



NATSICC NEWSLETTER

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

June 2019



IN THIS ISSUE

NATSICC ASSEMBLY	2
CULTURAL GATHERING IN TAS	4
NATSICC AWARDS	6
CATHOLIC MISSION CONFERENCE	9
DEACON BONIFACE TRIBUTE	12
ASSEMBLY PHOTOS	14
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUNDAY 2019	16
NATSICC / BISHOPS MEETING	19
2020 PLENARY UPDATE	21

Peace to this House and all who
dwell within

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday
7 July 2019

See page 16 for more details

Strong Faith. Strong Youth. Strong Future.

Celebrating Faith, Culture and Spirituality
in Perth 1-5 October 2018



Australia's First Peoples gathered in Perth from 1 - 5 October 2018 to explore the strong connections between faith, spirituality and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Over 270 delegates attended the week-long gathering, located at Technology Park in the Perth suburb of Bentley. The proceedings took place amongst the towering gums and lawns of the venue.

NATSICC assemblies occupy an important space on the calendars of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics and this year we adopted the theme 'Strong Faith. Strong Youth. Strong Future'.

The exploration of faith occurred throughout the week in designated "yarning circles". Following each presentation and workshop, delegates

joined yarning circles to develop ways to apply the learnings from the talks into their own ministries and communities. The theme was very much focused on 'doing' and not just 'talking'. Every speaker brought a unique aspect to proceedings. The traditional method of discussion facilitated authentic dialogue and resulted in the group developing a way forward for Australia's First peoples in the Church.

A common theme is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Catholics have to work together for the better of the Church as a whole.

The 2020 Plenary Council workshop, led by Plenary Council facilitator Lana Turvey-Collins, highlighted the commitment and yearning of Indigenous people to be included in the discussions. The voices of the

delegation were strong and displayed the deep faith and commitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The number of attendees that made the trek west was larger than expected with young people, elders and seven bishops exploring the deep connection of faith and culture. People agreed to work together and the group as a whole has galvanised and offers their gifts of family, culture and spirituality to the Church of Australia.

One of the strong focuses for future work of the Church and community is to concentrate on the youth – they are the present and the future. The strength of our people and our youth was evident. We love our Church and we love our culture and the assembly was an opportunity to showcase both of those things.

Australia's First peoples now constitute more than 130,000 of all Catholics in Australia, and numbers are increasing. Census data show that the growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in the Church was approximately 7 per cent in the five years to 2016.

This year, NATSICC has made the Assembly Proceedings available online. Please visit www.natsicc.org.au/2018-assembly.html where you will find the outcomes of the Yarning Circles, a photo gallery capturing the colour and excitement of the week and much more!

DELEGATE FEEDBACK



"It was my first Assembly, and I was so impressed by the keynote speakers, the participation of all attendees and the inspiring youth among us."

"What an amazing Assembly, so many wise and inspiring people, especially in our up and coming youth!"

"WHAT AN AMAZING ASSEMBLY!!!"

"Congratulations – it was so good! The feedback from our 8 delegates was just so positive and appreciative of it all."





Cultural Gathering in Hobart educates and celebrates

NATSICC was very pleased to be able to support the Catholic Education Office in Hobart to hold an event that celebrated and shared the gifts of Aboriginal culture with staff and stakeholders.

“On behalf of the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office here in Hobart I would like to extend our sincere thanks for the NATSICC State and Territory Grant. This extra funding enabled us to better inform and educate our TCEO Catholic community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

It was truly a significant moment in our history and NATSICC’s financial support helped us make this day so successful and empowering for indigenous and non-indigenous people alike. Thanks again from all of us at the TCEO.

» Rosa Connell
Manager, Programs



TAS Catholic Education Launches Reconciliation Action Plan

RAP Champion Jaimi-Lee Armstrong who is the Tasmanian representative for NATSICC has been working together with the senior leadership of Catholic Education Tasmania for a number of months and finally, the document has been launched!

As part of the launch, staff travelled to the Tasmanian Museum Art and Gallery where they were guided through the exhibition exploring Tasmanian Aboriginal history. After the tour, staff returned to the main office, here after a spectacular Welcome to Country and many of the local Aboriginal Elders gathered for the official proceedings.

A highlight of the event was the keynote speech by Karen Mundine from Reconciliation Australia and the presentation of a stunning piece of artwork, designed and painted by Auntie Verna Nichols. This artwork stands in the front foyer for every visitor, staff member and community member to see as a constant reminder of the commitment to Reconciliation in Tasmanian offices and schools.



2019 NATSICC Service to Community Awards

RECOGNISING THE UNHERALDED

Last year NATSICC launched the Service to Community Awards which resulted in an influx of nominations from around Australia.

Designed to recognise those that do not strive for the spotlight, the 2018 awards uncovered 6 very special people that are committed to their faith, community and their people. Leading the winners was Elder Peter Smith. Peter has been an advocate and leader for Aboriginal people for decades. His community forwarded his name and were extremely proud when he received the award.

In addition to the Elder award, Youth, Young Adult, Adult and non-Indigenous categories are the other categories that are awarded.

For 2019 NATSICC, with the blessing of his family, have renamed the Elder Award to the Deacon Boniface Award. Deacon Boniface Perdjert touched the lives of everyone that he met - and those he didn't through his words and writings.

The idea to pay tribute to our first ever Deacon occurred to the NATSICC Council whilst we were collating the nominations for our annual Service to Community Awards. What better way to acknowledge the shared goals and vision of our Elders?

The nominations for the 2019 Award were amazing. The council is buoyed by the fact that there are people working quietly in communities, sometimes for decades, bringing the person of Jesus Christ to the lives of others every day of the year.

Designed to promote the good stories, the 2019 Awards have indeed unearthed another batch of worthy winners that the council is proud to share with the Wider Catholic Community.

The Awards are presented by the local communities at local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Masses.

Award WINNERS

Deacon Boniface Award for Elders



FOR 2019, NATSICC HAS DECIDED TO RECOGNIZE EVERY ELDER THAT WAS NOMINATED.

- Elsie Heiss (NSW)
- Brenda Lester (SA)
- Ivan Wellington (NSW)
- Deacon Ralph Madigan (Qld)
- Dolly Hankin (Qld)
- Vicki Clarke (Vic)
- Elaine Walley (WA)

Adult



Cecilia Kelly (WA)

CECILIA STRIVES TO REACH HIGH GOALS THROUGH HER GENTLE, RESPECTFUL AND FRIENDLY APPROACH TO LIFE. LOCAL CHILDREN ARE DRAWN TO HER AND ASPIRE TO GREATER THINGS FOR THEMSELVES BECAUSE OF HER RESOUNDING WHOLEHEARTED BELIEF IN THEM.

Young Adult

18-25 YEARS



Josh Sly (NSW)

JOSH IS AN INSPIRATIONAL YOUNG MAN WHO CONTRIBUTES TO THE CATHOLIC ETHOS THROUGH HIS DEDICATION TO SHARING HIS CULTURE WITH STUDENTS

Non-Indigenous



Catherine Jones

CATHY'S TENACITY AND GRIT SHINE THROUGH ALL OF HER SERVICE, AS DOES HER LOVE OF THE OUTBACK. SHE IS A LIVING EXAMPLE OF THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN, SOMEONE WHO ACTS TO HELP THOSE IN NEED NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE.

NATSICC and the Bishops welcomed by Sydney's Reconciliation Church community

May 2019



Bishop Columba Macbeth - Green, Bishop Tim Harris, Bishop Charles Gauci, Bishop Christopher Saunders and our Chaplain Fr Darryl Mackie celebrated our mass. We also welcomed the visiting Natsicc Councillors and would like to thank everyone for coming. It was a great way to celebrate Mother's Day at the Church.

One Heart Many Voices Catholic Mission Conference '19

From the opening ceremony to the closing blessing, members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council participated and enriched the 2019 One Heart Many Voices conference in Sydney.

As per the previous conference, Councillors traveled to Sydney with water from their own communities. In a moving ritual, the waters from each State and Territory were combined and blessed by Perth Archbishop Tim Costelloe.

In addition to participating in the numerous workshops during an inspiring 3 days, NATSICC shared 2 workshops with an enthusiastic and reflective group of delegates.

NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak



Delegate responses

Powerful. Challenging reminder of responsibility we should not ignore.

We need to hear this right though the Church by the Aboriginal people.

Very good conversations, measured and social, creating harmony to go forward together.

Great inspiring session. I am so much more informed and feel more confident about following up on this.



was joined by Northern Territory Councillor Dean Chisholm and Lismore's Doreen Flanders (NSW Councillor) in a presentation that took participants on a journey from growing up Catholic on a Mission to teaching the next generation of Aboriginal leaders - and everything in between.

Using story telling as a vehicle to share perspective, the similarities that we all have as followers of Christ and the need to be united as one were the underlying principles that were explained.

The second presentation was focused on unpacking the Statement from the Heart. Using Dean Parkin's Tedx presentation as a starting point the NATSICC Council (joined by the Murri Ministry's Ravina Waldren) explored the hows, whys and, most importantly, the how we can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in their call for Recognition in the Constitution and equality in politics and Australian society as a whole.

Heartened by the over 50 people that chose to attend the group talked informally about the ways in which the Catholic Church can support the document and also support the different views of First Nations people in their own communities. It became clear that all voices are valid in this discussion and that all voices have value, dignity and the right to be heard.

The conference was a wonderful opportunity for all of us - as Catholics - to learn from one another and to build a sense of unity in Christ.

NATSICC Chair's pilgrimage to Coober Pedy

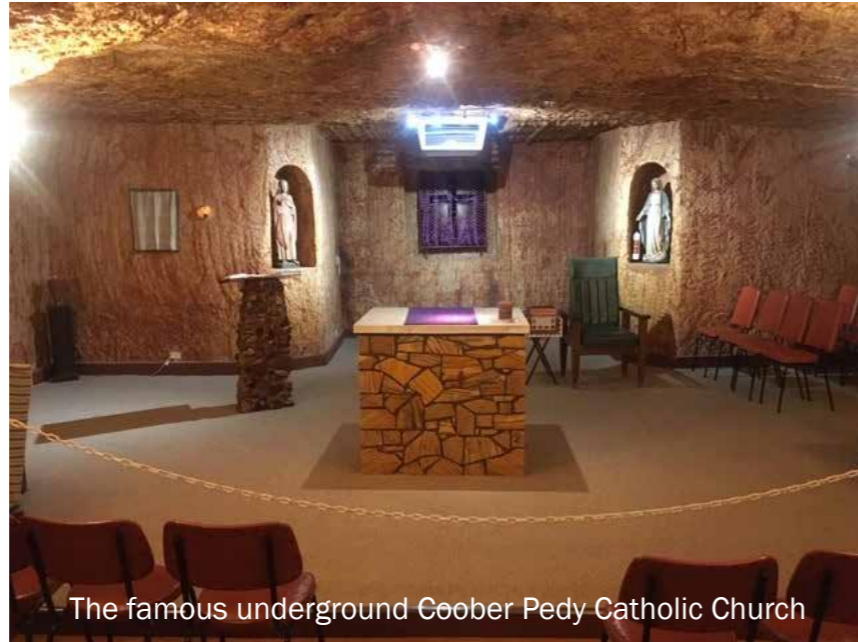
Sorry business called John Lochowiak back to his homeland.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) consists of one representative from each State and Territory. Each councillor is responsible for a very large area and, at times, they are called out to the farthest reaches of the area to walk alongside their community in both happy and sad times.

In April this year NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak was called out to the remote town of Coober Pedy as both an Elder and a Catholic Leader to attend the funeral of a respected Elder at Amata. A 10 hour drive from Adelaide, Coober Pedy is an enormous Parish as it stretches from Uluru all the way to WA, NT, QLD and NSW.

A harsh and unforgiving landscape does little to diminish the hospitality and welcome of the local community, which has existed from the time the first Jesuit Bush priests arrived right through to contemporary times where the coolness of the underground church welcomes visitors and locals to the loving embrace of Jesus Christ.

"Places like Coober Pedy show that the Catholic faith and traditional customs coexist and complement each other. Despite the challenges that face our people, and all people, in remote Australia, our faith is strong and the Holy Spirit continues to touch out hearts. I am always tired from the journey to my homeland, but I leave reenergised and strong." Said John.



The famous underground Coober Pedy Catholic Church

"It was sad that we lost uncle, and it was important that I was there to pay my respect and show that our traditions continue even though many Aboriginal people now live in an urban environment."

Also a member of the 2020 Plenary Executive Committee, John took the opportunity to share the progress of the consultations and to assure the community that their voice was important and respected in the process.

John's epic 3 day journey is representative of the commitment of all NATSICC Councillors, from the Northern Territory to Tasmania. We ask that you keep our NATSICC Councillors in your thoughts and prayers as they continue to work tirelessly to support and represent their communities on NATSICC.



Vinnies CEO David Wark, National President Claire Victory, SA President Cathy Beaton and NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak at the launch of the NATSICC / Vinnies Acknowledgment Plaques.

NATSICC and Vinnies SA working together to ensure that Traditional Custodians are Acknowledged

Vincentians believe that Jesus Christ is not only God, but also truly human and at home in our world. When the voice of the poor calls, they willingly leave their prayers, or other religious practices, knowing that they are leaving God for God. They seek to honour, love and serve their truly human God by honouring, loving and serving the poor, the abandoned, the victims of exclusion and adversity.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul have walked alongside the First Nations People of Australia for many years in their own caring and compassionate way. This relationship has been very evident in South Australia.

The Otherway Centre is the home of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) in Adelaide and has, for many decades been a second home to Aboriginal people visiting the city.

St Vinnies (as they are affectionately known) were there supporting those visitors through provision of clothing vouchers, access to programs and supporting staff in their endeavors.

It is fitting that this relationship continues in 2019. NATSICC Chair and ACM Manager John Lochowiak - who is on the Vinnies National Council and works closely with the State based team - is the glue that brings our organizations together.

NATSICC and the ACM are blessed to be working with SA Vinnies in developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). An important aspect of this plan is the Acknowledgment of Traditional Custodians in all Vinnies SA Locations. A custom plaque has been designed and will soon be placed in prominent positions across the State.

A tribute to our friend - Deacon Boniface Perdjert



Photo credit to
Mark Crocombe

It was with heavy hearts that we farewelled Deacon Boniface Perdjert, on March 18 2019.

Deacon Boniface, who was 82, blazed a trail for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to follow as he not only walked between two worlds – Catholic and Traditional – but he also brought them together.

Boniface's words and actions spoke loudly to the members of the Wadeye Community – of which he was a deeply loved and respected Elder – but also to the Catholic Hierarchy with whom he shared his wisdom on many official occasions.

NATSICC has created an online tribute to continue Deacon Boniface's legacy for future generations - <http://www.natsicc.org.au/a-tribute-to-deacon-boniface.html>



Deacon Boniface and Benedict XVI at World Youth Day, 2008

He was ordained the first permanent Deacon in Australia at Port Keats on July 19th 1974 by Bishop John O'Loughlin, the Bishop of Darwin. In November 1986, Boniface was present at the delivery of (now) Saint John Paul II's famous address to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Alice Springs

He assisted St. John Paul II at the beatification Mass for Mary MacKillop in Sydney in January 1995. It was fitting that Deacon Boniface received congratulations and accolades nationally to mark his 80th Birthday in 2016.

A man of extraordinary faith, Deacon Boniface was able to describe the ways in which his culture and faith came

together. He once described this relationship by saying "Jesus told us we have to love God with whole hearts, mind and spirit - that means the whole of me, and the whole of me is Aboriginal. There is no other way for me to love him." **Simple yet powerful.**

As the wider Catholic and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities grieve alongside the Community in Wadeye, the members of NATSICC ask that you keep Deacon Boniface's words in your hearts and continue the journey that he started all those years back by expressing your faith and culture in a way that is meaningful to you and enlightening for the Australian Catholic Church as a whole.

“My people existed here in Australia thousands of years before Abraham.

In all that time God was working with my people.

He worked through their culture.

He was saving us, despite our human weakness.

He was preparing us for the day when we would see the features of Aborigines in the image of His Son”

Deacon Boniface Perdjert



National 2018 NATSICC Assembly Photo Gallery

Thanks to Tony Robertson Photography



PEACE TO THIS HOUSE AND ALL WHO DWELL WITHIN

With over 120,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia, our first nation people form an important part of the fabric of Church life.

Every State and Territory in Australia has an Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministry, and NATSICC strongly encouraged Schools and Parishes to make contact with them in preparation for the celebrations on 2 July.

The theme for 2017 was 'Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me', which resonated strongly with our people. It was a reminder to keep an open mind and heart to not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but to all who are marginalised including refugees, the disabled and impoverished.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday has been on the Liturgical Calendar for nearly 30 years and is celebrated on the first Sunday in July. It is a time where Indigenous and non Indigenous Catholics come together to celebrate the richness and gifts that First Nations Culture bring to the Church. It must be said

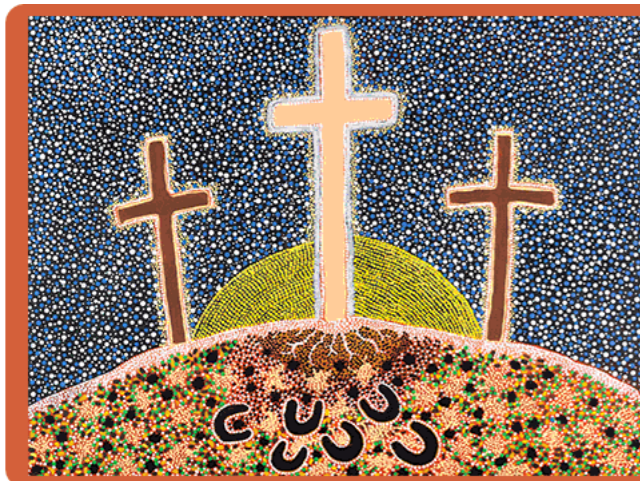


People talking to Jesus in the Brough Shed - Queenie McKenzie

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday is celebrated on the first Sunday in July

however that this occurs in some Parishes every day of the week. The challenge for us, as Australian Catholics, is to accept one another - with our strengths and weaknesses - as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Every year NATSICC produces a comprehensive range of resources to assist in the celebration of the day. For 2017, a dedicated website was built with multimedia resources, youth activities and much more. Visit www.natsicc.org.au and follow the links. **See middle pages for photos of the celebrations that occurred around Australia.**



NATSICC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Resources

The official set of resources as used by Parishes and Schools to celebrate the gifts of Australia's first people to the Church in Australia.

