



FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

RECONCILIATION: HEALING WOUNDS, RECEIVING GIFTS

All Australians have much to learn from the cultures, spirituality, and knowledge of country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, our society is yet to recognise fully Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waters now known as Australia, or to achieve right relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

The Catholic Church in Australia has been caught up in this history of dispossession, Stolen Generations, racism, and the undermining of language and culture. Dioceses, eparchies, and religious institutes have made sincere efforts to share faith, education, and pastoral services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, much suffering has been inflicted by the historically misguided attempts of those who were ignorant of the cultural richness of these peoples.

We know that we will not be ‘fully the Church that Jesus wants’ us to be until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made their contribution to the life of the Church and “until that contribution has been joyfully received by others” within the Church.

The Plenary Council joyfully receives the following recommendations of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), which were submitted “in the hope that the Catholic Church in Australia will more resemble the Church that Jesus Christ wants her to be in relation to Australia’s First Peoples” (John Paul II, Address to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 29 November 1986):

- a. Developing the cross-cultural competency of clergy, religious, lay workers and volunteers in the Catholic Church to enable more effective and appropriate ministry with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- b. NATSICC calls upon the Catholic Church to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics to undertake formation and training. Further, the Church is encouraged to ensure that existing retreats and courses are culturally appropriate.
- c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality contains symbols and rituals that, when used appropriately in Catholic liturgical contexts, enrich our celebrations, and facilitate a welcoming environment for Indigenous Peoples.

- d. NATSICC recommends that the traditional custodians of the land on which the Church, school, parish, or organisation stands be acknowledged in a prominent and appropriate manner. Verbal acknowledgement prior to meetings and Mass is also encouraged.
- e. NATSICC calls upon the Catholic Church to unearth and discover the genius and gifts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people possess through inclusion on committees, boards, and decision-making bodies.

The Fifth Plenary Council:

- a. says sorry to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in and beyond the Church for the part played by the Church in the harms they have suffered;
- b. commits to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in continuing to work towards recognition, reconciliation and justice;
- c. joyfully receives and accepts the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church”;
- d. endorses the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and encourages engagement with processes for implementing the statement, including local, regional, and national truth-telling efforts.

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DECREE

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decrees:

Article 1

That each Catholic school, parish, diocese, eparchy or organisation will respond to the recommendations contained in the NATSICC position paper, “Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Life of the Catholic Church” in the following ways:

- a. acknowledges in a prominent and appropriate manner the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which their buildings stand;
- b. includes the online Cultural Competency in a Catholic Context course developed by NATSICC and approved by the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the orientation and/or ongoing formation of staff and volunteers to enable more effective and appropriate ministry;
- c. ensures that any retreats and other formation activities offered are culturally appropriate;
- d. works actively to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on its committees, boards and decision-making bodies.

Article 2

That the advisory councils of the Bishops’ Commission for Liturgy, in partnership with NATSICC, will develop options for the liturgically and culturally appropriate use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander symbols and rituals in Catholic liturgical contexts, with respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay
Vice-President

Date: