



# NATSICC NEWSLETTER

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

July 2017



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## 2017 NATSICC SPIRITUALITY GATHERING IN QUEENSLAND

IN 2016, NATSICC held the first Formation Gathering in the heart of Australia - Alice Springs. Designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics (and those working in Ministry with us), the retreat was a unique offering which was strongly supported by the numbers that attended.

It was decided, that given the success of the first retreat, a followup Gathering would be

held on Minjerribah - Stradbroke Island in 2017.

The momentum from 2016 contributed to a larger group making their way to the lands of the Quandamooka people to share their faith stories and participate in formation and workshops.

A report from the event and photographs are on page 2 and 3 of this newsletter.



# 2017 NATSICC Spirituality Gathering on Minjerrihbah (Stradbroke Island)

Delegates were asked to place themselves in the presence of God and to leave the stresses and worries of everyday life in Brisbane -the Gathering was a time to explore faith and further develop a relationship with Jesus.



An outstanding collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non Indigenous speakers, theologians and Elders assembled on Minjerrihbah (Stradbroke Island) in preparation for the arrival of delegates at the 2017 NATSICC Faith and Spirituality Gathering.

The 60 Delegates were asked to place themselves in the presence of God and to leave the stresses and worries of everyday life in Brisbane -the Gathering was a time to explore faith and further develop a relationship with Jesus.

NATSICC devised a 4 day program that balanced sharing, 'yarning', workshops and cultural presentations



Gathering presenters included QLD NATSICC Councillor and Theologian Evelyn Parkin, ACU fellow Joan Hendriks, Bishop Columba Macbeth -Green, Bishop Joseph Oudeman and Fr. Tom Gleeson (the barefoot Priest). Based on the concept of faith and culture intersecting and complementing one another, delegates workshopped the following topics:

## Meeting Christ in Faith and Culture

### What is faith?

### Unpacking scripture

### Evening Rosary sessions

### Laudato Si

A highlight amongst participants was the mass upon the shores of Dunwich. Celebrated by retiring Bishop Joseph Oudeman, the group settled in front of traditional sand artwork created by a local artist on the beach.

The swirling and intricate artwork depicted the 3 language groups on the Island and, explained the artist, has strong links to the Catholic tradition of the Trinity. The synergy of the two concepts was echoed in the Mass where the wind and spirit swirled amongst the congregation as the Eucharist was shared.

The intersection of faith and culture was a constant undertone of the Gathering and presenters allowed participants the space and time to consider their own experiences and to share their thoughts with others.

The local community – the Quandamooka people - were deeply involved in the gathering. Having lived on Minjerrihbah for more than 25,000 years, their traditional homelands provided the backdrop for scripture and Catholic teaching with parallel meaning.

Delegates attended mass celebrated by Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green in the local parish and, experienced the tranquility of the traditional birthing area of Lake Bumerria (Brown Lake) after a full day 26km pilgrimage.

The increasing demand for the NATSICC Spiritual Gatherings shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are wanting to expand on their foundation of faith and take up leadership roles within the Church.

## DELEGATE FEEDBACK

“

I have learned so much and I will help send the messages of to the youth of today and the future

Deadly bunch! Thanks so much!!

Covered tremendous ground –especially for teachers and Ministry workers

Presentations were very engaging and meaningful

The highlight for me was the Mass on the beach. Thankyou for working so hard to make this a success

Meeting Christ in faith and culture was the best session. It filled me with knowledge

Renewed my spirit, I wish I could stay longer

”







## THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

***It was fitting that during this special time, National Reconciliation Week - where Australians are called to come together - our first nation people have come together and called for unity in forging a future for our children. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the result of 3 days of strong deliberation in the heart of Australia – on the future of Australia.***

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) stands in solidarity with the Uluru delegation by echoing calls for substantial Constitutional reform based on a foundation of spirituality and subsidiarity. We seek constitutional reforms that will empower our people and allow us to take our rightful place in Australia.

From our own consultations, and those of the Government appointed Referendum Council, it is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not simply accept symbolic Constitutional acknowledgement without associated meaningful structural changes.

The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in decision making processes has been a recurring theme in all State and Territory consultations. The Uluru Statement is a strong representation of the sentiment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people nationally and must be considered in parallel with the findings of Pat Dodson's expert panel on constitutional reform. Both approaches have value and should be considered on their merits and, most importantly, the impact they will have on the well being and empowerment of Australia's First people.

NATSICC is heartened by the underlying message of the Uluru statement which espouses the empowerment of our people as a key fundamental and imperative to the creation of a fair and truthful relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non Indigenous Australians. We echoed this sentiment in our submission to the Referendum Council in May 2017, where our Council proposed that the Principle of Subsidiarity should form the foundation of future discussions and planning on Constitutional Recognition. Subsidiarity would dictate that along with major, meaningful changes to the Constitution, substantial reform to the processes in which consultation and

delivery of programs for our people would need to take place. The formation of a national voice, 'enshrined in the Constitution' epitomises the concepts of empowerment, self-determination and subsidiarity. Further discussions about the form of this representation needs to continue, however Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are unique and constantly changing and a system of representation needs to reflect this. It needs to be agile enough to deal with localised issues but have the mandate to address national, endemic matters. It is imperative that the reforms give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the confidence, resources and trust to take our future in our hands. A First Nations body may provide such a vehicle.

The Uluru Statement provides an insightful comment on the notion of Sovereignty where it is described as a spiritual notion, seeped in, and at the very core of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and life. The Western concept of Sovereignty is tied in strongly with ownership, which has proven to heighten apprehension and fear in non Indigenous Australia. Mutual understanding of the concept of Sovereignty is essential to fruitful negotiations on Treaty and Constitutional reform.

### Key points

- NATSICC applauds the statement's call for empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in decision making processes
- NATSICC joins a united national voice calling for meaningful and substantive change to the Constitution and the establishment of a First Nations voice
- NATSICC champions the Principle of Subsidiarity as a cornerstone framework of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy development and Constitutional reform
- The Statement does not discount Constitutional Recognition – however it calls for more substantial changes. It is not a case of one approach over another, it is what is best for Australia now and in the future.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are living amongst the connotations of colonisation and the resulting ripples continue to manifest themselves in our poor health, education and living standards.

For over 60,000 years our connection with our creator and the land empowered us to shape our lives and to flourish amongst even the most arduous conditions. It is now time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non Indigenous people come together to right the wrongs of the past and build a new relationship built on a foundation of understanding, compassion and respect.