- Multimedia resources
- Youth Activities
- Liturgical Resources
- Creating a Welcoming Space

www.natsicc.org.au

2019 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUNDAY HOMILY

"At this time, as we consider the Mission of the Church in Australia in very challenging times, we ought to recall the many inspiring Aboriginal Christians who knew how to keep the faith amidst oppression, rejection and indifference."

'You are Australians, but we are Australia' was the refrain of activists for many years as they stood for Aboriginal rights in many a protest. Some, now Elders, were following in the footsteps of their parents and Elders. At this time, as we consider the Mission of the Church in Australia in very challenging times, we ought to recall the many inspiring Aboriginal Christians who knew how to keep the faith amidst oppression, rejection and indifference.

St John Paul II 's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at Alice Springs is often quoted, "the Church in Australia will not be the Church Jesus intended her to be until the Aboriginal people have made their contribution and that is joyfully accepted". This was a watershed moment for the identity and shape of the Church and Mission in Australia. However, the statement does presume that we, as Church, know our identity and what our mission now is in this land.

The Church in Australia is still being shaped by the land and the ancient culture she has encountered. She

not only needs Aboriginal people to contribute - she needs to ask Aboriginal people what it means to live the Gospel of Jesus in this ancient land. Aboriginal people are crucial to helping the Church understand who we are in this land. The First Nation people have an indisputable and irreplaceable role in shaping the story and identity of the Australian Church. We will never become the Church we are meant to be apart from the wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This will require a new depth of listening, a genuine appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and their story of encounter with new cultures.

Recently, an Elder reflected after years of fighting for equality and recognition that she had moved in her understanding of our identity as a Nation, "We are all Australia". This is from an Aboriginal woman who spent some time growing up in place where Aboriginals were detained and their lives regulated by white superintendents. Her father was removed with his family to another Reserve for standing up for more equitable conditions for

Aboriginal people. She says her father never lost his faith or had his spirit broken. It is clear that his faith tested in a crucible of suffering and injustice triumphed and was an inspiration to his family and many people. The authority of Jesus given to the seventy two "to overcome all the power of the enemy" (Lk:10:19) is clearly evident in his life and witness of faith.

There are so many stories like his - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men of faith-who drew strength from the Gospel, their land and their culture. There is something unique and profoundly spiritual when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people take up the Mission of the Gospel.

It is faith filled, down to earth, inspiring, healing and vulnerable. There is a genuine openness to the creativity and power of the Holy Spirit. Through story, song, art, drama the story of Jesus and his Ministry and his emphasis on relationships is highlighted. We start to glimpse the shape of the Mission of the Church in Australia born of the First Nation peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancient stories and their more recent story of encounter and resilience with non-Indigenous cultures provide a common story and identity born of this land.

Homily continued on next page



HOMILY CONTINUED.....

As people from other cultures are adopted into this land the story of First Nation peoples are what all Australians have in common-whether recently arrived or born here.

If the Church learns to listen and appreciate the action of God in ancient stories and ceremonies, the faith life, the liturgies, the Mission of the Church might be impacted. There are many inspiring encounters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the Gospel of Jesus. There is amazing faith in Indigenous Communities where Church and State policies were detrimental to both the culture and the dignity of the human person. Yet, there was an authentic encounter and experience of Jesus that has been passed down from generation to generation.

The two lungs of the Church in Australia are Indigenous and non-Indigenous being constantly filled by the Holy Spirit breathing the eternal newness of the Gospel. We are part of the Body of Christ with gifts of the Holy Spirit to bring the peace of Christ to this land. We are also responsible for the ancient cultural heritage of this land and its diverse climates and environments. Our environment has paid a hefty price for economic progress and our high standard of living; like depleted fish species and loss of biodiversity in our oceans; pollution of rivers and lakes and a massive waste problem driven by blind consumerism. We are not at peace with our land or amongst ourselves. We are spiritually sick which is reflected in the mental and spiritual health of many of our young people-Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

It is time we recognised that we need not only a contribution but also the gift of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the Church. It is time too, that Indigenous Australians realise only they can bring that gift to help shape the identity and Mission of the Australian Church.



Councillor in Focus Dean Chisholm (Northern Territory)

In Each edition of the NATSICC Newsletter we introduce you to a NATSICC Councillor. Councillors are appointed by their own States and Territories and fulfill their roles on a voluntary basis.

To get in contact with your State/Territory Councillor, visit the 'Your NATSICC' page at www.natsicc.org.au.

Dean Chisholm is of Aboriginal decent, a proud husband and a father of 5 children, 2 grandsons. He has been brought up in a loving environment with strict family values and his family is from Central Australia Arrente country.

"We have been taught to respect others, their values, to understand and value our Aboriginal heritage as well our European side. Dean has extensive knowledge and understanding of the environment and Aboriginal Cultures, and the ability to communicate with a range of stakeholders.

He is passionate about human rights, Indigenous issues, and helping to break down generational trauma to create strong families and positive pathways for future generations.

