

A Message from the NATSICC Liturgy Team
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday

NATSICC Councillors have endorsed the NATSICC Liturgy Team's proposal to produce an Information Kit that can be resourced by Catholic communities throughout Australia. The information you have received relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday 2001. The Liturgy Team will continue to gather and collate resource materials that will be offered to Catholic communities to share in prayer and celebration, anniversaries and events that are important to Indigenous Peoples of Australia. To assist in the preparations of participating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday on 1st July 2001 we have included prayers written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, homily notes prepared by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Committee for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and prayers of the faithful prepared by the liturgy team. Our theme 'May we be One' is linked to the scripture words "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8) has been adopted from Pope John Paul II's World Day of Peace message. If we are to be one in Christ, then we have to dialogue and share stories so that we can focus on the to and learning from one another as we share our stories, cultures, spiritualities and ways of living with the land. The Indigenous peoples of Australia have the oldest living culture in the world, a culture which has survived for thousands of years. A way of life that relied on living relationships with Creator Spirit and the whole of God's creation, kinship and place of belonging are the most important factors in nurturing a deep and meaningful relationship with God. Respecting and being responsible for nature and nurture presents a spiritual relationship with God, through living in community as family. Miriam Rose Ungunmeier-Baumann, a traditional woman from Daly River in her sharing of spiritual connectedness with nature relates that all people are important, and that all people are entitled to a sense of belonging. Also there are more Australians now who understand that we are a people who celebrate together. In her talk she relates that:

Dadirri is the most important part of our life. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australian,....It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. (Ungunmeier-Baumann in Hendriks & Heffernan 1993 "Spirituality of Catholic Aborigines and the Struggle for Justice")

Deacon Boniface Perdjert, an elder from Wadeye community (Port Keats, NT) in his talk "The good things in our way of life" share the following words:

....when I read the gospels, I read them as an Aboriginal...so many of the things Christ said and did and the way He lived, make me think of the good things of our way of life. Christ did not get worried about material things....He looked on them as things that get in the way and make it hard to get to our true country. He was born in the countryside in a cave, like many of us have been born. He walked about like us and with no where to lay His head. He died with nothing on a cross. So many of our people die with nothing.He was strong on sharing. We do a lot of things like that. Of course He went a bit further. In the Eucharist He shared Himself as nobody else could. (Boniface-Peridjert in Hendriks & Heffernan 1993 "Spirituality of Catholic Aborigines and the Struggle for Justice")

Pope John Paul II in his speech in Alice Springs in 1986 spoke these words to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

...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 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. (Pope

John Paul II quoted in Hendriks & Herrnan 1993 "Spirituality of Catholic Aborigines and the Struggle for Justice")

The Indigenous peoples of Australia do have the power to be reborn. The rebirthing of Indigenous wholistic approach to life will happen through the merging of Christian faith and Indigenous spiritual values and beliefs. In his final words at Alice Springs, Pope John Paul II delivered hope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with his message:

...You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others. Our sense of belonging as Indigenous Australian Christians will be enhanced by the immersion of our culturally appropriate rituals and symbols within the ethos of the Australian Catholic Church.

May we be One He who does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:8)

Young men providing musical accompaniment for Church celebrations in Balgo Photo supplied by the Diocese of Broome