

# Keep the Fire Burning: Strong in Faith

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Sunday Resource Kit

7<sup>th</sup> July 2024



# ABOUT NATSICC



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) is the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops on issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics. The Council was founded in 1992 and the Secretariat is based in Adelaide.

Each State and Territory nominates a representative via their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministry. In addition to a number of initiatives aimed to support First Nations Catholics, NATSICC advises the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics.

NATSICC is a not for profit organization that is funded by the Catholic Church and Caritas Australia's First Nations program.

## NATSICC Logo

The NATSICC Logo depicts a willy willy, the wind force in the centre a symbol of God's Spirit. The round concentric circles at the top symbolise God and Life; the base depicts men and women receiving the Holy Spirit. The logo was designed by Mrs. Olive Boddington, from Western Australia.



## NATSICC Vision Statement

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council promotes and celebrates the cultural identity of our Peoples across the Nation by living and expressing, in all its endeavours, the spirituality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Peoples.

Through this expression and recognition of our cultural identity we will find our rightful place within the Catholic Church in Australia.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are advised that this publication may contain images, words and mention of those that have passed.**

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## Cover artwork

Pentecost painting by **Magda Lee, Gracie Mosquito and Imelda Gugamen (Balgo Community)**

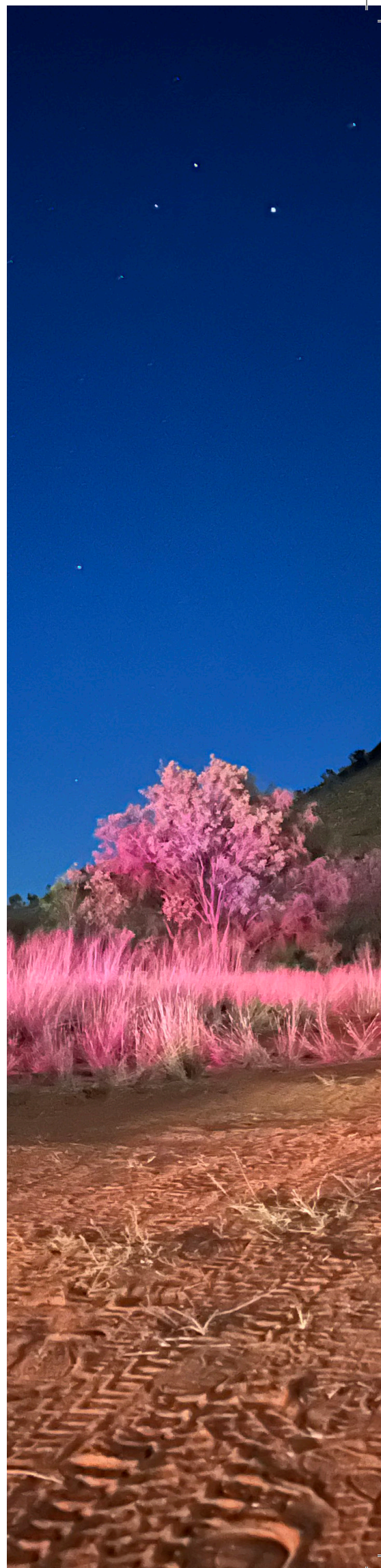
The four circles in the corners of painting represent the four communities: Wirrimanu, Mulan, Kurrurungku and Ringer Soak. The leaders are represented through the horse shoes located around the circle. The different colours represent different people.

The stars represent the different flowers in our area. The dots represent people all over the world and the people coming together for Church. People are also represented through the horse shoes on the right of the painting.

Wirrimanu is located in the top left hand corner, Mulan in the top right hand corner, Ringer Soak in the bottom right hand corner and Kurrurungku in the bottom left hand corner.

The Holy Spirit is located in the centre of the painting. It is the Spirit working in all of our communities.

Creating this painting helped to make us strong in the Spirit.





# USING THESE RESOURCES



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council has created resources that aim to inspire and support Parishes, Organisations, and Schools in their celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. These Liturgical resources are flexible and can be adapted to suit the diverse needs of Parishes and Schools across Australia. Parishes and Schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members are encouraged to work with local communities to incorporate Traditional Rituals and Symbols into their Mass.

NATSICC actively encourages open discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the congregation to further enhance the ways in which Traditional Rituals and Symbols can be used to enrich the Mass.

# NATSICC LITURGY TEAM WELCOME



## Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Welcome to this special celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. On this day, we gather as one community to honour and celebrate the rich cultural heritage and contributions of our First Nations Peoples to our Australian Catholic Church. This liturgy resource has been thoughtfully compiled to enrich your worship experience on this significant day.

The Gospel Reading for 7 July, from Mark 6:1-6, tells the story of Jesus returning to His hometown, only to be met with scepticism and disbelief. Despite His teachings and miracles, those who knew Him best failed to recognise His divine wisdom and power. This passage resonates deeply with our own experiences as First Australians, as we can often find that our voices go unheard and our contributions not embraced.