NATSICC MEETS WITH BISHOPS IN SYDNEY

A FRUITFUL MEETING BETWEEN NATSICC AND OUR BISHOPS COMMISSION

In recent times the meeting between NATSICC and the Bishops Commission for Relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics (BCRATSI) has been an opportunity for our two groups to connect, not only on 'business, but also on a spiritual level.

Recent meetings have taken place in Regional centres and have given the community a chance to 'yarn' with the NATSICC Councilors and the Bishops. These meetings have proved to be very successful and shares the message that the Bishops are there to listen and to learn from First Nations people.

In May 2019, the meeting was organized in Sydney to coincide with the Catholic Mission Conference. This location provided us with an opportunity to visit St Vincents Hospital and meet their First Nations staff and to learn about their many and varied programs. Both the Bishops and the NATSICC Councillors were impressed with the vigor and enthusiasm with which they shared their achievements.

The individual stories that the staff shared were a highlight and showed that the spirit of self determination and reconciliation is strong at the Hospital.

Fruitful discussions took place when NATSICC and BCRATSI sat down to meet 'officially'. The NATSICC Councilors bring issues from their local communities to the table, giving a voice to concerns from the ground level. This direct avenue to the Bishops is an example of the importance of the structure that NATSICC embodies and the openness of the Church to listen to our voices.

Key issues that were discussed:

- The need for the Bishops to encourage the appointment of First nations Deacons
- The Roles of Women in the Church
- Youth Suicide
- The 2021 NATSICC Assembly in Townsville
- NATSICC shared our new Strategic Plan

The Bishops were supportive and attentive to the issues raised and we have begun working two rads addressing these items in the next few months.



The Last Corroboree

Combining Faith, Culture and Ecumenism in the Nation's Capital



Canberra Aboriginal Catholic Ministry had its first Last Corroboree Supper on Thursday 11 April in the Parish Centre at St Benedict's Church, Narrabundah. It was amazing! In attendance were both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. Our invitations included people from other Faiths, and this proved to be a huge success.

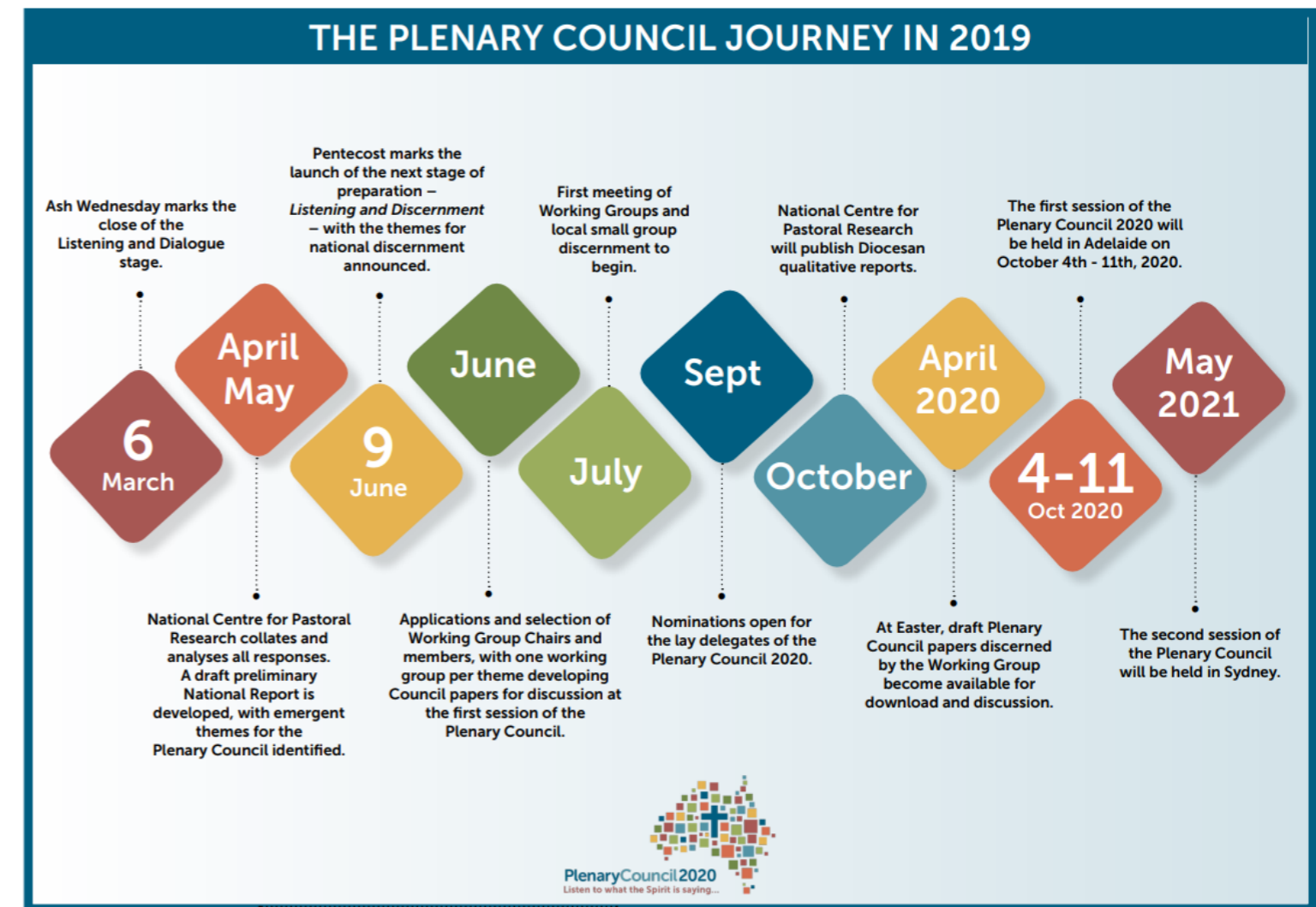
The concept of combining an Aboriginal Ritual - the Corroboree - with the Jewish tradition of Passover was first developed by the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Melbourne.