“ ***The Uluru Statement provides an insightful comment on the notion of Sovereignty where it is described as a spiritual notion, seeped in, and at the very core of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and life.*** ”

## Supporting the process of Recognition

- Every community is different and may have different views on Recognition, Treaty and Sovereignty. What is agreed is that the changes have to be substantial and make a difference to the lives of First Nations people
- Take the time to engage with the First Nations people in your school and Parish by hosting a forum, discussion or dedicated Mass
- Contact your State or Territory Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministry and ask them how you can support their stance on the issue
- Include updates on the issue in weekly bulletins. Education is the key to understanding and reconciliation
- Invite an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander speaker to present to your Parish or school
- Embody the spirit of Reconciliation in your day to day life. As per the Uluru Statement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives need to be impacted positively via any proposed changes. Make that impact not only at the Ballot box, but on the streets and in your community





## St John Paul II plaque presented to the Bishops Conference Secretariat in Canberra

As a gesture of thanks to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak presented a plaque containing quotes from St John Paul II's speech in Alice Springs 1986 to Bishop Eugene Hurley and Fr Stephen Hackett.

In November 2016, NATSICC organised a church wide celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the significant address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With the assistance of the Bishops Conference, NATSICC received a Papal blessing and inspiring words of support from Pope Francis. Parishes and schools in every corner of Australia utilised the specially designed NATSICC resources to celebrate and remember the iconic address of St. John Paul II that has left an indelible mark on the hearts of our people.

"The celebration proved to be an excellent way of bringing St John Paul's words back to the forefront of everyone's minds. The Bishops were supportive in their Dioceses and we are very thankful and proud that the plaque will be displayed in Canberra on the walls of the Secretariat" said Mr. Lochowiak.

The plaque features a stunning landscape image of the MacDonnell Ranges, which sits prominently above a selection of quotes that have inspired and empowered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics for the last 30 years.

## Br Laurie joins the NATSICC team



NATSICC is very pleased to welcome Br. Laurie Sweeper to the NATSICC Office.

Br. Laurie is a Capuchin Franciscan Friar of Murrawari descent. His family come from North West New South Wales - Brewarrina, Goodooga. For over 20 years he worked in Catholic Schools, both Primary and Secondary as a Pastoral Counsellor offering parent and student support.

"In the 1990's I had the privilege of working with the Brisbane ACM as part of their Juvenile Detention Chaplaincy and as a Juvenile Court assistant" added Br Laurie. He has worked at the Adelaide Aboriginal Catholic Ministry for the past 2 years and has supported June Romeo and Chairperson John Lochowiak in the various projects and events held at the ministry.

As an Aboriginal man and a Religious Brother, Br Laurie brings a unique perspective to NATSICC, which he hopes to utilise in supporting requests from ACM's ad supporting NATSICC Councillors in their important roles as leaders in communities and the Church.

Br Laurie joins our National Administrator Craig Arthur in Adelaide.



## TIWI NUN SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

SISTER Anne Gardiner vividly recalls the day she flew to the Tiwi Islands to start her missionary work.

"That was a moment of joy when I landed," she said. "I got out of the plane and the children all ran up to me, pinching my skin and saying 'you look so young'."

The year was 1953. Sr Anne was just 22 years old and, as a member of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, she had been asked to move to Bathurst Island, the smaller of the two Tiwi Islands, 80km north of Darwin, to live among the Tiwi Aboriginal people.

"I didn't know very much about indigenous people at all. I was enthusiastic, I was full of life, I wanted to change the world, but to go to Bathurst Island I think the people there changed me," she said.

She recalls she didn't know exactly what her mission would be, but she was well guided by the man who had founded the Tiwi Catholic mission in 1911, Bishop Francis Xavier Gsell, who she met in Sydney on her way to her new posting.

"He was a physically big man. He had a very strong voice. He had a very white beard and he had penetrating eyes," Sr Anne said.

"And I asked him 'What will I do? I'm going to Bathurst Island.' And he looked down through his beard and looked deep into me and said two words, 'Love them'." She set about devoting her life to teaching, building community and supporting the Tiwi people and their culture.

"You live a life that must be very much like the Palestine of Jesus' day," Sr Anne said.

"You walk with the people, you mourn with the people, and listen to their stories. Jesus was a great storyteller and I think the Gospel comes alive up here."

"And I am very, very grateful for the time I've spent with them and prayed with them, gone to their funerals and smoking ceremonies, and your faith deepens because there's quite often a funny side to it, quite often a serious side to it, and you laugh with them and you cry with them."

Sr Anne was recently honoured for her lifetime work by being named as the Northern Territory Senior Australian of the Year

She has been working tirelessly with the Tiwi people, especially the women, to ensure their culture and language is documented and preserved for future generations.

Tiwi elders have already planned her funeral, and told her she will be buried there as a sign of great respect.

STORY AND PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CATHOLIC LEADER



# QUEENSLAND MINISTRY PILGRIMAGE

*Appointed as Queensland's latest representative on NATSICC, Evelyn Parkin certainly hit the ground running in late 2016 when she embarked on a 5000km pilgrimage up the Queensland coast. "Following the NATSICC retreat in Alice Springs, I was invited to assist with a Christian Women's Retreat in Cairns" said Evelyn. "I decided to go by road, with my husband, in our motor home and meet with the Aboriginal and Islander ministries and Councils along the way"*



**Hopevale:** "I visited Paster George Rosendale. On my own journey Paster George is someone who helped me connect both spiritualities and for that I will be forever grateful."

Pastor George is well known for his teachings on Aboriginal Spirituality and Christianity.



Back L-R: Cecilia O'Brien, Pat Wilson, Sylvia Wagner, Josephine Murgha, Evelyn Parkin, Yvonne Stevens, Gertrude Davis  
Front: Sabrina Stevens, Aunty Lena Stevens, Aunty Mary Oliver.

**Cairns:** "I attended and presented at the Women's Christianity Retreat. Sessions included Lectio Divinia, Dadirri, 'My life Journey' refection, Mass and discussions."

Women are often the backbone of ministries and communities so opportunities to come together and discuss faith and culture are very valuable.



Aunty Gladys Sailor, Evelyn, Carol Kyle, Alice Bin Tahal

**Townsville:** "It was lovely to meet with the ladies, we sat and listened to the things happening in the community"

The Townsville ministry is very active and is involve in many programs in the Diocese including Cultural awareness, formation, building networks in communities and embracing the gifts of Elders.