The recent Voice referendum highlighted the ongoing journey toward recognition and reconciliation. While the outcome was not what many hoped for, it has strengthened our resolve and commitment to working together for a better Australia for everyone. Like Jesus, who persevered in His mission despite the obstacles, we too remain committed to our Culture, our Land, our Church, and our communities with unwavering hope and determination.

As we gather on this sacred land, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and honour our Elders past and present, and our young people. Our connection to the land, waters, and skies is deeply rooted in our identity and spirituality. We invite you to join us in respecting and cherishing this connection, as it is vital to our shared journey of faith.

Our prayer is that this resource will deepen your understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Through the prayers, reflections, and hymns included in this Liturgy, may we all be inspired to walk together in reconciliation, respect, and unity.

As Pope Francis reminds us, we are called to be a Church that goes forth, embracing all cultures and peoples. Let us open our hearts to the wisdom and spirituality of our First Nations Peoples, recognizing the presence of Christ in our stories and traditions. May this celebration be a moment of grace, healing, and transformation for all of us.

Thank you for joining us in this celebration. May the Holy Spirit guide and bless each of us as we journey together in faith, hope, and love.





# BISHOPS APPROVE MASS OF THE LAND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

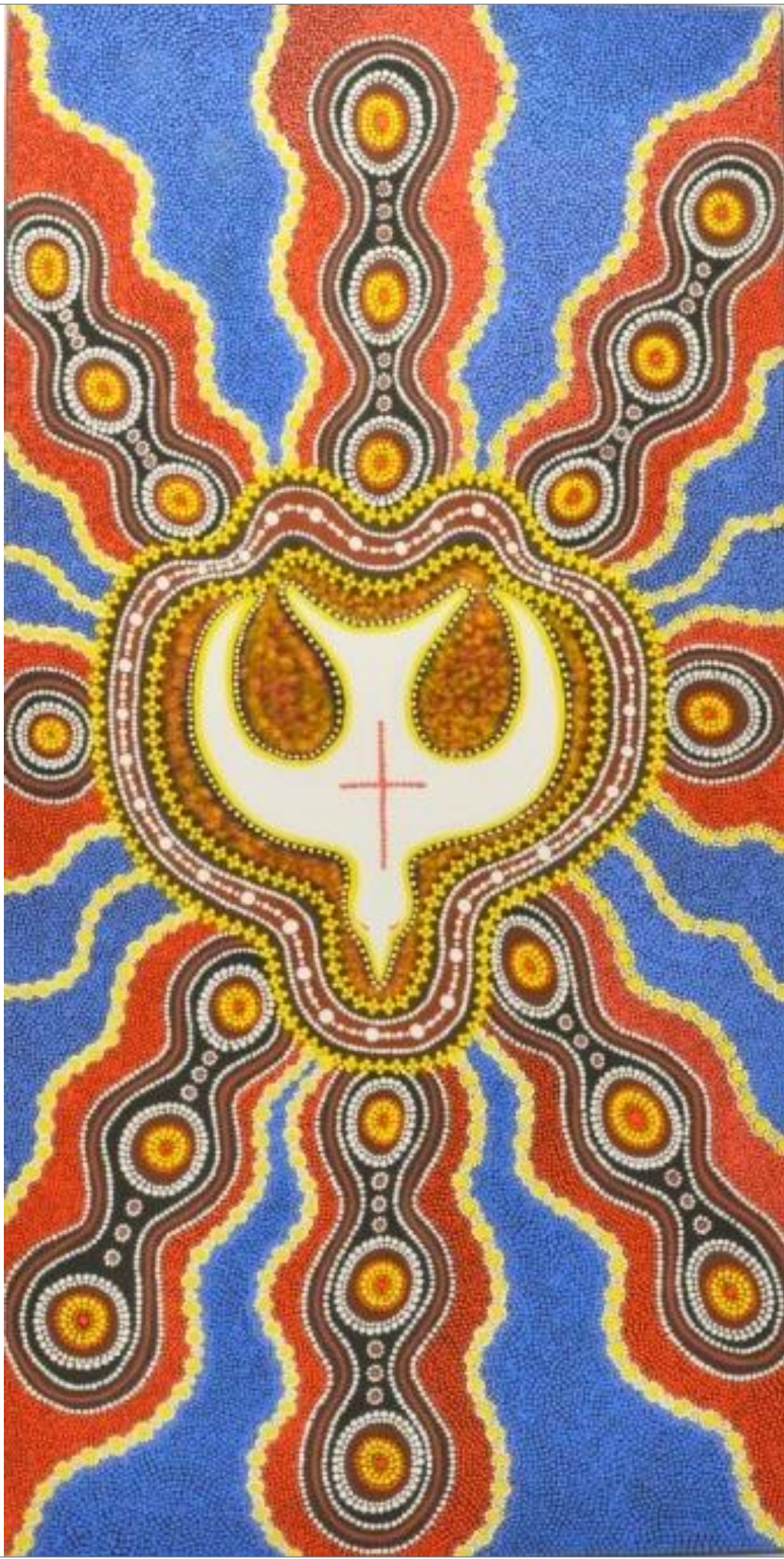
Australia's Catholic bishops have formally approved a liturgy that integrates Aboriginal languages and cultural elements, titled the Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit (Missa Terra Spiritus Sancti). This approval occurred at the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's recent plenary meeting in Sydney, earmarking the Mass for exclusive use in the Diocese of Broome, Western Australia. This decision paves the way for the Mass to be submitted to the Vatican's Dicastery for Divine Worship for official recognition, a process known as "recognitio."

The Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit has been an active part of the local liturgical practice in the Diocese of Broome for over fifty years, celebrated in various Aboriginal languages. It stands as a testament to the Catholic Church's commitment to embracing Aboriginal cultural heritage within its liturgical framework, ensuring that the spiritual expressions of Aboriginal Communities are acknowledged and incorporated into worship.

The development of this Mass involved significant collaboration between Fr. Kevin McKelson, other clergy, and Aboriginal Elders from the Kimberley region. They worked together to translate and adapt the traditional Roman Rite into five local languages, making it relevant and accessible to the Aboriginal Communities. This effort was not merely a translation but a Cultural adaptation that respected and reflected the rich traditions and spiritual insights of the local Aboriginal people.

This liturgy not only preserves the Sacred Elements of the Catholic Faith but also celebrates the unique cultural contributions of Aboriginal Communities to the Church's life in Australia. It serves as a powerful example of how the Church seeks to foster an environment of inclusivity and respect for the diverse Spiritual and Cultural dimensions of all its members.

MISSA TERRA SPIRITUS SANCTI



MASS OF THE LAND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

An **'Acknowledgement of Country'** is a way that all people can show awareness and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage and the ongoing relationship the Traditional Custodians have with their Country. Both First Australians and non-Indigenous people can perform 'Acknowledgement of Country'. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the Traditional Custodians of the lands (or sea) where the Mass, event, meeting, school function or conference takes place. It can be formal or informal.

The Acknowledgement must be seen as more than simply 'ticking a box'. It is an opportunity to show the respect you have for the country, the waters and its people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have been experiencing exclusion, discrimination and oppression for so long that a genuine and authentic Acknowledgement conducted by your community can mean so much to Australia's First Peoples.

To help you give an authentic Acknowledgement:

- Find out the name of your local Traditional Custodians (<https://aiatsis.gov.au/whose-country> can help)
- Try to write your own Acknowledgement that is tailored to your area. Use it as an opportunity to educate and inform the congregation/group. The example we have provided below is an excellent starting point.
- Be genuine and enthusiastic
- Use correct terminology (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, First Nations Peoples and First Australians are acceptable)

Additionally, NATSICC would like to recommend that Parishes consider the following forms of Acknowledgement:

- Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which the Parish stands in a physical form (signage, plaque) on Parish grounds
- Provide an Acknowledgement to the Traditional Custodians in Mass booklets, websites and other media produced by the Parish
- An Acknowledgement or Welcome to Country before every Mass and meeting or, at minimum, on significant days
- Use Traditional place name for your location

An example of an Acknowledgement of Country:

***We Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.***

An excellent guide to providing a meaningful and engaging Acknowledgment of Country can be found at [https://youtu.be/zxo18\\_7BDt4](https://youtu.be/zxo18_7BDt4) or search 'Shelley Reys Tedx Sydney'





# WELCOME TO COUNTRY

A **'Welcome to Country'** Ceremony is an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, where Traditional Custodians (Elders) welcome people to their land. It is a formal process that has been practiced for thousands of years and varies according to the region and practice of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community.

During a Welcome to Country, the Traditional Custodians welcome those in attendance, guests, staff, and students to their Country. It can take the form of a simple speech or a performance, such as a song, Traditional Dance, or Didgeridoo piece. This Ceremony is a significant recognition of the connection to the land and is often considered a right and not a privilege.

It is important to note that a Welcome to Country should always occur at the beginning of an event, preferably as the first item. If you need assistance in implementing a Welcome to Country, NATSICC is happy to help. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Ministries also provide a great resource to Parishes, as they work hard in the Community.

As part of the planning process, we strongly advise that you meet with the Elder/s that you have asked to perform the Welcome to Country to discuss expectations and logistics. Get a feel for what the Welcome entails and be sure that you are both comfortable with the Ceremony and context. Discuss any materials that may be needed and be mindful of smoke detectors/alarms if a Smoking Ceremony is to be incorporated into the Welcome.

For more detailed information and suggestions on wording, please visit <http://natsicc.org.au/acknowledgement-and-welcome-to-country.html>. By acknowledging and respecting the traditions and customs of Australia's First Peoples, we can work towards reconciliation and a better understanding of our shared history.

“ It is our way that once we welcome you to our land, it is our duty to take care of you. It is the same way as you would welcome someone into your home. ”

- NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak



# HYMNS, READINGS AND PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION



## Readings

**First Reading** – Ezekiel 2: 2-5

**Responsorial Psalm** – Psalms 123: 1-4

**Second Reading** – Second Corinthians 12: 7-10

**Alleluia** – Luke 4: 18

**Gospel** – Mark 6: 1-6



## Hymns

### Entrance

“A New Heart for a New World” | AOV158. | Trisha Watts & Monica O’Brien.

“Gather your people O Lord” | AOV 71. | Bob Hurd.