This was our "Passover Meal" - unleavened bread (or damper), bitter herbs, red wine (non-alcoholic), lettuce, parsley and salted water. We followed the prayers and rituals of a Passover Meal. Our prayers were Jewish, Christian and Aboriginal and before the last Blessing two of the women from the Islamic Faith read from the Koran and said a prayer.

Every person who attended praised the night. It was solemn. It was sacred. It was prayerful. It was emotional. It was inclusive.

As we move to be more like Christ, Ecumenical gatherings that respect other celebrations have proved to be an excellent way to come together and begin dialogue and education with one another.

There was an atmosphere of one-ness, peace and harmony. Participants said that they were touched by the ritual of it and you could "feel" the presence of the Creator Spirit with us. Now we all want to move forward together to help make the world a better place.



2020 Plenary Council Update

Following an extensive consultation period the 2020 Plenary Council has released the 6 Themes for discernment -

- Missionary and Evangelising
- Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal
- Prayerful and Eucharistic
- Humble, Healing and Merciful
- A Joyful, Hope-Filled and Servant Community
- Open to conversion, Renewal and Reform

NATSICC worked hard during the consultation phase to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voices were heard.

Activities included a workshop during the Assembly, creation of a webpage with a collection of resources for people to use in submitting their thoughts, a Yarning Circle Resource for communities holding consultations and being a point of community contact. NATSICC will continue to be involved in the process to ensure all voices are heard and valued.



"God is asking me to share my indigenous language and culture through my spirituality I have with the connect to my country. For the Australian Catholic church to acknowledge and make it a living document the 'Address to the Aboriginal People' by Pope John Paul II in Alice Springs in 1986."

Erica Bernard
Broome, 51

Finding a Spiritual Richness for Life

BISHOP CHRISTOPHER SAUNDERS' DIOCESE OF BROOME HAS BEEN WITNESS TO YOUTH SUICIDE IN KIMBERLEY COMMUNITIES. IN THIS ARTICLE, BISHOP REFLECTS UPON THE ROLE THAT SPIRITUAL POVERTY PLAYS IN THIS NATIONAL TRAGEDY.



The Coroner's recent findings on young people who have committed suicide in the Kimberley have not revealed anything we did not already know. Plainly however, it has drawn attention to the obvious failure of this nation, and of local society, to address the dreadful contagion since the last time a Coroner delivered a report on the matter.

Two things are certain. Firstly, these self-harming deaths are both a local and a national tragedy beyond all telling. There is a depth of sorrow at work that is akin to agony within families, in communities and in the hearts of all caring Australians. Secondly, there is no single solution to this crisis that has overwhelmed us and extinguished the lives of innocents. Adequate responses will only be found in actions and attitudes born out a sense of charity and justice, in such a way that they emanate from a commitment to change by the whole community.

Some of us will remember a time when there were no suicides among youth in the Kimberley and wonder what has happened to bring about this tragic change in circumstances. Certainly the abuse of alcohol can be listed as part of the problem together with marijuana and a cocktail of drugs now prevalent among our youth, adding further to mental health complications. It is worth noting that the crises in our Communities caused by the super-drug "Ice" have gone almost unnoticed by authorities and you have to wonder why?

Much emphasis has rightly been placed on material poverty as a cause for social unrest and mental disturbance. A lack of adequate food security and the deprivation of essential goods such as clothing and housing can add to a sense of marginalization and loss. This in turn can damage a person's sense of self-worth. So too can child abuse, family violence, wrongful peer group pressure (as seen in cyber bullying), and the rabid exploitation of an individual. These aberrations can often give rise to hurt, harm and a sense of hopelessness.

An aspect of our humanity that is seldom addressed is the crushing effect that spiritual poverty can have in our lives. This interior feeling of destitution too often rests heavily upon young people as they struggle with life and the growing pains that go with it. Such spiritual poverty raises people's inability to articulate responses to the basic questions of life – Why are we here, where have we come from, where are we going? How might our lives be lived in fullness? These are not philosophical mind games. They are at the core of our being and cannot be answered by trite speculation or random opinions.

In our Christian Tradition, the necessary nourishment of our spiritual selves draws upon the mercy and Grace of God made present through Christ. Keeping this Tradition alive in our innermost selves safeguards us from the spiritual poverty that diminishes us from within. Further, it empowers us to live a life with direction and purpose, armed with the spiritual richness that comes from Christ. It is in prayer that we find solace enough to discover God's boundless love for us and for others. In prayer we find forgiveness of others in our hearts, and heart enough to forgive ourselves for our shortcomings and imperfections.

May we always be generous enough to see to it that this giftedness, we enjoy from Christ as His disciples, is something we share readily with others. We pray that all may rise above everything negative so as to find that which gives life and gives it to the full.

WHY ISN'T THE GAP CLOSING?

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

We need to work together to close the Gap.

On 14 February 2019 Prime Minister Morrison outlined the failure of the Closing the Gap Strategy to attain the goals for which it set itself in 2007. Admirably, the Prime Minister has acknowledged and taken responsibility on behalf of the Government for letting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to linger behind non-Indigenous Australians in health, life expectancy and education. Our people are suffering in every area and quite simply, it is not good enough.

NATSICC wholeheartedly welcomes the renewed focus of engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in amending the framework. Importantly the inclusion of our people in the planning and delivery of related programs will also place responsibility upon us to work on reaching the targets.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities possess a strength of faith and culture that has not diminished since colonisation.” said NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak. “We continue to draw upon these pillars of our culture in the face of adversity and will continue to do so to reach parity with non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, education and the other measures contained within the Closing the Gap targets.”

Although aspects of the Prime Minister's address were well received, many of our people acknowledge that there is another the Gap that also needs to be addressed – the Gap between words and actions.

Closing the Gap has also resulted in an unnecessary layering of bureaucracy which has served to move Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people further away from decision making

processes. As Catholics we believe that the Principle of Subsidiarity should form a core pillar in the design and implementation of programs in partnership with - and for - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Subsidiarity empowers and acknowledges the genius and dignity of the individual by recognising that those closest to the problem or issue are best placed to provide a solution. We must encourage and use these intrinsic attributes to forge a path forward for our people and not bury them under protectionism or paternalistic measures.

NATSICC also conditionally welcomes the announcement that HECS debt will be waived for teachers that work in a remote community for four years. The issue with the announcement lies in the

fact that it does not consider the geographic dispersion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Centre for Pastoral Research has found that,

according to the latest census data, 63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics live in Major cities or inner regional areas, while a further 19% live in outer regional areas. Just under 18% live in remote or very remote areas. It would be more prudent to allocate the waiver of HECS debt based on areas of underlying need and disadvantage and to consider extending it to other occupations including nurses, doctors and other key areas of employment.

The combination of targeted HEC's incentives across a range of occupations, meaningful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, embracing subsidiarity in program design and delivery and the provision of stable and long term funding will result in positive outcomes for our people.



LISTEN TO WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

Join with over 5,000 young Catholics in Perth,
home of the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation

8-10 December, 2019 for the Australian Catholic Youth Festival

PLENARIES | MUSIC | WORKSHOPS | PRAYER | LEADERSHIP | SERVICE | PILGRIMAGE



Featuring a dynamic line-up of speakers and performers, including:

Fr Rob Galea – Festival Favourite, Fr Rob returns with his band to front the plenary house band for the first time at an ACYF.

Katie Prejean-McGrady – International Catholic author & speaker. Having travelled around North America since 2007 delivering engaging talks on a variety of topics, this will be her first visit to Australia.

Joe Melendrez – Rap Artist and Speaker, Joe is known for his high-energy performances and as America's most exciting Catholic performer.

AND

Sabrina-Ann Stevens – NATSICC Youth Councillor, Sabrina-Ann joins an impressive speaker line-up at ACYF19. Sabrina-Ann identifies as a young Aboriginal woman of the Yidinji and Kuku Yalanji decent and has a history of involvement in youth leadership and ministry in the Catholic Church.

and many more...

Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green Bishops' Delegate for Youth, Chairperson of the Bishops' Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and Bishop of Wilcannia Forbes.

**REGISTRATION
NOW OPEN
www.acyf.org.au**

Visit the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council Cultural Centre as part of ACYF's Expo Space.



SUPPORTERS



PERTH CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
AUSTRALIA

HOSTING PARTNERS