the legacy of our Elders.

Yours in Faith,
John Lochowiak
NATSICC Chairperson

Together in Spirit - COVID-19 and our Communities

An unprecedented Pandemic that could have serious impacts on our communities, physical and mental health.



We want to let you know that all of us at NATSICC are keeping you, your ministries, families and communities in our thoughts and prayers during this difficult and challenging time. We are aware that most Aboriginal and Islander Ministries are closed to visitors and are operating remotely. Obviously Masses have been cancelled, with many praying individually and utilising video conferencing technology via their own Dioceses.

We are not medical experts and are suggesting that everyone follows the guidelines set down by their States, Territories and medical authorities. We do however ask that you continue to check in on family via phonecalls and consider utilising online video calling. Skype is free and can be downloaded here. We always like to see each other when talking so take the time to help our Aunties and Uncles through setting Skype up.

Finally, now is an excellent time to revisit St Pope John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at Blatherskite Park in 1986. Many of his words were revolutionary at the time, but in our current circumstances they provide us with hope and strength as a Nation united against a common threat.

COVID-19 Emergency Contacts and information

If you or are a family member are experiencing these symptoms, or you are concerned about their health, you can:

Call your local Aboriginal Medical Service, or someone you trust in the community if you feel unwell.

Call the 24-hour National COVID-19 Hotline can 1800 020 080.

Visit www.niaa.gov.au for information about remote community closures.

Check out the newest information on www.health.gov.au

State and Territory Phone contact

ACT health: 02 6205 2155

NSW health: 1300 066 055

SA health: 1300 232 272

TAS health: 1800 671 738

QLD health: 13 432 584

VIC health: 1300 651 160

WA health: 08 922 8588

National hotline: 1800 020 080

Government Covid Updates

The official health.gov.au website link relating to Covid

https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert?fbclid=IwAROVLEy4vsQTrcwE9ZORAFSDbqYTOFHHRgQPfNIODG-10mLx_o2yqpJtk6Q

NACCHO Covid Updates

<https://www.naccho.org.au/home/aboriginal-health-alerts-coronavirus-covid-19/>

NACCHO is the national peak body representing 143 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) across the country on Aboriginal health and wellbeing issues. Bookmark this page as it is updated regularly.

Covid-19 Support grants for remote communities

<https://www.naccho.org.au/government-backs-remote-communities-with-covid-19-support/?fbclid=IwAR2DnCIMx2zTFhj8pkjPwqRCezEedyAnKZuUFQPNInHNtw8KrtHTxlpwnB4>

The Federal Government is offering 45 Flexible grants to assist remote communities as part of the Government's \$57.8 million Remote Community Preparedness and Retrieval package. Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, said the Government was focused on ensuring remote Indigenous communities were prepared for an outbreak of COVID-19.

Sorry Business during Covid

<https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/resources/datsima/people-communities/sorry-business-factsheet.pdf>

National Resources

Department of Health <https://www.health.gov.au/>

Australia.gov.au www.aus.gov.au

National Indigenous Australians Agency
Coronavirus Information <https://www.niaa.gov.au/covid19-remote-communities>

Indigenous.gov.au <https://www.indigenous.gov.au/>

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation <https://www.naccho.org.au/>

Keeping our Mob safe

NACCHO - National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation - has produced the below guide to keeping everyone in our communities safe.

Everybody is at risk of contracting COVID-19 so you need to protect yourself and others in your community. Especially elders.

We all need to work together to keep our communities safe and stop the spread of the virus. Government action alone is not enough.

As the Government is undertaking a broad range of actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, we can all act to protect and save lives by doing three simple things:

1. Staying healthy and strong with good hygiene - keep your hands clean.

- Wash your hands with soap and water (where possible) for at least 20 seconds after you cough or sneeze, go to the toilet, and before you make any food.
- Cough or sneeze into your arm or inside of elbow, not your hands.
- Put your tissues in the bin after you use them and wash your hands after.
- Don't touch your face.
- Clean surfaces often, such as door handles, kitchen and bathroom.
- Don't hug or shake hands with people.
- If you are sick with a fever, cough or sore throat and feel tired or are having trouble breathing, keep away from people and family in the community and seek medical help.

