

Walking Together in Christ: ADPC 2026 Celebrates Faith, Culture and Leadership

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aboriginal Catholic leaders from across the Diocese gather to pray, listen and share their hopes for faith and leadership in their communities

Aboriginal Catholic leaders from communities across the Diocese of Darwin gathered at Nungalinga College from 21–24 September 2026 for the Aboriginal Diocesan Pastoral Council (ADPC), under the theme “Walking Together in Christ: 40 Years On!”, reflecting on the 40 years since St John Paul II’s historic visit to Alice Springs.

The four-day gathering brought together Aboriginal leaders from Central Australian communities, communities in and around Wadeye and Daly River, the Tiwi Islands and Darwin for prayer, listening, fellowship and discernment about the future of Aboriginal Catholic leadership in their communities.

Bishop of Darwin, Most Rev Charles Gauci, said he was deeply encouraged by the gathering and by the strength of faith and hope expressed by leaders from across the Diocese.

“I was so heartened by the gathering of our Aboriginal leaders. A common desire was for a deeper understanding of our faith. There was also a deep desire to pass it on to others, especially our young people,” Bishop Gauci said.

“There is a lot of hope, often in very challenging situations. What came through very strongly was the desire of people to grow in their faith, to strengthen leadership within their own communities and to ensure that faith is passed on to the next generation.”

The gathering began with an Acknowledgement of Country, a welcome by Bishop Gauci and a memorable Rosary and Catholic Fellowship around the fire. Across the following days, community-led morning prayer, Mass, praise and worship, a healing night, fellowship and group discussions created space for participants to encounter Christ and one another.

A Praise and Healing Night included Reconciliation, Adoration and prayer ministry, while an Aboriginal-led Fellowship Night brought together music, testimony and prayer. These times of prayer and fellowship sat alongside opportunities for leaders to listen to one another and speak openly about the life of faith within their communities.

A significant focus of the gathering was remembering past Aboriginal Catholic leaders who laid foundations of faith in their communities. Participants shared stories of leaders whose lives were marked by prayer, service, teaching, visiting the sick, music, art and passing faith to younger generations.

Across these stories, common qualities emerged: strong Catholic faith, humility, patience, service, cultural strength and a commitment to forming young people. The stories provided an important reminder that leadership is not simply about holding a position, but about faithful service within family, community and Church.

Community discussions also explored how God's Spirit has always been present among Aboriginal peoples - through Country and creation, family and kinship, Elders, language, stories, song, dance, art and traditional knowledge. Participants reflected on how prayer, Scripture, the sacraments and the Gospel can strengthen these gifts and bring faith and culture together in the life and mission of the Church.

Importantly, ADPC was also about looking forward. Communities identified practical hopes including stronger local leadership teams, greater participation of young people, children's catechesis, regular Mass and prayer, Bible reading, healing and bush retreats, and closer collaboration between Elders, younger leaders, priests and Catholic organisations.

For Bishop Gauci, the desire expressed by leaders for deeper formation and for greater involvement of young people was a particularly hopeful sign.

"Our Aboriginal leaders know their communities, their strengths and the challenges they face. To hear them speak with such hope about wanting to understand their faith more deeply and then share that faith with their children and young people was very moving," he said.

The 2026 gathering also carried particular significance as the Diocese marks 40 years since St John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Alice Springs in 1986. His words continue to speak powerfully to the life of the Church today: "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."

The gathering concluded with a Travel Blessing, music, a group photo and farewells, but its mission continues. ADPC 2026 affirmed that Aboriginal Catholic leadership is about faithful service, walking together, passing faith to the next generation, and allowing the gifts of culture and faith to enrich the life of the Church.

Bishop Gauci said the gathering was an important reminder of the gifts Aboriginal Catholics continue to bring to the Diocese and of the importance of listening to and walking alongside local leaders.

"There are challenges, but there is also great hope. We need to continue walking together, supporting our leaders and creating opportunities for people to deepen their faith and share it with others," Bishop Gauci said.

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