

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR RELATIONS WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

MEDIA STATEMENT

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Saint Pope John Paul II's speech resonates 40 years on

Catholics across Australia are being encouraged to mark the 40th anniversary of Saint Pope John Paul II's landmark speech to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The speech at Blatherskite Park in Alice Springs on November 29, 1986, was a transformative moment in the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reconciliation.

The delivery of this text to an audience largely comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people inspired many dioceses to initiate Aboriginal Catholic ministries as integral to their pastoral outreach.

The Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) are urging parishes, schools and other entities to mark the occasion in ways which are appropriate to their local community.

"This year marks the 40th Anniversary of Saint Pope John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Alice Springs," NATSICC chair Shirley Quaresimin said.

"The address was a pivotal moment because it spoke not only to us, but to the whole of the Church in Australia.

"It is timely that we look back at what has been achieved in the past 40 years but also be honest about what has not progressed. We see this as an opportunity to come together as one Church, one body in Christ."

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, said: "The enduring lesson of Saint Pope John Paul II's Alice Springs address is that the Church in Australia is called not simply to minister to Aboriginal peoples, but to joyfully receive from them.

"He saw Aboriginal culture as a place where God's Spirit was already at work and where the Gospel could take deep root.

“Forty years later, our task remains to ensure that Aboriginal Catholics are not at the margins of the Church's life, but at the heart of it.

“I encourage everyone to use this moment for reflection and celebration.”

Commission chair, Bishop Tim Norton, said: “Forty years after Alice Springs, Saint John Paul II's message remains unfinished business for the Church and the nation. His call to honour Aboriginal culture, uphold human dignity and walk together in reconciliation is as urgent today as it was in 1986.

"One of the most powerful messages of Alice Springs was the Pope's conviction that Aboriginal people do not have to choose between their culture and their Catholic faith. They are called to be fully Aboriginal and fully Christian.

"Let's enter into this anniversary with a spirit of solidarity.”

The speech at Blatherskite Park has been influential in the lives of many Catholics as the Pope affirmed the spirituality of First Nations people and their integral place in the Church.

“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,” Saint Pope John Paul II said.

A Mass will be celebrated on November 29 in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish in Alice Springs, which is expected to be livestreamed.

Background material

The full video of the speech can be found on the [ACBC YouTube](#).

The full text of the speech can be found at the [Vatican website](#).

Resources produced by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council to mark the occasion can be found [here](#) and will be updated over coming months.

A three-minute video highlighting the 1986 speech and featuring comments from people who were there will be made available via the ACBC YouTube ahead of the anniversary date for parishes and other entities to use. A link will be provided in due course.