2. Protecting your communities and Elders

- Don't travel to places in your community, or other communities, unless you have to.
- Stay at home and away from other people as much as you can. If you are around people, try to stay two metres away from them. That's two big steps.
- If you use medication, make sure keep taking it to stay as healthy as possible.
- Don't share cups or water bottles
- Don't smoke or share smokes with other people.
- Get a flu shot and protect yourself and your family from the flu too.

3. Staying connected

- It's important we stay connected with family, friends and community.
- Call people for a yarn on the phone.
- Talk about the community and check if they are OK.
- Talk about the virus and how to stop the spread.
- Connect to family and friends on social media.
- Share your tips on social media
#KeepOurMobSafe

By taking action together we will slow the spread, take the pressure off our doctors and nurses and ultimately save lives – keeping your mob safe and well.

Where can I go for help?

Keep safe by knowing the symptoms of Coronavirus. The most common symptoms are fever, sore throat, cough, tiredness and difficulty breathing.

If you or are a family member are experiencing these symptoms, or you are concerned about their health, you can:

Call your local Aboriginal Medical Service, or someone you trust in the community if you feel unwell.

Call the 24-hour National COVID-19 Hotline can 1800 020 080.

Visit www.niaa.gov.au for information about remote community closures.

Check out the newest information on www.health.gov.au

St Vincent de Paul Society SA Reconciliation Action Plan Journey

NATSICC and the Adelaide ACM are working together with St Vinnies in South Australia for Reconciliation. Story by Tony Roach.



The RAP provides a roadmap for the Society to turn good intentions into positive actions, helping to build trust, minimise prejudice, and increase pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This collective action is creating the right environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to access sustainable employment and business opportunities, and contributing to a just, equitable and reconciled Australia

In 2019 the Society in SA committed to the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan, forming a Reconciliation Action Plan working group which includes the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (the Otherway Centre) and NATSICC.

The St Vincent de Paul Society SA's vision for reconciliation is for a just and equitable society. Our vision is based on our core mission to offer a hand up to people experiencing disadvantage and to shape a more compassionate society. We are acutely aware that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience discrimination and disadvantage at levels that cause great sorrow and shame to many Australians. At the Society we are deeply troubled by the extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health, and lower life expectancy experienced by our country's First Peoples.

The Society is committed to reconciliation actions aimed at closing social and economic gaps in order to make a substantial difference in the lives of the people we engage, employ or assist.

Although the Society has had a long history of involvement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it had not until now sought to formalise its commitment to reconciliation. We know that an organisation as iconic as ours has an obligation to contribute openly and extensively to Australia's reconciliation journey.

During Reconciliation Week we undertook practical reconciliation action events such as morning, afternoon teas and barbecues. More broadly, the NATSICC Acknowledgement plaques are proudly displayed at the 36 Vinnies shops, 59 Conferences and Special Works sites as a symbol of our commitment to reconciliation.

The Society has the capacity to start thousands of conversations across SA as our members, volunteers and staff go about their daily work. These conversations will build a foundation of respect for diversity and inclusion. We will foster a spirit of trust and mutual appreciation throughout the entire organisation, in all departments and across all geographic locations.

We will engage in Cultural Awareness training to ensure our members, volunteers and staff work in culturally appropriate and accessible ways that will become ever stronger and more embedded throughout the life of this RAP. We will also make every effort to ensure our workplaces and facilities are regarded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as culturally safe places to work or engage with our services.

INTERACTIVE NATSICC CALENDAR

The Calendar (in the Resources Hub area of the website) is the first to combine important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates along with Catholic dates of significance.

Local events and dates of significance can be included (get in touch with the NATSICC Office). Based on the Google Calendar platform, users can download the calendar to their own computers or devices and have the dates integrate with their current calendars.

Given the wide range of significant events included, the calendar is an excellent tool for education and respecting important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates.



RESOURCES | STORIES | NEWS | EVENTS | SOCIAL MEDIA
www.natsicc.org.au

February 22 2020 marked the 60th Jubilee of Profession for Sister Joan (the bone) Hamilton. Sr Joan has been a constant presence at the ACM in Melbourne for many years. A very big congratulation, not only from the staff and volunteers at the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry but from all our supporters who have loved and laughed with Joan over her many years, came together to mark this important anniversary.