Louise Smith, Evelyn, Adele Giles, Carol Willie, Coral Way and Margaret Hornagold had already left.

**Rockhampton:** "We sat and talked and shared"

The Catholic Education Office is a strong presence in Aboriginal and Islander Ministry in Rockhampton. Many generations of inspiring Indigenous Catholics live and worship in 'Rocky'.



Murri Ministry is the home of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Brisbane. Evelyn meets regularly with Ravina and the team at Woolloongabba.

## One Heart Many Voices Catholic Mission Conference '17

From the opening ceremony to the closing blessing, members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council participated and enriched the 2017 One Heart Many Voices conference in Sydney.

Councillors travelled to Sydney with water from their own communities. Water from the sacred springs of Santa Teresa mixed with that from every State and Territory as it all came together in a vessel which symbolised unity and fraternity amongst not only Australia's First People, but all Australians.

NATSICC Councillors used this water to bless all participants, using the most symbolic of means - small branches collected from local gum trees. It was a moving ceremony which proved a highlight for delegates.

**Thank you for this opportunity to hear from the Aboriginal people at this conference.**



Alongside high profile speakers such as Fr Frank Brennan and South African Ginn Fourie, NATSICC workshopped and unpacked the address of St John Paul II to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Alice Springs in 1986.

Assisted by Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green, workshop participants listened to the address in full and then discussed the impact and significance of those words, which were spoken 30 years ago. The intent and message of St John Paul II's words are still as relevant today as they were in 1986. This speaks to the genius and understanding of the then Pontiff, but unfortunately also to the lack of progress in Australia relating to Indigenous people.

The group discussed the challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still facing in contemporary society and the need to feel fully accepted by the Church. "It was excellent and mind opening to learn about the Aboriginal people and how they struggling to put up and keep the points alive" stated one participant in the workshop.

The Council thoroughly enjoyed the conference and found the range of speakers and opportunity to network with peers an invaluable experience for their positions on NATSICC as well as their State and Territory roles.

A NATSICC board meeting was conducted following the Conference at which the Council expressed their thanks to Catholic Mission for the opportunity to participate in the event.



# Aboriginal and Islander Mass

Victorian NATSICC Councillor Sherry Balcombe shares her experience at St Thomas' Parish in Mareeba and details the wonderful work of Indigenous Connections

I was fortunate enough to be invited to St Thomas Catholic Church in Mareeba by Deacon Ralph Madigan and Fr Robert Greenup in October.

Every year they hold a special Aboriginal Mass at St Thomas' the mass was attended by many Aboriginal people. It started out the front with a water blessing accompanied by the droning of the Didgeridoo.

Some lovely young ladies from the local Catholic school attended and participated in the mass in the opening procession and processing the gifts to the altar.

It was wonderful that our NATSICC youth Representative Sabrina Stevens and her mother Yvonne were able to make the trip to support Deacon Ralph and Fr Robert.

Many had travelled from Cairns which are over an hour away to support the beautiful mass.

St Thomas' is a beautiful church with many things reminding me of Italy itself with its arches and touches of marble around, so the Italian influence is definitely in their town.



St Thomas' Parish - Mareeba



Fr Rob Greenup, Sherry Balcombe, Sabrina Stevens and Deacon Ralph Madigan in Mareeba

Mareeba is actually my own Grandfathers Country - Muluridji - so it was a real honour to be on home country and to acknowledge the Traditional custodians, my own ancestors.

I gave an Acknowledgment of Country and then was given the opportunity to speak to the congregation about our work here at the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Victoria and about our national body NATSICC.

After Mass was finished I had many local people who were not Aboriginal come to me and say thank you and that it was great to hear me speak about our deep connection with the Creator Spirit about our relationship with God and our deep Spiritual relationship with the birds and animals and that they had not heard a lot about this, so I hope that I have helped to open some communication lines in the community or at least sparked some interest in Aboriginal Spirituality.

Beside St Thomas' church there is a special space put aside for Aboriginal people to meet decorated with signs and symbols and it is dedicated to Aboriginal people it is the Indigenous Connections room. I left some information on the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria including Aboriginal Pray card, book marks, flyers and a DVD on Aboriginal Spirituality when I went back it was all gone.

It was great to be welcomed so warmly and a real pleasure to speak on my Grandfather's country, so thank you to all at St Thomas in Mareeba.

I am a proud Aboriginal woman born and raised at Bowraville part of the Gumbaynggirr Nation. My country is part of the beautiful mid north coast of NSW from Scotts Head through to South Grafton. I grew up in a very large family with strong Catholic values. My family and my Christian life play an important role in who I am and the work do with families and communities.

I have been employed by the Catholic Schools Office Diocese of Lismore for 21years as the Aboriginal Education Advisor. My work involves addressing Indigenous education and issues effecting Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders students in mainstream classrooms. It also involves contributing to the vision of Catholic Education in the Diocese by providing assistance to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Students, Parents, Teachers, Indigenous Workers and all students in the Diocese of Lismore's Catholic schools.

Over these years I have also set up the Lismore Indigenous Theology Education (LITE) committee and we are an outreach to Wontulp Bi Buya College to run the Cert III in Theology and Ministry a Nationally Accredited Course through QLD. This has been a very positive and productive relationship with the Wontulp Bi Buya College.

The Theology and Ministry course helps and strengthens our Christian faith and deepens our knowledge and understanding of our Aboriginal Spirituality. It also strengthens our church identity as Indigenous people and helps to build the confidence needed to connect with our own families and communities. This then helps to empower us with the faith, vision and skills required to effectively build up others in our families, in their church, and their local communities. Many of the students have consequently taken on leadership roles in the various ministries in their local communities.



Doreen presenting at the Catholic Mission Conference 2017

## Councillor in Focus Doreen Flanders (NSW)

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](http://www.natsicc.org.au).

This month we are very pleased to be able to share the story of the newest Councillor on NATSICC - New South Wales' Doreen Flanders.



I am also a part of;

- Diocese of Lismore Marist Fathers Indigenous Education Team that provide financial assistance to students who are enrolled in Catholic Schools of the Lismore Diocese.
- Catholic Schools Aboriginal Advisory Committee (chairperson)
- Lismore Indigenous Theology Education - LITE (chairperson)
- Diocesan Representative on the NSW Catholic Education Aboriginal Advisory Committee
- and currently studying Certificate IV Mental Health & Suicide Prevention - Wontulp Bi Buya College



# His Holiness expresses his esteem for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture

In addition to providing his blessings for our celebration of the 30th Anniversary of St John Paul II's speech in Alice Springs, Pope Francis shared his esteem and Spiritual closeness to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a letter and blessing to Indigenous Australians.



Jesus spoke directly to the hearts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on 29 November 1986 in Australia's heart – Alice Springs. The message was delivered to our people by his devoted apostle Saint John Paul II. We had travelled along our well-worn trade routes from every corner of Australia to encounter God on that day.

As Saint John Paul II spoke, a wind storm picked up the red soil from the Earth and swirled it amongst our people. The dust seemed to intertwine with the words of love, hope and empathy. The message touched our souls and it touched our skin. Never before had we felt so welcome in the house of Jesus as when Saint John Paul II said:

*'You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.'*

We were filled with hope when he said:

*'If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire 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!'*

The impact of this day on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics cannot be measured. It provided the encouragement for the establishment of Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministries all over Australia and it lit the fire our hearts which still provides the warmth, energy and strength for us to continue. We now have over 120,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia and the support of our Australian Catholic Bishops on our journey of faith.

2016 marked the 30th Anniversary of Saint John Paul II's visit to Australia and we need his words now more than ever - our people have the worst health in Australia as well as the highest incarceration and youth suicide rates in the world.

In partnership with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) called for a day of celebration on 27 November 2016 where Parishes and Catholic School's held a celebration of the visit.

Pope Francis wrote to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and provided a blessing and shared his spiritual closeness. His words (full letter overleaf) were uplifting and reaffirming of St John Paul II's hopes for Australia's first people to be welcomed and nourished by the Church.



To Mr John Lochowiak  
Chairperson  
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

I send cordial greetings and best wishes to you and the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the visit of Saint John Paul II to Alice Springs. I assure you of my spiritual closeness as you reflect on the many ways in which Almighty God has blessed your community through that historic visit.

This anniversary affords me the happy opportunity to express my deep esteem for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for your ancient cultural heritage. Uniting my voice to that of Saint John Paul II, I encourage you in his words: "Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost." For when you share the noble traditions of your community, you also witness to the power of the Gospel to perfect and purify every society, and in this way God's holy will is accomplished. I pray that this occasion will provide an opportunity to deepen your love for Christ and for one another, offering a convincing and tangible sign that we are "no longer strangers and sojourners, but... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

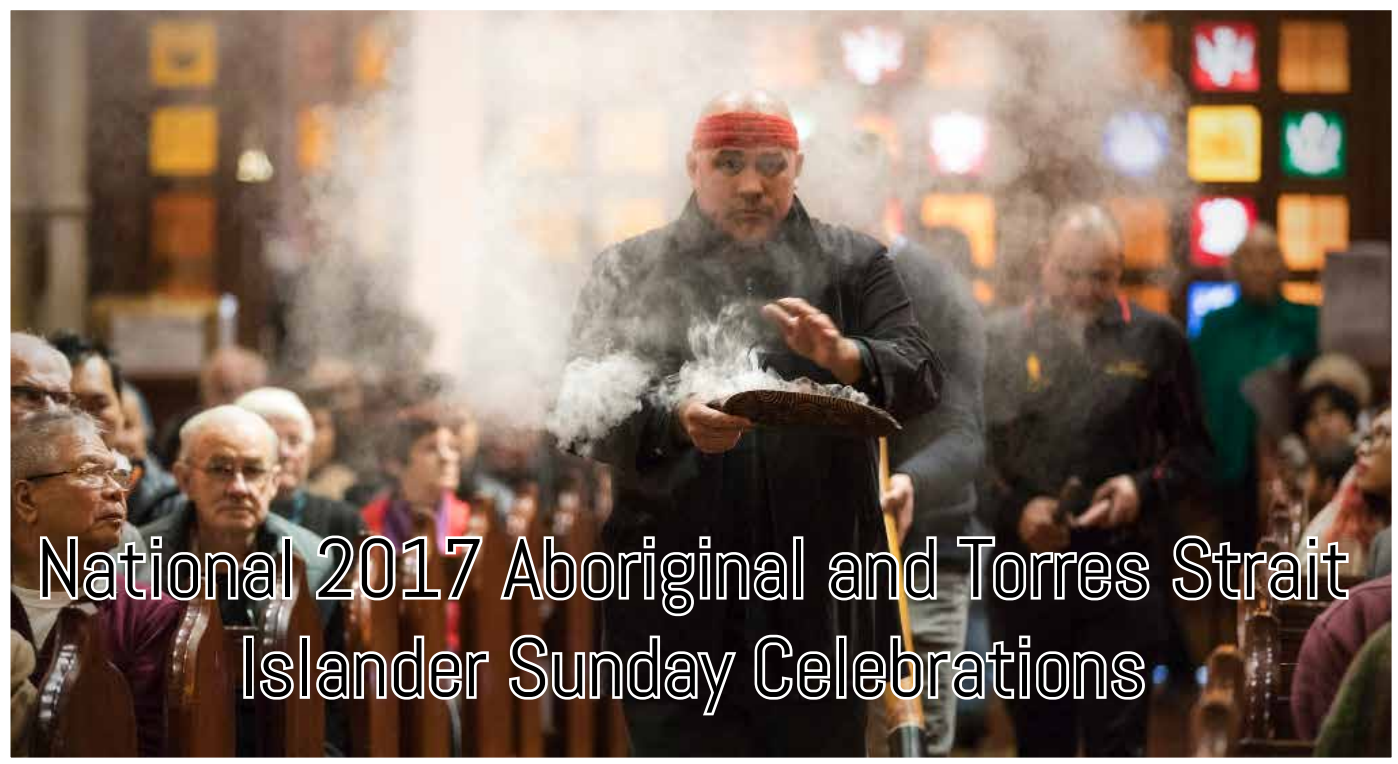
Commending you and all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the intercession of Saint Mary of the Cross McKillop, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 29 November 2016

