



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines
and Torres Strait Islanders

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ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUNDAY 2011

FRIENDSHIP:

A NEW NAME FOR SOLIDARITY WITH THE FIRST AUSTRALIANS

In Catholic Social Doctrine solidarity is a key concept. In short, “it translates into the willingness to give oneself for the good of one’s neighbor, beyond any individual or particular interest” (*Compendium*, n.194).

It may sound a complex term, but it is really quite straightforward. Blessed John Paul II wrote of it as follows (*Centesimus Annus*, 10):

What we nowadays call the principle of solidarity ... is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term “friendship” ... Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term “social charity”. Pope Paul VI, expanding the concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a “civilization of love”.

The term friendship with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a possibility we could examine more fully. This would imply that to be in solidarity with the First Australians means to deepen our friendship with each other. It means to develop an attitude of support and unity. It makes our relationship personal and practical.

How can we nurture such a friendship amongst all Australians?

FRIENDSHIP LOOKS BEYOND LARGE SYMBOLIC EVENTS.

We are all aware of the important national milestones that are so important to our relationships with the First Australians.

Here are some examples:

- Many could recall the historic moment when Vincent Lingiari received the Daduragu lease from Prime Minister Gough Whitlam at the Wave Hill Station in 1975.
- Pope John Paul II’s address at Alice Springs on 29 November 1986 is still remembered by many. It continues to set our agendas for conferences, talks and dialogue.
- Then there was the Redfern speech of Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1992.
- We can recall the importance of the Mabo (1992) and Wik (1996) decisions of the High Court of Australia.
- The Harbour Bridge walk and other walks during the Centenary of Federation in 2001 would be remembered by many.
- Then there was the National Apology given by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Leader of the Opposition in 2008.

These and other symbolic events have been important in moving us forward with our First Australians. They propelled Aboriginal issues centre stage. Despite all these significant ecclesial, legal and political initiatives, the tragic statistics of Aboriginal disadvantage continues.

Although symbolic national victories have been won, nothing much seems to be happening in between these historic moments to “close the gap” between Aboriginal disadvantage and the fruits of Australian life enjoyed by the majority.

True friendship cannot tolerate such a gap.

Like the Good Samaritan in the Gospel, friendship demands a deeper heart-felt response that implies a real imperative to reach out to those on the margins and bring them home to full health and hope.

Part of the problem is that so many Australians have still to make friends with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This is despite the fact that 80% of Aboriginal people live in capital cities, especially in the Eastern States, and not in remote desert regions.

What are we doing to meet up with Aboriginal people?

How can we make efforts to become friends?

By developing friendships, we would become aware first-hand of the issues that concern us all. So where do we start?

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE FIRST AUSTRALIANS. SOME SUGGESTIONS.

START BY	TRY TO
1. Start by understanding that statistically Aboriginal Australians are in a highly disadvantaged position.	Try to dispel ignorance of the appalling statistics regarding today’s Aboriginal Australians.
2. Start by appreciating the human tragedy that these statistics represent for Aboriginal Australians	Try to look for the deeper issues and avoid victim-blaming.
3. Start by learning about a longer Australian history beginning thousands of years ago.	Try to envisage Australian history beginning more than 200 x 200 years ago.
4. Start by encouraging collective and individual responsibility as an appropriate response to Australia’s past and present.	Try to discourage collective guilt notions about Australia’s past history.
5. Start by placing Aborigines in a unique category as the First Australians.	Try to avoid categorizing Aboriginal Australians as refugees, migrants or ethnics.
6. Start by understanding national unity as based on respect for diversity and difference.	Try to envisage national unity as something more than mere uniformity.

7. Start by listening and learning from a culture in our midst that spans thousands of years.	Try to be fair rather than patronizing and simplistic when speaking of the Aboriginal contribution to Australia.
8. Start by joining the painful and slow journey towards national reconciliation.	Try to reconcile rather than transferring prejudices and biases from one group to another.
9. Start by seeking out Aboriginal agencies and communities in your area and try to see the situation from their perspective as well.	Try to examine complex issues regarding our relationships with Aborigines from perspectives other than my own.
10. Start by learning about what John Paul II said to Aboriginal peoples gathered at Alice Springs in 1986 and about subsequent statements of the Catholic Church.	Try to understand the Catholic Church's response in history to Aboriginal marginalization.
11. Start by learning how local Catholic parish communities and schools are often significant points of interaction with Aboriginal peoples.	Try to participate in reconciliation initiatives in your parish. Make sure Aboriginal people are included in parish groups. Form friendship groups.
12. Start by reaching out to Aboriginal groups in your neighbourhood, parishes, and deaneries. Reach out in both traditional and non-traditional situations.	Try to seek out opportunities for prayer and gatherings in their own meeting places. Perhaps a Mass could be celebrated in an Aboriginal setting.

MAKE FRIENDSHIP A PRIORITY

This 2011 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday can prompt us to think about how we can start or deepen friendships with our First Australians.

Let us listen to some testimonies of people who try to make this a real priority in their lives.

My friendships with Aboriginal people have served to remind me of the importance of family and my responsibilities in maintaining the family unit. *Craig*

The key to understanding each other is a listening heart with mutual respect.
Brian

I have been inspired by the deep faith, humility and desire for God particularly of Aboriginal women and gentle trust in His providence, despite the incredible adversity and complex issues that are reality for many communities.
My life has been forever changed through the friendships I have made and I thank God for that.
Bronnie

My friendship with Aboriginal people has been an encounter with people who place a great value on the non-material aspects of life... having elaborate houses and wearing stylish clothes are less important than caring for each other, particularly their families, their natural environment and sacred spaces. My life has been enriched by these friendships.

My living and working with Aboriginal people over a long period of time has turned my life upside down but in a deep and enriching way. I am indebted to them for the new learnings they have taught me.

Living and working with my Aboriginal friends over a long period of time has been a great blessing to me. My perspective on life has changed. Some of the things which I have learnt from my Aboriginal friends which I believe has enriched me are:

- Don't worry about tomorrow – live today "well".
- Don't rush through life. Take your time. Wait! There is nothing wrong with waiting!!! The Seasons always wait for each other and they always arrive and do their work. All will be well in time
- You come into this world with nothing and you leave this world with nothing. Why spend your life collecting more and more possessions? Don't live life full of clutter. Live simply and contentedly. Live in such a way that you can roll up your swag and move on.

Val

For myself, I have been able to learn and better understand the difficulties that face my friend; the peer pressure and family pressure that make it more difficult for her to move forward. I have also learnt to respect and appreciate her capabilities. I feel frustration with the moving forward process. I need to take care not to impose my ideas rather than listen to her needs and desires.

Vicki

Over 20 years, there has been a gradual change in me. I was living a comfortable, pleasurable lifestyle, surrounded by opportunities to experience all sorts of new and different things as well as have access to every service to satisfy every need. Today is the absolute opposite – no affluence, busyness, comforts, choices; money is not a value, the local people do not take annual holidays or long service leave, do not have pantries, fridges, freezers full of food, do not have overflowing wardrobes, do not have homes full of mod cons and gadgets.

Their lifestyle is simple and uncluttered. They know stillness and silence. They are insightful, observant and wise. They are not acquisitive or possessive. There is nothing false or fake about them.

Friendships with Aboriginal people have helped me and taught me, to see the 'more' to life. They are more dear to my heart than I could ever imagine.

Mary

Carol, my aboriginal friend, encouraged me to go on pilgrimage with our Indigenous brothers and sisters to Santa Teresa {Healing Waters}, near Alice Springs. Memories I will never forget, friendships born as we all sat under the full moon, red desert dust on our feet and love in our hearts as we shared stories and experienced the sacred moments!

As the journey out to the Red Desert has brought life to my soul, so too the journey I've been experiencing as I share the many moments of friendship at our monthly Indigenous Community "Shared Meal" at Murri Wodja.

Doris

THE FRUITS OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is important to us all.

The greatest friendship of all is the permanent and all loving friendship of God. Jesus brings that friendship to us. In his Death and Resurrection, Jesus brings us back to God. Our repentance and conversion to Jesus unites us fully to this saving friendship.

Now is the time to bring the fruits of this friendship with Jesus to the world, especially to our highly marginalized Aboriginal friends. In Christ, they are our brothers and sisters. We form a bond of unity in Jesus Christ.

We begin in our hearts. We ask Jesus to show us the way deep within us. We pray and repent. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us more and more deeply with an experience of friendship with the First Australians.

Let us pray now for this.

***Heavenly Father, creator and source of all things,
we praise you, we bless you, we worship you.***

***We thank you most of all for sending us your Son Jesus into our world.
He is our Saviour, Redeemer and Prince of Peace.***

***Lord Jesus, in your Death and Resurrection we find salvation and true friendship with the
Father.***

You no longer call us servants but friends.

We thank you for your friendship alive in us always.

Holy Spirit, you bring to us the friendship of the Father and the Son.

Live in us and touch our lives.

Teach us to be real friends with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia.

Make us the Australia you truly want us to be.

AMEN