Beloved Amazonia

NATSICC responds to Pope Francis' latest Exhortation on the Amazon.

Pope Francis' Querida Amazonia – Beloved Amazonia - has been warmly received by many members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic community. The tone of the exhortation is reflective of the position that underpins our vision for the Church in Australia – a Church that is open to the gifts of First Nations Catholics, honest to the past and embracing of a new way of thinking that utilizes the principle of subsidiarity.

Please note that we have not covered the environmental aspects of the Exhortation. Our commitment and care for the land for thousands of years is our continuing legacy and the Council supports all efforts to care for and sustain Mother Earth. We stand alongside our Amazonian brothers and sisters in their struggle for their culture, land, identity and survival.

It will take some time to 'digest' and fully understand the implications of Beloved Amazonia but the Synod and accompanying document are all leading us to a pivotal time in the global Catholic Church – and particularly the Australian Catholic Church. The Church in our Great Southern Land is currently undertaking a Plenary process that carries the hopes and dreams of the 130,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics.

Many had expected Beloved Amazonia to include

a definitive statement on the issue of accepting married men into the Priesthood to address the needs of remote Amazonian Indigenous communities – drawing obvious parallels to the needs of our communities in Australia. Instead, the Pontiff espoused “a specific and courageous response is required of the Church” to meet the needs of Catholics. Some have seen this statement as an attempt to obviate further difficult discussions, however, those of us involved in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) feel it is reflective of the need to take a wider perspective and consider options and avenues that have not yet been fully explored.

A point that is often lost in these discussions is to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the Priests and Religious that are currently working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban, regional and remote settings. Everyday these Priests and Religious work tirelessly in communities with very little respite. They are owed a debt of gratitude.

Undoubtedly, having Aboriginal Clergy would embody Catholic Social Teaching's Principle of Subsidiarity, a teaching that NATSICC and the Catholic Church subscribes to and strives to bring to life. Subsidiarity advocates that those closest to the community and the issues faced should

be empowered to make decisions and become leaders. In doing so we embrace the value and the transcendent worth that comes from God in each and every individual. But it cannot be seen as the only way to empower our people.

This single course of action alone ignores and minimizes the important roles of women in our communities, families and Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministries (AICMs) in Australia. Just as cultural responsibilities may deter SOME Aboriginal men from becoming Priests in SOME communities (but not all), we are culturally and morally bound to respect and revere our matriarchs. Additionally, Aboriginal Deacons have long been revered and integral to Aboriginal Catholic Communities alongside our young people (both male and female) that culturally become leaders within families. The empowerment of women and youth is a 'courageous response' to Subsidiarity.

Whilst we encourage and would welcome Aboriginal Priests, the Ordination of married Aboriginal men alone will not make the “Church fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be” – as per St. Pope John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 1986 . “Standing alongside thousands of others in Blatherskite Park in 1986, I witnessed and absorbed the then Pope's words and was filled with hope and joy for a united future.’ Reminiscenced NATSICC Chair John Lochowiak.

“We waited upon his every word that day and the bus back to Adelaide was filled to the brim with discussions of the possibilities that lay before us. As we barreled through the desolate bush back home, we concocted plans for what was to become the new home of First Nations Catholics in South Australia – the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Adelaide. We didn't need a roadmap or Strategic Plan laid before us, all we needed was hope and a sense that our culture and point of view was valued and respected.” John continued.

A living example of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in communities was recently shared at the Catholic Youth Gathering. The Parish Priest of a remote Aboriginal Community was trying, unsuccessfully, to get young people to attend Mass. Many initiatives were attempted, resulting in only one young Aboriginal leader accepting the invitation and becoming a Mass

regular. He began 'dressing up' for Mass and changing his route to the Church so that he would walk past his mates on the way. One by one, and week by week, a new 'pilgrim' would join the procession to Mass. Witnessing a peer, friend and respected member of the community showing leadership through action planted a seed of hope in the community. It is this concept that we need to nurture in “a specific and courageous” way – the concept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the capacity to lead and possess gifts of faith, perseverance and culture that will enhance and strengthen an authentic Australian Catholic Church.

