

Bishops seek forgiveness from the Stolen Generation on National Sorry Day

As our country prepares for National Sorry Day and the coming week dedicated to reconciliation, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference is mindful of the sad history of injustices endured by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since the beginning of European Settlement. With this in mind, we, the Catholic Bishops of Australia wish to take the opportunity offered by this occasion of remembrance to ask the victims of the policy of breaking up indigenous families their forgiveness for any part the Church may have played in causing them harm and suffering.

We note with regret that lamentable chapter of Australian history which saw the unjustifiable separation of indigenous children from their families. We express our deepest sorrow for the suffering and hurt inflicted on indigenous Australians which have consequences still in evidence today - social dislocation, loss of culture and identity and a continuing sense of hopelessness in the lives of many of the First Peoples of our nation.

The accounts of family separation and the terrible personal suffering endured by our indigenous sisters and brothers, brought about by government policies of the day, are well recorded in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report Bringing Them Home. What is also recorded is the assistance given to the implementation of these policies, through the provision of institutional care, by a variety of agencies including the Catholic Church which, despite the best of intentions, reflected the prevailing attitudes of the era.

We recognise the selfless work of many Church personnel, religious and laity, who have served Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with love for many generations. The wholesome relationship which exists between many such carers and the indigenous people they served, testifies to the loving sacrifices of both parties despite the adversity of the times.

In a spirit of sorrow and forgiveness, we, the Catholic Bishops of Australia wish to record our commitment to continue the healing process for the benefit of victims of the unjust policies of the past, to support the just needs of indigenous people today and to contribute to the quest for national reconciliation. It is our prayerful hope that this commitment will help our nation grow in unity and live as one people with dignity and in peace.

Statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference