

Heal Country !

The theme for NAIDOC WEEK 2021 is *Heal Country!* This theme encourages everyone to advocate for stronger safeguards against the exploitation, desecration, and destruction of our lands, waters, sacred sites, and cultural heritage. This is the time to celebrate everything wonderful about Indigenous Australia.

One thing I've learned from my encounters with our indigenous brothers and sisters in Carnarvon and Derby is the importance of environmental stewardship. They have a unique perspective on the way they understand nature and the way they treat it. Nature is sacred to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, as it nourishes and sustains their lives.

I had the opportunity to explore the beautiful landscape; the rivers, gorges and national parks. I witnessed gestures that say something louder, such as stroking the trees or throwing stones into the river and the asking of nature and the land for permission.

This reminded me of a message written in front of a big tree on the way out from Mammoth Cave (Margaret River) near the car park. It said:

*“Ouch! THAT HURTS. Show us a little respect, please.
Our bark is like the skin on your body,
it protects our living cells inside from destructive diseases, fungi, and insects.
Carving and cutting into our bark can cause us serious harm.”*

The theme “Heal Country!” has many meanings. It can mean healing a sacred land to its people that has been desecrated by exploitation, or the healing of a divided nation that treats its indigenous people with little respect. One of the significant meanings is the healing of our blindness and disrespect for what is sacred and alive. This blindness demonstrates a lack of appreciation, particularly in relationship with the environment, which in turn could jeopardise the future of all Australians and the world.

Nature speaks. Listening to nature's voice is something I always enjoy doing. When we celebrate, the closer we are to nature, the closer we are to the core of life. Nature makes us appreciate the value of life. When we think of a tree as nothing more than a potential chair, it can't tell us much about growth. When a river becomes nothing more than a dumping ground for our industrial waste, it no longer informs us about movement. And when we think of a flower as nothing more than a model for a plastic decoration, it loses its ability to reveal to us the simple beauty of life.



Fr Tim Tapoona was on mission in the Gascoyne and the Kimberley, February - June, 2021

Our difficult and urgent task is to accept the truth that nature is primarily a gift to be received with admiration and gratitude, rather than property to be possessed. Only when we bow deeply to the rivers, oceans, hills, and mountains that provide us with a home will they become transparent and reveal their true meaning to us.

The journey, like many others in life, begins with a desire to see, understand, and treat people and things differently, with an openness to new ways of thinking, and with a genuine desire to learn and correct past mistakes. Let us be more aware of and attentive to the cries of indigenous people, our lands, our waters, our sacred sites, and our cultural heritage as we observe [NAIDOC Week](#). God bless this Great South Land!

Timothy Tapoona, CSsR