We need to see all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as leaders and role models in our Church. We need to look beyond the obvious because, as Pope Francis writes “the real response to the challenges of evangelization lies in transcending the two approaches and finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined.” There is not simply 'Aboriginal way' and 'Catholic way', there is something in between where each strengthens and lifts the other. This is the Church that we imagine.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference support of NATSICC is emblematic of that concept. We are working together to strengthen the roles of women in leadership, support our young people in their struggles of faith and survival and include First Nations Peoples in decision making. Collectively, one of our greatest challenges is to inform and educate the mainstream Church of our gifts and our readiness to share those gifts.

The discussions following Beloved Amazonia should focus on “Specific and Courageous” ways that Australia can be home to a more authentic Australian Church augmented and enriched by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture. The 2020 Plenary is an opportunity to discuss and explore the opportunities that we have as a nation to embrace all voices within the Church.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia are echoing Pope Francis and asking all Catholics to be courageous, be governed by the Holy Spirit and be present to support us on our journey as part of the Australian Catholic Church.

St Ignatius College Geelong's Journey to Reconciliation



"We want it to be the same size as the other plaques - it can't be smaller!"

This was the response of Brendan Nicholls, the Religious Education and Liturgy Coordinator of St Ignatius College when offered an A3 Acknowledgment Plaque for the School. Together NATSICC and the College worked on developing a larger, custom plaque - a project that came to fruition on Ash Wednesday this year. Below, Brendan shares the journey of St Ignatius College and beginnings of significant journeys of preparation, friendship and service.

Ash Wednesday was a very important day for the community at Saint Ignatius College Geelong due to the celebration of two significant parallel beginnings. As a Catholic community, staff and students received the ashes as Lent began and the start of forty days of preparation of growing closer to God and others. The College also unveiled a significant symbol of the desire to further the College's journey of reconciliation and justice for our nation's First Peoples in the form of an Indigenous Acknowledgement sign. Both of these events are beginnings of significant journeys of preparation, friendship and service.

Saint Ignatius College has a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee (ATSI) that over a number of years has developed a vision of reconciliation and support for our Indigenous students. A crucial aspect that had been discussed throughout 2019 was a public

statement of a commitment to reconciliation and the acknowledgment of the nation's First Peoples. A sign to this effect was agreed to be a suitable illustration of this intent.

Fortuitously, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) simultaneously released a plaque that perfectly encapsulated this vision. The focal point of the plaque is an image designed by Murri Ministry (Brisbane, Queensland) that depicts reconciliation as "black and white people coming together and growing in faith and respect for one another".

The College was blessed to work with Craig Arthur (NATSICC National Administrator) and John Lochowiak (NATSICC Chairperson) who supported the vision of upscaling the plaque as designed so that it was equal in size to other significant signs at the College.

The unveiling of the sign on Ash Wednesday was supported by the presence and support of John Lochowiak (NATSICC), Rebecca Famlonga (Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation), Fr James Puppady (College Chaplain and President of the Canonical Administrators) along with the College's FIRE Carriers (staff and students). In particular, John's message of encounter, friendship and understanding strongly aligned with that of Saint Ignatius' ATSI Committee and inspirational to those in attendance.

After the unveiling ceremony and liturgy, a mission of reconciliation was presented to the attendees. The knowledge passed on by John and the vision of justice prompted reflection, conversation and response.

For the College, the sign is significant, but in itself is only a symbol. Reconciliation is a journey, and this beginning presents future opportunities. With the support of NATSICC, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne (ACM) and the local Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation, the College will seek to further the journey of reconciliation. Through friendship, understanding and service, the community of Saint Ignatius College seeks justice for and affirms the dignity of our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

Brendan Nicholls
FIRE Carrier, Religious Education and Liturgy Coordinator





NATSICC Youth Councillor's dream for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics

28 year old Sabrina-Ann Stevens, the current Youth Councillor on the NATSICC, is a proud member of the Yidinji Nation from Cairns and the Kuku Yalanji People from Mossman which north of Cairns, Queensland, and has been involved with NATSICC since 2011, when she was just 19. Her family were the driving force in nurturing her Catholic faith, whilst maintaining and passing on Traditional beliefs and Culture.