Francis

Francis





National 2017 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Celebrations



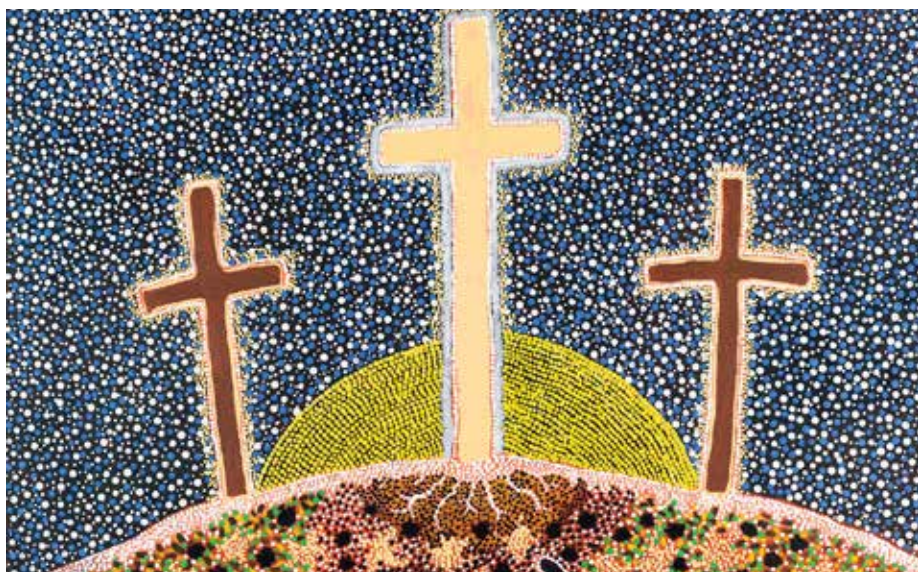
# ANYONE WHO WELCOMES YOU, WELCOMES ME

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



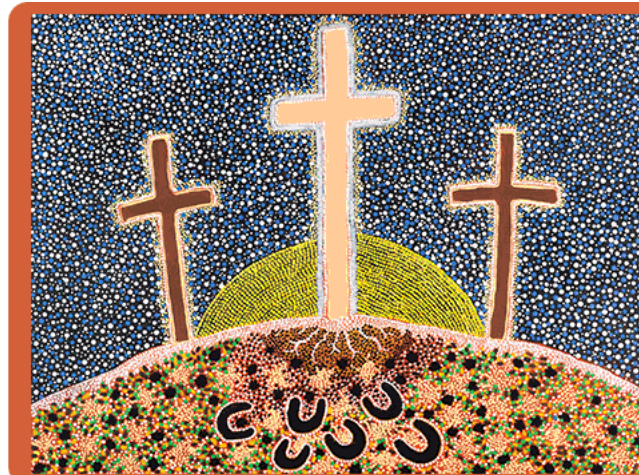
Three Crosses by Yvonne Tjintjiwara Edwards

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

said 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](http://www.natsicc.org.au) and follow the links. **See middle pages for photos of the celebrations that occurred around Australia.**

“**The challenge for us, as Australian Catholics, is to accept one another - with our strengths and weaknesses - as brothers and sisters in Christ.**”



**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](http://www.natsicc.org.au)

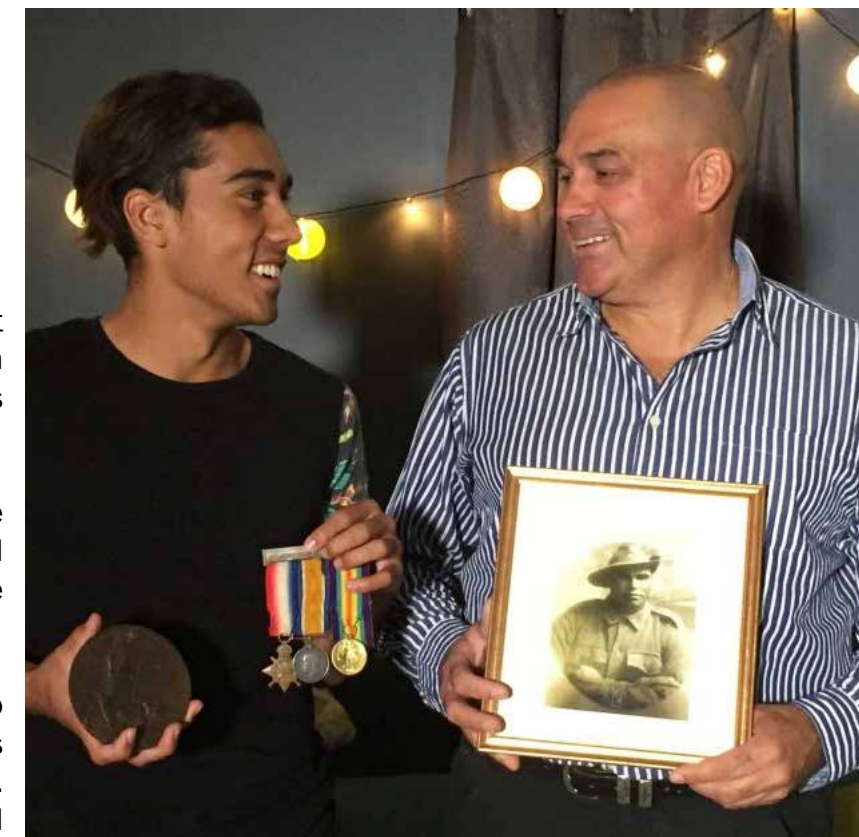
## The ANZAC spirit alive and well in South Australia

If there is one thing that comes out of sharing Arthur Walker's story, John Lochowiak hopes that it simply brings people together.

Arthur lied about his Aboriginal heritage and his marital status so that he could enlist in the army and fight for the country he loved.

Although he never made it back to Australia, Arthur Walker's legacy lives on through his story and his family. "Every generation has an Anzac" said John, whose second oldest son bares the name. "it reminds us of our history and our responsibility to keep telling the story".

Each year on ANZAC day, the Lochowiaks rise well before the sun and are in readiness for the dawn service - no mean feat with 5 children. The day is shared with families of other ANZAC's and war veterans, swapping stories

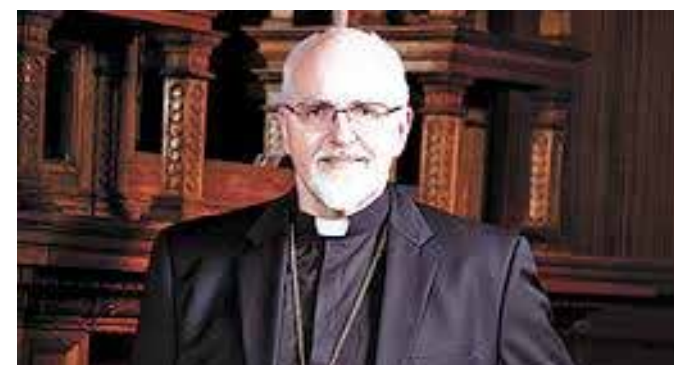


and reminiscing about those that made the ultimate sacrifice.

"I want people to know that despite the atrocities and injustices that Aboriginal people faced, we had enough forgiveness in our hearts and love for our fellow countrymen to fight for this land. As Catholics, we are called to forgive and show mercy on a daily basis and this story is a way of bringing those concepts to life" said John.

To learn more about Indigenous service men and women, visit the Australian War Memorial site at [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au)

## FAREWELL TO BISHOP JOE OUDEMANN



In his role as an Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane, Bishop Oudemann was an ardent supporter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in the Archdiocese. His passion for Australia's first people was also evident in his relationship with NATSICC and with the Murri Ministry in Woolloongabba. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, their first experience of Bishop Joe (as

we know him) was seeing him sitting barefoot upon the ground at the 2006 NATSICC Assembly in Alice Springs. His willingness to listen and understand traditional spirituality and culture became a trademark of the 'way he went about things'.

The last official role of Bishop Joe was to attend the 2017 NATSICC Spirituality retreat on Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island). His session was co-facilitated by Evelyn Parkin and in many ways epitomised his episcopate - he and Evelyn unpacked scripture and related the key underlying messages for the group in an engaging and thoughtful way.

We sincerely thank Bishop Joe for his continued support of our people over many years and we wish him all the best in the next phase of his life!





## WELCOMING BISHOP TIM HARRIS

**Due the retirement of Bishop Joseph Oudemann (see article on page 17) the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (BCRATSI) has welcomed newly installed Townsville Bishop Tim Harris to the Commission.**

**NATSICC are very pleased to welcome Bishop Harris and we are looking forward to working with him in the years ahead. Upon his appointment as the Bishop of Townsville, the council wrote to convey our congratulations and we were very encouraged by his warm response to that letter.**

**In that response, Bishop Harris wrote “I have much to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples and I look forward to working with all of you as my brothers and sisters”.**

Queensland NATSICC Councillor Evelyn Parkin attended Bishop Harris’ installation in Townsville and provided the following account

*I attended the Ordination of Bishop-Elect, Rev Timothy James Harris at Townsville. Rev Tim was welcomed as the Sixth Bishop by the people of Townsville who had been waiting more than three years for a new Bishop. This was my first time being present at a Bishop-Elect Ordination and I was feeling excited to be part of this wonderful Celebration.*

*I was very thankful to be met by Alice Bin Tahal, the Project Coordinator who made me feel so welcome. From the airport, we drove straight to the Cathedral*

*for Evening Prayers followed by dinner in the grounds of the Cathedral. When we arrived at the Cathedral, I was very happy to see familiar faces that I hadn’t seen for quite awhile. Uncle Peter and Auntie Dolly from Mt Isa, Auntie Gladie, Auntie Nerida and her Husband from Townsville to name a few as well as other members of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council.*

*During the Prayer Service Rev Tim said that he had some very important things to do in the first month as the Bishop of Townsville and one was to go to Palm Island to meet the people there. I thought to myself good on you Father and my heart felt emotional. I knew that the people all over had a wonderful Bishop for everyone in the Townsville Diocese.*

*What an amazing sight seeing all the Clergy, the Altar Servers as they walked down the Procession to the Altar and along the side seats. It was truly something special with all Catholic Rituals and Ceremony of an Ordination. We were third from the front with a clear view and wanting to capture everything but not sure where to look as so much was happening.*

**We will walk side by side with you, Bishop Tim - and we will learn from each other.**



## Faith and culture in the Tiwi Islands

**Bishop Hurley, Fr Pat Mara and Religious Education coordinators visit Ranku for Mass and First Reconciliation for students.**

Term two has been a very exciting time for our MCPS community. When the sun finally shone through the big wet and dried out the dirt roads we opened our new school in the remote community of Ranku.

Families are returning to the tiny outstation, surrounded by rugged bush and dense vegetation, knowing that their children can access a quality catholic education on their traditional land.

In week seven Bishop Eugene and Father Pat, joined by our Religious Education Coordinators Marilyn and Jane, made the 80km journey to Ranku to celebrate mass. Students who have been learning about how Jesus forgives us for our sins made their First Reconciliation during the visit.

After Bishop Eugene blessed the students and teachers, he was treated to a tour of their classroom and traditional dances. Students also took him into the bush and demonstrated techniques for hunting possums and carpet snakes.

A big thankyou to Anita and Elisha who have worked tirelessly launching the Ranku school to benefit our Tiwi community. Many students will return to the Wurrumiyanga community on 18 June to celebrate their first Eucharist with their peers.