“Shout to the Lord” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Darlene Zschech

“Lord, I lift Your Name on High” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Rick Founds

“This Day God Gives Me” | CCLLicence no 126361 | James J Quinn/ Claud E Patrick

### Offertory/Gifts

“Lord, to whom shall we go” | AOV 6. | Michael Herry

“Spirit of the Living God” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Daniel Iverson

“One Bread, One Body” | WOL Licence 2007E | John Foley

“I Give You My Heart” | CCLLicence 126361 | Reuben Morgan

### Communion

“The Cry of the Poor” | AOV 83. | John Foley SJ

“Come as you are” | AOV 31. | Deidrie Browne

“My Soul Give Thanks” | Permission given by Fr Tony Schick, MGL

“Faithful One” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Brian Doerksen

“The Power of Your Love” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Geoff Bullock

“Jesus Take Me as I Am” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Dave Bryant

### Recessional

“Isaiah 49” | AOV89. | Carey Landry

“Companions on the Journey” | AOV188. | Carey Landry

“Shine Jesus Shine” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Graham Kendrick

“How Great Thou Art” | CCLLicence no 126361 | Stuart W K Hine

“City of God” | WOL Licence no 2007E | Dan Schutte



## Prayers of Intercession

Today, as we celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, we recognize and honor the diverse Cultures and histories of the First Australians.

Let us come together in a Spirit of unity and respect, bringing our Prayers and worries before God. We seek Healing, Justice, and Peace for all people, and trust in the power of Community and love.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for our Holy Father, Pope Francis, all priests and religious and laity, especially those who are working with First Nations Peoples. That we may stand firm in the teachings of Christ and strong in proclaiming the Gospel.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all World Leaders that they strive to attain peace, justice and equality for all people.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

Generous God, you Created the World and gave it to us to cherish and protect. May we receive the gifts of your creation with gratitude and humility.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for our Elders in our Communities, that they will be guided by the Holy Spirit and lead us in maintaining the dignity and value of each person.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for our youth, that they will listen to and follow Jesus of the Gospel in everything that they do.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all peoples, both First Nations people and non Indigenous people, that we will all learn to walk together and serve and respect each other.

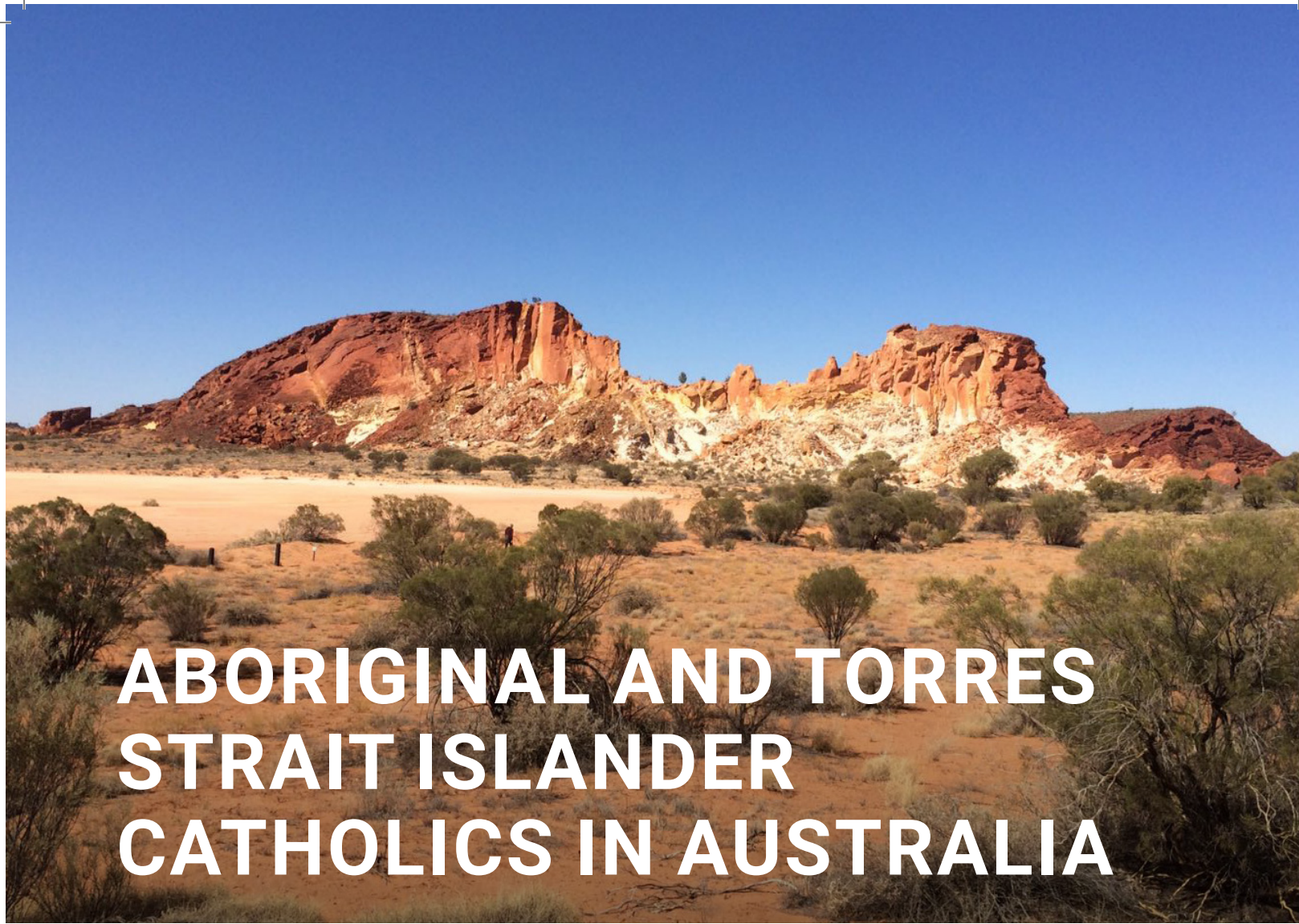
**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for the gift of compassion that we may reach out to all who are oppressed, especially to women and men who struggle for equality and fullness of life.