Over the course of her tenure at NATSICC, Sabrina-Ann has led numerous NATSICC Youth groups at Catholic events – including NATSICC Assemblies, NATSICC Youth Gatherings and several Australian Catholic Youth festivals. At the latest Youth Festival in Perth, she provided a uniquely Australian perspective to the thousands of young people that travelled west to experience the exuberance and diversity of faith. Presenting and sharing her story in several Plenary and workshop sessions, Sabrina gave young people an insight into First Nations culture and the way that Traditional beliefs and Catholic Traditions come together. “The link between faith and culture, my family and my history are the foundations of my life, this is where my seeds were watered and this is where I was encouraged to grow,” she said when asked about the core focus of her presentations.

The NATSICC group in Perth consisted of 5 handpicked young leaders from around Australia (turn to page 23 for the full story on the 2018 Australian Catholic Youth Festival). “The council chose to support these young people to build their capacity as leaders in their own communities.” said Sabrina. In a case of ‘practice what you preach’ Sabrina is building her own capacity to grow as a leader and is currently completing a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in politics and human services. “I’m passionate about empowering others through aspects of faith, Indigenous culture and spirituality.” Sabrina explained.

Living in Cairns, a multicultural regional hub, Sabrina has witnessed the ways in which other nationalities express their own culture in the Catholic Church and holds hope that First Nations people can continue to do the same - “we are encouraged to be expressive and proud of who we are: If I’m an Aboriginal person within the Church, then why should we not be authentically ourselves by making use of our cultural gifts?”

Sabrina-Ann’s long term hope for her Youth portfolio on NATSICC is an ambitious one – the formation of a Youth Council to sit alongside the existing council. “My vision moving into the future

as a youth Councillor is that we can have our young people feel like they have a place here in the Catholic Church,” she said. “I have a vision that all people will be included, and that people will have a vision (for the Church) that they will be comfortable enough to share that with us as well.

The Youth Council will be the first of its kind in Australia and will work to give a voice to emerging leaders from every State and Territory. “I believe that we should be encouraging young people to play an active role in contributing to the life of the Church and the journeys of others around us.” explained Sabrina.

NATSICC has lent its support to the establishment of a youth council and has committed to supporting the group via existing State and Territory networks. NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak is excited by the initiative and said “We will not establish a new body made up of our future leaders without establishing support mechanisms. We need to walk alongside them and give them every chance to be heard and I will ensure that NATSICC will be receptive of their points of view.

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face many challenges in their lives as they search for identity and their rightful place in Australian

society. Youth suicide is the most concerning and immediate issue for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Sabrina hopes that the new council might be able to spiritually support and link young people to existing services.

“Perhaps if we can provide an aspect of togetherness with the NATSICC community, then it can be just one place that young people can identify with and feel the belonging. I hope that this youth council will help young people feel encouraged to continue reaching out and making connections with others, not only in faith based networks but in every day life as well” explained Sabrina Ann.

Sabrina Ann wants other young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to share the same experience she had when she first attended a NATSICC Youth Assembly. “My mind was blown when I first walked into the Assembly in 2009: I saw so many other young Indigenous people who were sharing faith and culture within the church and I was hooked. I wanted to know more, I wanted to know what those people had in their love for Jesus: I wanted that, and I loved that I was seeing them combine their cultural gifts with their faith in God.” she said.





Image: Iceberg Media

Australian Catholic Youth Festival Perth 2019





Opening of the Academic Year at Pilgrim Theological College

Welcome to Country and Theologising Across Cultures

On Thursday 20 February we were honoured to be Welcomed to Country by Elder Perry Wandin of the Wurundjeri Land Council. The words of traditional language and contemporary stories combined with the healing and cleansing smoke of eucalyptus leaves in a ceremony of reconciliation and recognition to open the academic year. The Indigenous Working Group which had taken a lead on this event has been part of Pilgrim's life since 2015, inherited from the work of Fr. John Wilken sj and others at the United Faculty of Theology, but this was the first time, so far as we know, that we had been formally welcomed to country.

The Welcome to Country led us into a seminar with three excellent speakers.