*Story by MCPS community.*



**arrernte language bible launched in Alice springs on 2 July 2017**

**See page 23 for more details**



# MORE THAN JUST A NUMBER

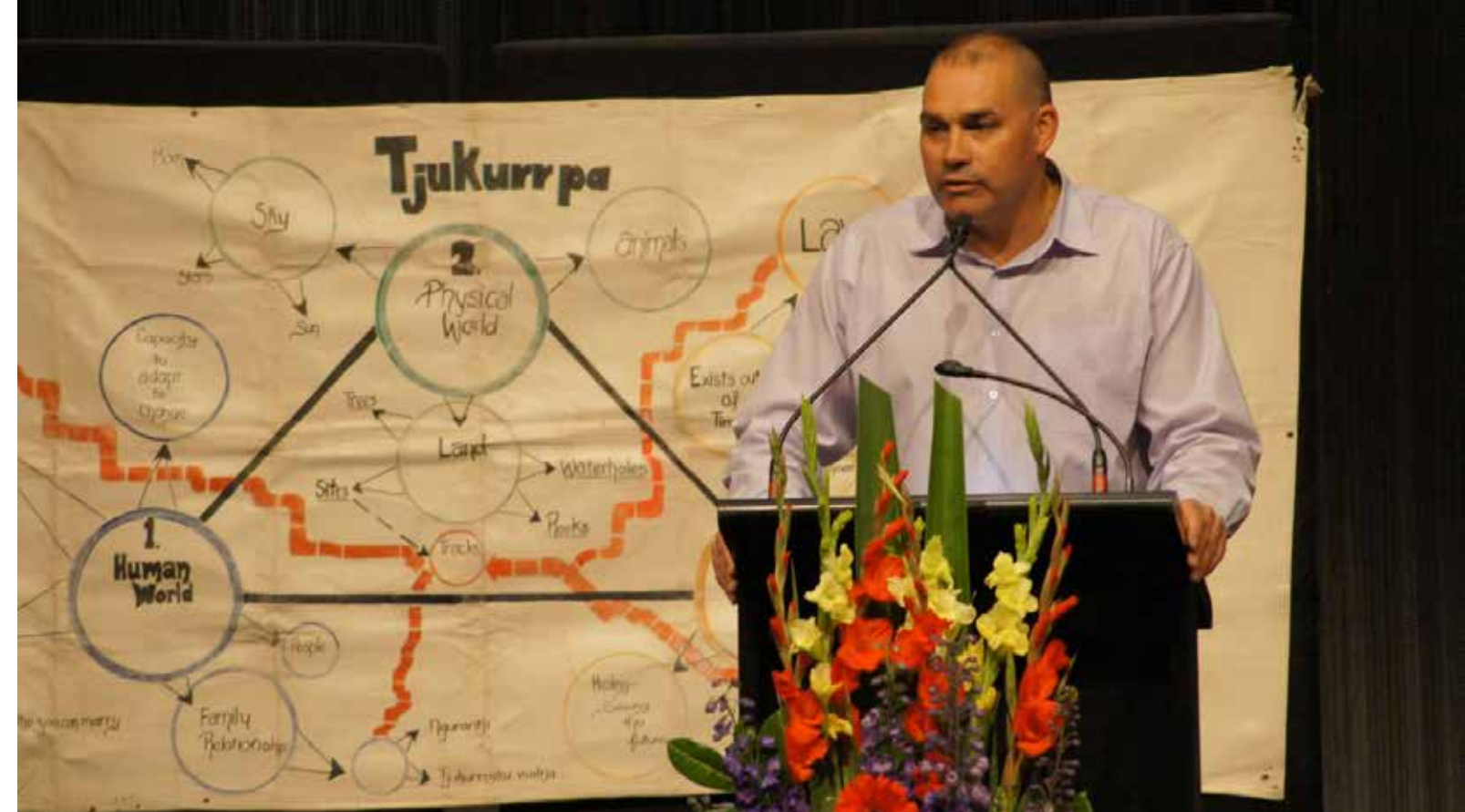
USING STATISTICS AS A TOOL TO REACH OUR PEOPLE



In collaboration with the Pastoral Research Office (PRO), NATSICC has developed a set of data that identified Parishes with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics. The data was sourced from the 2011 Census and divided responses into Parish boundaries. Much thanks must go to the PRO team who worked tirelessly to realign the data set so that we, as a church can gain a clearer understanding of where our people worship.

Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministries have received the data and have used it to develop ways of engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and informing them of their projects and activities.

We envisage that we will again provide the same data to the ministries once the 2016 information is made fully available.



## NATSICC Chairperson appointed to Plenary Council Executive Committee

The Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council have announced the names of those who have accepted appointment to the Plenary Council Executive Committee. Their appointment followed an extensive confidential process of consultation across the Australian Church to ensure diversity. Together they bring a variety of gifts, competencies and experience to the work of the Executive Committee.

NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak has been included amongst the people that will work closely with the Bishops Conference to ensure the successful preparation, celebration and implementation of the Plenary Council 2020.

The Executive Committee will be chaired by Archbishop Coleridge who said that the Plenary Council will play a crucial role in shaping the Church's future in Australia. 'This is no time for the Church to be putting up signs that say "business as usual". If we needed any proof, then the Royal Commission has shown that. We need to face the facts, and in the light of the facts, which aren't always friendly, we have to make big decisions about the future. The Plenary Council will place the

Church on a sound footing to respond to what is not merely an era of change but a change of era.'

John Lochowiak is understandably proud to have been approached and appointed and said 'To have Aboriginal representation on such an important committee is a step forward in the right direction. As Chairperson of NATSICC, I hope to be able to consult widely with our people and ensure a voice for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics.'

'We are the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the Church in Australia and we have so much to offer in terms of incorporating culture and spirituality on a daily basis. We, as the Catholic Church are one body, like family, and family is the most important thing to our people.' Mr Lochowiak continued.

NATSICC is hoping to be active in the consultation process for the 2020 Plenary via the many Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministries throughout Australia.



Donna Ryder and ACM members celebrating the St John Paul II Mass in Perth



## SR ROSE MARY DISCOVERS CULTURAL SIMILARITIES

### A MUCH LOVED SISTER AT THE ADELAIDE ACM, SR ROSE MARY SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

When Sister Rose Mary Mangalanathan decided on a religious life with the Sisters of St Anne in Chennai, India, the last place she expected to end up was Australia.

Coming from the traditional Catholic family in Chennai, South India capital of Tamil Nadu, Rose Mary was sure her mission would be helping people of her own country.

As she started her teaching ministry in a Jesuit School in northern India, she was chosen to go to Ethiopia in a remote place. Within a few months into her three-year mission in Ethiopia, she realized it was “God’s call” and she found the Ethiopians to be deeply “spiritual, peaceful, and loving” people. After facing difficulty teaching students in their national language, the locals went to great lengths to teach her their Amharic language.

She returned to India to complete her final vows preparation training while working in a social work centre and then in a secondary school and was expecting to remain there or perhaps have the chance to return to Africa but was told she was being sent to Australia.

Sr Rose Mary quickly came to understand that for Indigenous Australians, it was not only their souls that needed attention. Working as a social worker for Centacare in Port Augusta, Sr Rose Mary was shocked to find that many Aboriginal people were deprived and faced issues such as domestic violence, mental illness and substance abuse.

She spent eight months in Port Augusta and has recently moved to Adelaide where she is working at the Otherway Centre, part of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry.

Sr Rose Mary said she was enjoying being able to

Story adapted from The Southern Cross (Adelaide)



Photo: Courtesy Southern Cross

in a relaxed atmosphere while hearing their stories and sharing her faith.

She has also enjoyed getting to know about their history and culture which, she said, had many similarities with her own Indian culture. “The way they treat their elders with respect and listen to their words – it’s the same as us,” she said.

“Some of their ritual practices and values they hold on to surprised me.” She said even the Aboriginal smoking ceremony reminded her of the incense burning in new homes which was practised by Hindus but pre-dated any of the religious practices in her country.

She is unsure how long her mission will be here in Adelaide but is happy to leave it up to God.

“ **The way they treat their elders with respect and listen to their words – it’s the same as us.** ”

## MILESTONE FOR ARRERENTE CATHOLICS - LAUNCH OF THE BIBLE IN LANGUAGE

This is a milestone and GOOD NEWS for all but especially for the Arrernte speaking Catholics and all those who were involved in this massive 25-30 year Eastern & Central Arrernte Bible Translation Project. This priceless treasure will be officially launched by the Arrernte Catholics elders themselves on Sunday 2nd July 2017 at OLSH Parish, Alice Springs in the context of the Holy Mass combined with the celebrations of NATSICC Sunday & NAIDOC week.

The main translators of this shortened version of the Arrernte Bible were of 30-40 elders from Santa Teresa Parish and Ngkarte Mikwekenhne (Mary Mother of the Church) Catholic Community. The initial project was spearheaded by Mr Neil Broad, Director, Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, Inc. (AuSIL), and fully supported by the various Arrernte Catholic Chaplains over the years in partnership with the Diocese of Darwin and the Bible Society.

We will be launching all the 27 Books of the New Testament and 3 Old Testament Books in vernacular namely, Genesis, parts of Exodus and the Book of Ruth. Many individuals and organisations who financially sponsored the project will be flying in from interstate & overseas.

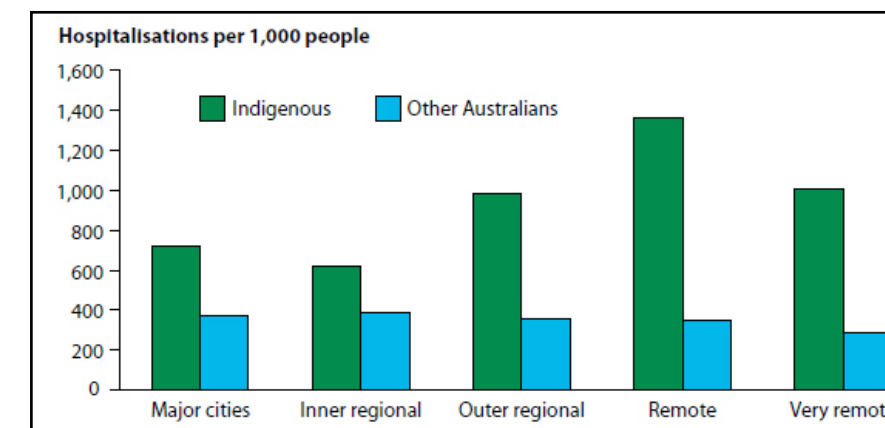
We in the Red Centre are convinced that Aboriginal language matters for it connects the native speakers to their true cultural and spiritual identity in their experience of the Mystery we call God.

It is my hope that God’s Word in Arrernte language will bring new life, new discovery and a new articulation of who Jesus Christ is in the local Arrernte culture.

**Fr Raass**

## NATSICC TOILETRY BAG PROGRAM

### HELPING PEOPLE WITH THE BASICS IN HOSPITAL



The NATSICC Toiletry bag program provides staple items for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people staying in hospital. The bags are distributed via Aboriginal Catholic Ministries nationally.

In many cases, people travel for hundreds of kilometres on short notice and have nothing with them. The items contained in the bags provide them with the basic necessities and make a hard time a little easier.

In Australia there is a large gap between the health of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are more likely to get preventable diseases and life expectancy is much lower. As a result Aboriginal people are in hospital more often.

The graph (above right) shows this and also explains why the toiletry bags are important.





## MIRIAM IS THE MUM OF THE YEAR

She was the NT's first fully-qualified qualified Aboriginal teacher and worked as the principal of the local Catholic primary school for years and in April 2017, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann OAM was named 2017 Barnardos mother of the year in the Northern Territory.

A keynote speaker at the 2015 NATSICC National Assembly in Darwin, Miriam is a strong Catholic Leader that has, through her teachings and publications, managed to meld Aboriginal Spirituality and Catholic teachings together. For many years Miriam has used the process of Dadirri as a way for people to reconnect and refelt upon their spirituality. Dadirri recognises the inner spirit that calls for reflection and contemplation of the wonders of all God's creation. Within a deep silence it is an attempt to find the inner self, the perfect peace and the experience of God's embrace.

## 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.



# Aboriginal & Islander Catholic Ministries

## Murri Ministry Brisbane



Murri Ministry Celebrated Reconciliation Week / Mabo Day with prayer evenings for the community across Brisbane. Reconciliation Week is a great time to bring people together from all over the country with different backgrounds to walk together in the spirit of reconciliation and ecumenism.

We began Reconciliation Week with services at Bracken Ridge Catholic Church celebrating with Fr Gerry Hefferan and the Parish community, youth music group and recently arrived Iraq refugees.

Uncle David Miller and Ravina Waldren began with an Acknowledgement of Country along with Church Elders Aunty Jean Phillips Elders and Aunty Rose Elu, Anglican, from Torres Strait speaking in Language, Mrs Chrissy Ellis Murri worker for the Anglican Reconciliation Action Plan for the Diocese of Brisbane and Fr Bruce Boase Aboriginal Anglican Priest.



Our speakers were strong and trying to educate our community on the importance of Reconciliation in this Country with our First Peoples of this sacred Land. Main issues for discussion were the Closing the Gap report, 50 years since the 1967 Referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo judgement.



### Contact Murri Ministry

84 Park Rd, Woolloongabba QLD 4102  
centacarebrisbane.net.au  
1300 236 822





# The Coming of the Light

On Saturday 1 July the people of the Torres Strait Islands celebrated the arrival of Christianity to their shores - The Coming of the Light.

Torres Strait Islanders living on the islands or on the mainland come together to honour this anniversary every year. Islanders of all faiths celebrate the Coming of the Light in a festival like no other in Australia. Colour and faith abounds during the celebration

Activities included church services and a re-enactment of the landing at Kemus on Erub. Hymn singing, feasting and Ailan dans strengthen community and family ties. The celebration started a very special weekend because the following day - 2 July - marked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday.



Painted gumleaves created as part of the ACM  
Melbourne's Fire Carrier project in Victorian Schools.



# SAVE THE DATE

2018 NATSICC National Assembly



**1 - 5 October 2018**

Technology Park Function Centre,  
Bentley - Perth  
Western Australia

Celebrate and share the gifts  
that Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Catholics bring to the  
Church in Australia

Visit [www.natsicc.org.au](http://www.natsicc.org.au) for updates  
Email [assembly@natsicc.org.au](mailto:assembly@natsicc.org.au) to register your interest