**Lord, hear us.**

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**



# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CATHOLICS IN AUSTRALIA

**First Nations Catholics are the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the Australian Catholic Church.**



**135,681**

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics



**4.6%**

The percentage of Catholic population aged under 5



**10**

The number of Dioceses which have over one-fifth of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population who identify as Catholic



**8.2%**

The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics aged under 5

# Top three

## Parishes

with the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics:

**1**

Wadeye  
(Darwin)

**2,078**

**2**

Dubbo  
(Bathurst)

**1,787**

**3**

Broome  
Cathedral  
(Broome)

**1,581**

with the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics:

**1**

Palm Island  
(Townsville)

**98.5%**

**2**

Dubbo  
(Bathurst)

**97.3%**

**3**

Melville Island  
(Darwin)

**96.4%**

## Dioceses

with the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics:

**1**

Brisbane

**16,474**

**2**

Darwin

**9,671**

**3**

Maitland-  
Newcastle

**8,436**

with the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics:

**1**

Broome

**62.7%**

**2**

Darwin

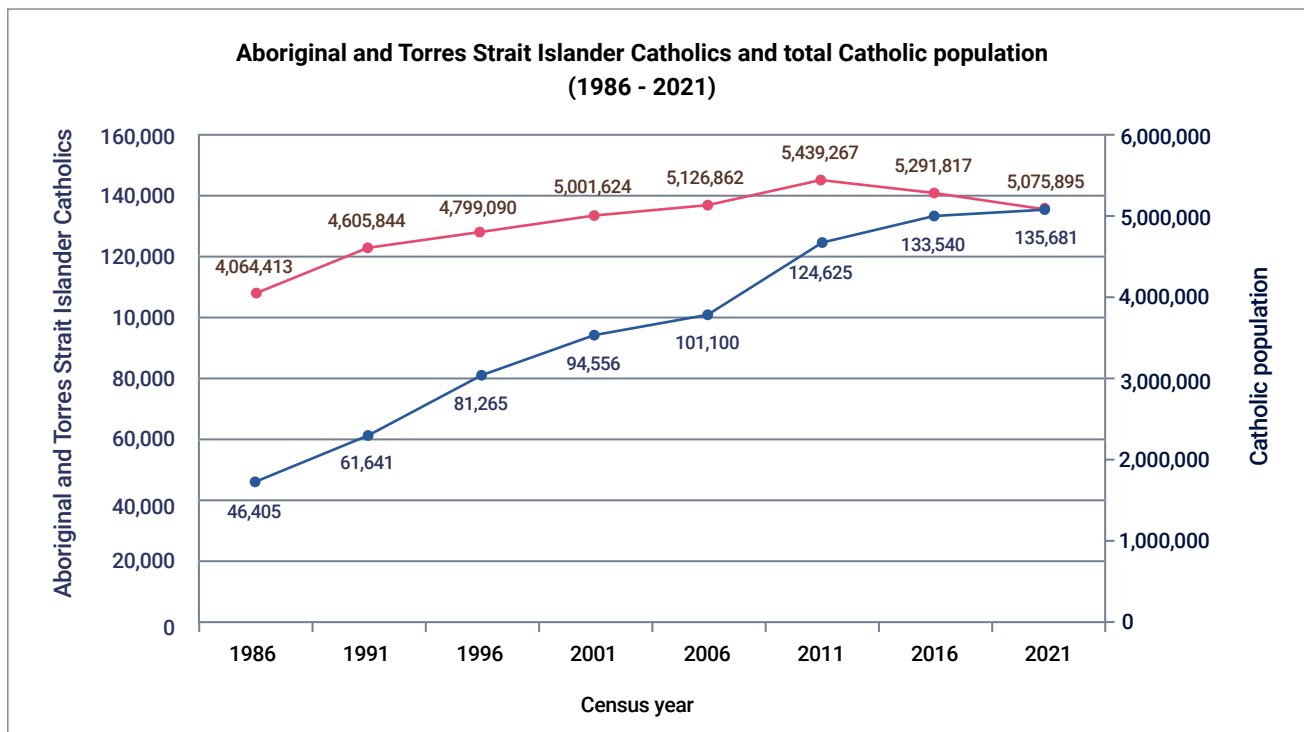
**24.8%**

**3**

Wilcannia-  
Forbes

**13.8%**

2016 Census



Notes:

Prepared by the ACBC National Centre for Pastoral Research as part of the National Catholic Census Project. Data is sourced from the 2021 Census unless specified.

Data on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population for some years and prior to 1971 is not recorded here due to the poor quality of data collected.



# LITURGICAL RESOURCES - ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONGREGATIONS

**It is a privilege to acknowledge and embrace the richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the Church's Liturgy. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are part of the celebrating assembly, incorporating elements of their culture can enhance the spiritual experience for all members.**

**To ensure that the inclusion of these cultural elements align with the Liturgical norms of the Roman Missal, it is highly recommended to work closely with the Parish Priest and Liturgical team. By doing so, we can ensure that the suggestions are respectful and appropriate, and that they contribute to a meaningful and inclusive Liturgy for everyone involved.**

## **LANGUAGE**

Language is a cultural element that is closely linked with identity and pride in oneself and one's culture. This year is an excellent opportunity to bring the gift of culture into the Mass by including local Language speakers to participate in elements of the Mass.

Careful consideration needs to be given to determine which elements in the language of the people can be properly introduced into Liturgical celebrations. The suggestions below would be most appropriate to congregations where Traditional Languages are predominantly used.

In other congregations, perhaps a word or phrase in local Language could be included with the permission of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers.

How Language can be used:

- \* The readings can be read in Language from a recognised Scripture translation.
- \* One or more of the Prayers of Intercession can be in Language – as above.
- \* Hymn verses can be translated into Language as appropriate/possible



## INTRODUCTION

Use the Welcome to Country guide available at <http://natsicc.org.au/acknowledgement-and-welcome-to-country.html> to determine whether a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country is appropriate.

## SMOKING CEREMONY

An Elder could Smoke the Community and the precious objects – altar, place of the Word, Cross – at the beginning of the Mass.

## A RITE OF WATER BLESSING

Loving Lord, make us feel Your invitation to 'come to the water'. At the very beginning You blessed the water, Your great gift to us. We now ask You to bless this water and to renew us by Your grace. Water to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is always a sign of Your peace and fulfilment in everything that is good; the promise of food, of Your love, and protection, and Your power to love one another as true Christians. Lord, this truly is a sign of the new life in Christ, which in Baptism we have all received. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## GOSPEL PROCESSION

In the spirit of our ancestors the Message Stick can be carried forward with the Gospel Book. Other symbols and actions are used according to local practice. Traditional dance and instruments may also accompany a procession of the Word.

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

These could be prepared by the Community prior to Mass or prayed spontaneously during Mass. Alternatively, you can use the suggestions provided.

## PREPARATION OF GIFTS

The bread to be used for Consecration might be carried to the altar in a Collamon.

Other gifts such as a Boomerang, Woomera, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander painting, Clap Sticks might be presented. Gifts of food etc. to share with others might also be presented and are intended to be given to the poor; they would not be returned to the giver but shared with others.

## EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER OPTIONS

Masses for Reconciliation, or one of the Eucharistic Prayers for Use in Masses for Various Needs [see Roman Missal (2010) pp. 804ff.] may be used. The Aboriginal Our Father may be also be used.

## ABORIGINAL OUR FATHER

Diocese of Broome has granted permission for use of this prayer if it is used, as is, unchanged.

You are our Father, You live in heaven,  
We talk to You. Father You are good.  
You are our Father, You live in heaven,  
We talk to You. Father You are good.  
We believe your Word, Father,  
We are Your children, give us bread today.  
We believe Your Word, Father,  
We are Your children, give us bread today.  
We have done wrong, we are sorry,  
Teach us, Father, all about Your Word.  
We have done wrong, we are sorry,  
Teach us, Father, all about Your Word.  
Others have done wrong to us,  
And we are sorry for them, Father, today.  
Others have done wrong to us,  
And we are sorry for them, Father, today.  
Stop us from doing wrong, Father,  
Save us all from the evil one.  
Stop us from doing wrong, Father,  
Save us all from the Evil One.  
(Repeat first verse)

## MUSIC / SONG / DANCE

Music and singing, which expresses the soul of the people, have pride of place in the Liturgy. Music forms melodies and musical instruments could be used in divine worship if they are suitable or can be made suitable, for sacred use, and provided they are in accord with the dignity of the place of worship and truly contribute to the uplifting of the faithful.

- \* Didgeridoo and Clap Sticks can accompany the choir.
- \* Didgeridoo and Clap Sticks together with other instruments can be used for reflective music.
- \* A Hymn can be sung in language. If a stanza of a hymn is translated it should be able to be used at an appropriate time in the Liturgy.
- \* Dance can be incorporated into the Liturgy, especially as a procession – Entrance, The Word, and Gifts.
- \* Use Clap Sticks rather than bells at the Consecration.

## ACTIONS

The gestures and postures of the assembly are signs of its unity and express its active participation and foster the spiritual attitude of the participants.