"How the story is 'heard' is only part it. How is the story 'held'? This is the more important question." Alison Overreem, of Leprena Tasmania and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, called attention to the importance of engaging deeply with sacred stories as she opened the

occasion. The theme of "Theologising Across Cultures" had emerged from conversations last semester about the significance of context for interpretation, or hermeneutics, or as John Martis sj, our second speaker for the afternoon pointed out, for 'receiving and sending the message' if the history of the word itself (from Hermes the messenger) is in focus.

How and when different horizons of experience might fuse so that "meaning happens" has been a concern of preachers and religious teachers from the outset. What does it mean to 'translate' sacred meaning into a new environment? We did not expect to come up with a definitive answer to that question on this occasion but the third speaker, Sherry Balcombe, offered an important way to open up the discussion with compelling examples of the work being done in symbol and story at the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Thornbury. The symbol of including a "Message Stick" within the liturgy of the Word is part of that work.

In Aboriginal cultures Message Sticks were a means of communication, made of wood of various shapes and sizes, and marked with symbol rather than writing, they were brought by a messenger from one group to another. The messenger conveyed the details. The Message Stick has had a place in Aboriginal Catholic liturgy in Australia formally since 1993.

This February the community at Pilgrim Theological College marked a commitment to continue to listen to Aboriginal theologians and Aboriginal story as part of our theological engagement by receiving a Message Stick from ACM for the chapel. As Sherry led us from the seminar room to the chapel carrying the Message Stick aloft, and as we held the symbol alongside the Bible as Scripture was read, we were enacting the reality that is recognized in the revised preamble to the constitution of the UCA.

The Second Peoples did not bring God to this land: "The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways." <https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/covenanting/PreamblePoster-web.pdf>.

We are grateful to all of our speakers: Perry, Alison, John, Sherry, and to all who came along to support this event, including also Aunty Patricia Courtenay from ACU. As the good conversation at the BBQ made clear, it was a great way to launch the year and an important milestone in our conversation about what it means to listen well, and theologise authentically, in Australia.

Associate Prof Katharine Massam
Academic Dean

ANZAC Reflection 2020



Great Creator - The Spirit who is in all things - be with us as we gather together, virtually, remember and to celebrate the lives of all people, who have suffered from the pain and trauma of wars.

The Anzac story runs deep in the psyche of this country, especially for our Aboriginal service men and women. Their stories are numerous and in some ways greater, because they went far beyond the call of duty. They volunteered to defend a people that had colonized, oppressed, and removed them from their families, took their children and called our land their own.

Then, when those who survived and returned home from war were not regarded as citizens of the country they had fought for. Surely such acts of love and suffering, Jesus must someday honour, because Aboriginal people were also chosen by God and created in his image having God's presence within them.

They are the true corner stone, the foundation people of this land, now a new people of God, rising like the phoenix, remnants from the flames of oppression war.

Response: Creator God,
You are our Rock, in your Mercy hear our call.

Aunty Elizabeth Pike 2008

Progressing appropriate Aboriginal Clinical Pastoral care



NATSICC ACT Councillor Sally FitzGerald has recently completed a Clinical Pastoral Care course with hopes of assisting Aboriginal people to receive culturally appropriate pastoral care.

A comment made by a delegate at the 2018 NATSICC Assembly provided the inspiration for Sally FitzGerald, NATSICC's ACT Councillor, to return to study and embark on a Clinical Pastoral Care Course. An Aboriginal woman at the Perth event said, "no one listens to us!" and it was clear that there was a need for Aboriginal people to be there for other Aboriginal people in a Pastoral sense.

Having had the seed planted, Sally went in search for a focused Clinical Pastoral Care Course that catered for Aboriginal people. Unfortunately there is no such course available in Canberra, however a mainstream course was available. Via our State Grant program, NATSICC supported Sally to undertake the CPE - 1 Course. "Ultimately, I wanted to be an Aboriginal Pastoral Carer for Aboriginal people who are palliative. I had a passion for this and I knew that lots of our mob were not receiving the appropriate palliative care because of fear. I had no idea how or when this would happen but, this was my goal!"

Sally's clinical placement was in Goulburn Base Hospital, where she was the Pastoral Carer for both Indigenous and non Indigenous people. NATSICC was pleased to be able to support Sally because the

Council has a long term goal to empower our people to build their capacity to serve our communities as leaders and role models.