# LITURGICAL RESOURCES – NON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONGREGATIONS

Although there are over 135,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia, they may not be present in your Parish. Consider these suggestions to honour and include them in the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, and to keep them in your thoughts and prayers on this day.



## **INVITE A TRADITIONAL CUSTODIAN TO PROVIDE A WELCOME TO COUNTRY**

Healing is made real when people come together. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday is an opportunity to make contact with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community and invite them to provide a Welcome, or participate in ways outlined in this resource.

## **CONDUCT AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

Use the Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country guide available at <http://www.natsicc.org.au/acknowledgement-and-welcome-to-country.html>



## CONNECTING WITH YOUR LOCAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY

To enhance your Liturgy, and to avail your parishioners of the gifts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, NATSICC suggests that you involve your local Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministry (AICM) in planning your celebration.

Visit 'About NATSICC' at [www.natsicc.org.au](http://www.natsicc.org.au) and click on your State or Territory to find your local AICM.

These Ministries work very hard to serve local Indigenous Catholics and do a lot of good in the Community. You may be able to work together in preparing the Liturgy, sourcing speakers or presenters or learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in your area and ultimately build a relationship that will benefit the Parish.

## CELEBRANT INTRODUCTION

Today, on the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, we join the Australian Bishops and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council in celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. As Australians, we are fortunate to share our home with the world's oldest continuing culture.

On this day, we honour and acknowledge God's presence in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, who have upheld their rich and diverse Cultural Traditions for thousands of years. We give thanks for the deep and enduring legacy of these ancient peoples and their contributions to our Continent.

Let us also take a moment to recognise and appreciate the land on which our Parish is situated and the people who have nurtured it over time. Together, let us continue to cultivate a spirit of unity and respect for all cultures and traditions within our community.

## RITE FOR BLESSING AND SPRINKLING OF WATER

May be used in place of the Penitential Act on this day (appendix 2 Roman Missal)

**PRIEST:** Dear sisters and brothers, let us ask our ever-living God to bless this gift of creation, this living water, that has nourished people of this land since the Dreaming and will now be sprinkled on us as a memorial of our Baptism.

May God bless us with the grace to remain faithful to the Spirit we have received. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## MUSIC

Prior to Mass, during the arrival of the Priest or during the Offertory Procession, a recording of instrumental Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music (Didgeridoo, Clap Sticks) might be played. We have made some music available at [www.natsicc.org.au](http://www.natsicc.org.au)

## GIFTS PROCESSION

Besides bread and water for the Eucharist, gifts of food or a special collection could be brought forward for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in need.

Additionally, a Collamon could be placed in front of the Altar as a symbol of the absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters at the table.

## EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II

## AUDIO AND VISUAL

- Display a Powerpoint prepared by NATSICC before Mass (Available at [www.natsicc.org.au](http://www.natsicc.org.au))
- Ask local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students to create artworks to celebrate the day and have them present their work in the Parish (or display)
- Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork in the Church during Mass and in the leadup to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday.
- Use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designed cloth on the Altar. This is a powerful symbol of the presence of First Nations Peoples, both physically and Spiritually in Australia.
- The Priest could wear an Indigenous designed stole and/or chasuble

# HOMILY NOTES



You would think that, God being all powerful and eternal, those on the side of God would have things go their way. However, here on Earth, this has not been the experience of God's prophets and saints. The readings today deal with this painful reality.

St Paul had a profound conversion experience on the road to Damascus and gave his life thereafter to preaching the Risen Christ. However, as St Paul recounts in the second reading this only led to insult, hardships, persecution and agony. In every way, Paul says he feels weak. Yet Paul realised that God wanted him to know his weakness, because this allowed Paul in his humility to be filled with the power of Christ. So Paul carried on, in his weakness, powerfully witnessing to Christ, right up to his martyrdom in Rome.

In the first reading, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Ezekiel and Ezekiel receives his commission as prophet. But it was not anything humanly glorious, but rather to the same insult and persecution that Paul experienced as he was called on to prophesise to a defiant and obstinate people – set of rebels.

These readings set the scene for the Gospel. Jesus returned to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and preached in the synagogue. Despite the brilliance of his teaching, Jesus' own people did not accept him. They thought they knew him and could not seem to accept that Jesus might be so much more than the carpenter's son. On his part, Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith and could work no miracles there. Jesus could raise the dead. He could walk on water. He could feed thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread. But, if people had no faith, He could do nothing for them.

And, of course, we know that Jesus would continue to be rejected by his own people despite all the good that he did. After three years of public ministry, Jesus would be handed over by his own people to be crucified.

Many felt crushed by the loss of the Referendum last year. It seemed a just cause in the process of Reconciliation, yet was rejected by the Australian

people. We need to acknowledge the feelings of rejection and disappointment – much like the insults and agony St Paul spoke about – that many First Nations people experience.

However, the time will come when all Australians must continue the journey of Reconciliation. Our deepest identity is that we are sisters and brothers in Christ. We are created, loved and redeemed by God. Our homeland is together with our Father in Heaven. Even now we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Reconciliation is right. It is what God wants. This is our faith and our faith keeps us strong. It gives us direction. And it gives us the knowledge that, one day, God's Kingdom will come.