"Being a Pastoral Carer to Aboriginal people is a little bit different." said Sally. "Aboriginal people tend to ask lots of questions about you before you can engage with them. They want to know who you are; where are you from; who are you connected to and what are you going to do to help them!"

Building of relationships is a foundational requirement when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. NATSICC has always found that the success of any project is dependent on forming strong, reciprocal relationships with stakeholders and Sally's experience echoes this. "Once all of this has been established I noticed that the shoulders came down and they were ready to allow me to encounter them in their vulnerability; knowing that both of us were entering sacred ground and there would be no judgement." Sally explained.

As an Aboriginal person, Sally's unique point of view has allowed her to audit and think about ways in which Pastoral care can be provided in a way that



Acknowledgments from around Australia.....
A beautiful acknowledgment to the Ngadjuri people by the Jesuits at Sevenhill, Clare Valley South Australia

is more culturally appropriate and approachable. "What I found was that many of them wanted to be outside so that they could feel the air and their feet could touch the ground-connection to land-their culture and spirituality. Most said that they found it confronting being in a shared room, with curtains round them-they wanted to be free. This seemed to be a constant "problem" as they didn't want other people hearing them. Sometimes, it was not possible to accommodate their needs, but we worked with what we had."

This type of feedback will prove invaluable as the next stage of the process is NATSICC working with Sally to assist existing Pastoral Carers and training programs to tailor their learning, teaching and delivery to encompass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander requirements.

"In any Pastoral Care encounter one needs to be still-not just sitting still, but stillness of body, mind and heart. This way each of us meets the other in our own vulnerabilities. I found that our people liked this and they could relate to it." Sally said.

What does the future hold for Sally and NATSICC in this space? We both have a strong commitment to ensure that Pastoral outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are improved and NATSICC will focus the next stage on supporting existing providers and Pastoral Carers by providing resources and making our Councillors available to discuss and provide advice on future initiatives.

As for Sally she said "I ultimately want to be a Pastoral Carer for our people who are palliative.

She has been accepted as a Pastoral Carer in Goulburn Base Hospital as a volunteer one day a week and will form part of an ecumenical Pastoral Care team. "I will be working with Indigenous and non Indigenous people whose medical conditions will be acute, chronic and palliative. This way I will get an overall experience. I am very excited to be accepted and will commence as soon as it is safe for me to do so."

MURRI MINISTRY ANNUAL CHRISTMAS VISIT TO CHERBOURG



Every year Murri Ministry visits the Cherbourg Community to hold a special Christmas Liturgy. The Mass is the highlight for a community that has seen more than its fair share of hardship over the years. Originally, Cherbourg was known as Barambah. In 1904 it was established as a Lutheran Missionary Station for indigenous Australians.

Forty-seven Aboriginal tribes with different traditions and different rites were forced to live together in one place.

Religious institutes involved with the Cherbourg Catholic community over the years were the Presentation, Good Samaritan, Charity, Holy Spirit and Josephite Sisters, the Marist and Christian brothers, Marist priests, and Diocesan Chaplains.

In 1913 a church in Wooroolin (just north of Kingaroy) was opened and dedicated by the late Archbishop James Duhig, then Coadjutor to the Archbishop of Brisbane.

In 1918 the first Masses in the Murgon region were held in private homes until the first Church was built and blessed on August 4 by Fr M O'Flynn, for Archbishop Duhig. The Catholic Parish of Murgon was established in 1927 and regular visits of local priests to nearby Cherbourg began.

In 1972, the church moved from Wooroolin to Cherbourg. Fr Patrick Stratford would head into Cherbourg on a Wednesday afternoon to give religious education to the students.

In 1993 Archbishop John Bathersby of Brisbane, issued a public apology on behalf of the Catholic Church to Aborigines for the way the Church treated them in the past.

In the 2000s Josephite Sisters Anne Cannon and Kay McPadden and other members of Murri Ministry visited and started working regularly with the community.

"Aboriginal Catholics are so proud of their faith background ... who they are and where they're from," said Ravina Waldren – coordinator of Murri Ministry.

"It's been a beautiful journey with the religious sisters and the priests as well.

"The majority of that community has now moved from Cherbourg to settle in Brisbane and so the journey continues." Said Ravina.

The NATSICC funds have allowed the visit to occur in 2019 and, additionally, assisted in the purchasing and distribution of Christmas hampers.

NATSICC Toiletry Bag Program

Recent Closing the Gap report cards have revealed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are still lagging behind non Indigenous Australians in terms of health and life expectancy. The demand that has been experienced for the toiletry bags correlates strongly with these findings.

In partnership with the Adelaide Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and the Burnside Conference of St Vincent de Paul, we have sent out over 150 bags to contacts throughout Australia.

NATSICC and the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See join forces to support NT hospital visitors



Image courtesy of the Australian Embassy to the Holy See

NATSICC was humbled to be approached by former Australian Ambassador to the Holy See Melissa Hitchman to provide nearly 100 Toiletry Bags to the Royal Darwin Hospital for distribution to Aboriginal patients visiting the hospital.

"Having explored existing programs on offer which the Embassy could possibly support, I was attracted to the prospect of gifting toiletry bags to Indigenous Australians visiting Darwin from country for medical or a variety of other reasons" said the Ambassador.

Ambassador Hitchman presented the bags to the Hospital during her visit to Darwin in September last year.

Supporting communities affected by Bushfire in NSW



NATSICC was proud to be able to support the Culturally safe Bushfire Relief Centre in Moruya, NSW. We sent out both male and female Toiletry bags to assist those that have lost everything.

Local community members Kerry Boyenga, Trish Ellis and Iris White are the community leaders behind providing a culturally safe place for First Nations people in the Moruya area and continue to work from their homes to provide support (both material and emotional).

Bushfires leave a footprint and legacy long after they have been extinguished and there will be a continual need for support from all members of the community that have been affected by this Natural Disaster.



NATSICC Youth Gathering and participation in the Catholic Youth Festival in Perth 2019

The NATSICC Council decided to take a multifaceted approach to the 2019 Youth Gathering, which was held 6-10 December 2019. The Gathering took place alongside the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF) and the program worked in and out of the ACYF events.

Direct Support of Identified Leaders

The Council identified 6 key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from around Australia. The group consisted of: 2 young leaders from Palm Island, 2 women from the Northern NSW area that are working in the Catholic Education space (the Gathering aimed to equip them with a broad range of skills that they can use in their classrooms) and 2 NATSICC leaders that would present and build their capacity as National leaders

This core group of participants had the opportunity to attend Mass at Clontarf College. We had organized for the Townsville and Broome Groups to join us for the Mass. It was a lovely celebration and start to the Festival. NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak was present and shared his knowledge and spirituality with the group. All participants had the opportunity to attend and present at the ACYF.

Educating Mainstream Catholic Youth

NATSICC hosted a Cultural Centre at the ACYF. The Centre included:

- Information on ACM's around Australia
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander items that are used in Liturgy
- A small theatre showing programs of inspirational First Nations youth, NATSICC events and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content
- Tree of Life painting activity. This activity provided young people with the opportunity to paint their own leaf using traditional art and symbols. Each leaf was then added to a tree canvas that was prepared by WA Traditional Owners. There were Aboriginal Elders and participants sharing the space and explaining the artwork, symbols and importance of culture whilst the painting was occurring. A number of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates have asked if the trees could visit their communities to show them that the youth of the Church are with them – which is exactly why the activity was set up

Over 1000 participants visited the Cultural Centre during the ACYF and gained a new level of knowledge and respect for the gifts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.



Holly Roberts joined the NATSICC Youth Group for Mass at Clontarf College prior to the 2019 Youth Festival in Perth. Holly presented NATSICC Youth Councillor Sabrina-Ann Stevens with a very special cross. Adorned with Aboriginal artwork, the Cross was blessed by Pope Francis in Rome earlier this year. It will be a symbol of hope for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics and was displayed throughout the 2019 Australian Catholic Youth Festival.

"I am the Vine, you are the branches"

John 15:5



NATSICC Spirituality & Formation Retreat

St Clement's Retreat Centre
Galong, NSW

Rescheduled to 5 -8 October 2020

The 2020 Gathering will provide you with the opportunity to expand your knowledge of Catholic Faith and liturgy and experience the ways in which Traditional Culture and Catholic Traditions can come together.

For bookings and more information - www.natsicc.org.au/2020retreat
or call Sally FitzGerald on 0422 066 080