We are called to be strong in faith, as Ezekiel, St Paul and Jesus were. Each of them suffered terrible rejection, yet their faith gave them the strength and confidence to keep going. Because faith attaches us to God and God's power can be manifest in people of faith.

The themes for today – "Keep the fires burning" and "Strong in faith" are very much related and so necessary for those working for Reconciliation. Being strong in faith is to keep the fire deep within our hearts burning. For it is to retain hope that God's ways, whatever the rejections and insults and agonies, will in the end win out. And faith attaches us to God, so we can continue to know God's love deep within our hearts, which gives us the capacity to love and to forgive even in the darkest of times.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, St Paul writes that we must endure many difficulties before we enter the Kingdom of God. So it was for Ezekiel, St Paul and Jesus Himself. So, it is for us. But God is greater than everything. For those who stay close to God, all things turn out for the good.

Bishop Danny Meagher

Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Sydney  
Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander Peoples







# OTHER WAYS TO CELEBRATE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUNDAY



- Research and share the stories of the Traditional Custodians of your area. <https://aiatsis.gov.au> has an interactive map to help you discover your Traditional Custodians. You could also google your area + 'Traditional Custodians' or search your local Government website.
- Invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from other Faith Traditions to your celebration.
- Visit <https://www.naidoc.org.au> and see what events are taking place in your area.
- Display the NATSICC Poster prominently.
- Display the Traditional place name of your location physically on signage, Mass booklets, newsletters and/or digitally (PowerPoint presentations, websites)

**As an example:**

**St David's Parish**

**Kaurna Country | Burnside, South Australia**

- Organise a community event to celebrate First Nations culture, such as a cultural festival, art exhibition, or food fair.
- Partner with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community to learn about their traditions and customs, and work together on community projects.
- Hold a fundraiser for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander charity or organisation
- Create a prayer or reflection space dedicated to First Australian spirituality, with symbols, artwork, and literature that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditions.

Remember to always consult and work with local First Nations communities and organisations when planning events and activities, and to ensure that they are respectful and Culturally appropriate.



# YOUTH ACTIVITIES



**The 2024 theme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday is Keep the fire burning- strong in faith. It speaks to the need and desire to keep working for reconciliation, trusting that this is God's work and that God is with us.**

**When we encourage young people to join us on the journey, we do so knowing that they bring unique perspectives, ideas and energy that will benefit us all. The activities that follow aim to encourage a feeling of connection to the earth and each other, to feel the fire burning, the gift of the Holy Spirit and come to know the strength that their faith can offer them.**

### Activity 1: Keep the Fire Burning!

Fires need three things to burn: heat, fuel and oxygen.

1. What three things help to keep your faith alive?  
E.g. prayer, acts of service, forgiveness, music etc. Share with a partner or the whole class/group.
2. After hearing what helps others keep their faith alive, what are two things you can do to help others stay strong in their faith?
3. How can you fuel the work for truth-telling, justice and reconciliation?

### Activity 2: Stand Up!

First Reading: Ezekiel 2:2-5

The **Spirit** came into me and made me **stand up**, and I heard the Lord speaking to me. He said, 'Son of Man, I am sending you up to the Israelites, to the rebels who have turned against me. Till now they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me. The sons are defiant and obstinate; I am sending you to them, to say, "The Lord says this." Whether they listen or not, this set of rebels shall **know there is a prophet among them.**'

In the first reading, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Ezekiel and Ezekiel receives his commission as prophet. But it was challenging for Ezekiel to share God's message to a set of rebels who perhaps weren't willing or able to listen. However, God reminds Ezekiel that whether people listen or not, they will know there is a prophet among them.

It is important to stand up for what we believe in, even if at times it feels like others won't listen, and to remember that God is always with us.

Who are the prophets among us? How are they calling us to act? What message do you want to share with your community?

### Activity 3 - We are all connected!

**Set-up:** You need a ball of string. Everyone stands in a circle.

One group member starts by wrapping the string around their wrist. They then share something such as a place they like to visit. If others in the circle also like to visit this place then they put their hand up. The first student throws/rolls the string to someone in the circle with their hand up, aiming for the ball of string to cross the circle as much as possible. Group members continue to pass the string to others with their hand up creating the web.

Continue with ideas or activities such as sharing something they do to care for creation. If others have also completed this action pass the string to them and so on.

Make sure every person has a chance to hold and pass the string.

**Conclusion:** Let's think of the web we have created to be like roots below the ground that helps hold soil together and provides the nutrients to the plants, keeping them strong and enabling them to grow. All of us are grounded in the particulars of our own lives, but all of us have roots that intertwine with the roots of others. These interconnected roots give us strength, support and a sense of belonging that empowers us to act in the world.

Written in collaboration with Caritas Australia



The communities of the Kimberley came together in Warmun (WA) to celebrate Pentecost 2024. The 2 days preceding the Holy Feast were filled with discussions around the establishment of a new Kimberley Aboriginal Catholic Ministry. NATSICC presented each community with their own painted cross (from Canberra) in the hope they will be reunited when the communities once again come together as a Ministry.



## The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

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