



REDEMPTORISTS OF OCEANIA AND THE REFERENDUM ON RECOGNITION OF FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES THROUGH A VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

The Redemptorists of Oceania are a community of priests, brothers and lay partners dedicated to following Jesus Christ. We have been on mission in Oceania since 1882.

As leader of the Redemptorists in Oceania, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence for over 60,000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the land and waterways of the Australian continent. I acknowledge their culture, customs, spirituality, endurance and their profound love for, and custodianship of this land.

I am incredibly saddened that our First Nations' peoples have suffered for over 200 years through the non-recognition of their dignity as human persons, the dispossession of land and waterways, the diminishment of culture / language / customs / spirituality / food sources / rights / autonomy and identity, the breakup of families and communities, the introduction of new diseases, the neglect of basic human needs, and the ongoing destruction of the environment leading to poverty, dependence, broken spirits and a trail of tears.

I hold in admiration the desire of our First Nations' peoples to seek reconciliation with non-indigenous Australians while enduring so much suffering to the point of near extinction. I hear their consistent voice to seek a way to walk together that acknowledges the injustices of the past, redresses the wrongs, heals the hurts and gives hope for our future as one nation. I hear the trembling in their hearts and voices as they await a decision that will impact them to the core.

I believe that all who follow Jesus with any commitment have an obligation to take up his mission with honesty, and seek grace to find a way to right the wrongs, reconcile differences, build bridges, cultivate empathy, walk together in peace and love one another as Jesus loves. Everything in our DNA as missionary disciples of Christ calls us to advocate for all who are marginalised, abandoned or displaced. In conscience, we cannot walk alone; nor can we leave anyone behind. Everything we do, we do in Christ who calls us into communion with God and all creation.

As Redemptorist provincial, I entrust our community to participate wholeheartedly in Jesus' mission to proclaim "Good News to the poor, release for the prisoner, recovery of sight for the blind, liberation for the oppressed and instituting a year of Jubilee." (Luke 4). As Redemptorists, we commit ourselves to the social teachings of the Catholic Church which proclaim Jesus' preferential option for the poor and the dignity of every person. We uphold our own Redemptorist constitutions which impel us to show solidarity with the poor by promoting their fundamental rights to justice and freedom. (#5) We cannot, nor do we seek to escape our obligations to walk joyfully and humbly with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I realise the importance of a referendum to address in legislation a more honest awareness of who we are as a people, and how we walk together into the future. I acknowledge the necessity of First Nations peoples to be involved in all the decisions which affect them, a right of theirs enshrined in the charter of the United Nations, but not yet in our own.

I anticipate that, should the suffering of our First Nations' peoples continue, then it does so with consequences for all Australians. Their plight is ours, their grief will be ours, and their healing will be ours. We are in this together and we each have an obligation not to do harm, nor cause our First Nations' peoples further grief or distress about their future.

I have faith in the heart of most Australians to sense the immense significance of this moment to build trust between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, to see the good that can be done and do it without fuss or complication; and to let goodwill overcome the fear about all that could go wrong in re-wording the constitution, recognising our First Nations peoples and granting them a voice to Parliament to better help us care for the least.

I place hope in the goodwill of those migrants to Australia over the past 235 years who have embraced a way of life which tries to "give everyone a fair go", "do the right thing" and "give a hand-up, not a help-out." Closing the gap will be unrealisable without a change of awareness and a deeper sense of working together for the good of everyone. I trust the courage of most Australians to not put off for tomorrow what can be done today, and in doing so, rejoice in a nation awakened to the hope of a better and more just future.

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." (Romans 8:28)

I pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this most important watershed moment.

Come Holy Spirit!

Calm our hearts and minds,
brooding with conflict, confusion or despair
about who is right, what is just and how the best outcomes can be delivered.

Allow us the grace to be still,
to feel the weight of the moment without needless anxiety,
to hear the cry of the poor,
and listen to your voice calling us into communion,
revealing your plans for peace, not disaster.

Nourish us in love to overcome our fear,
deepen trust so that we walk together and not alone,
and inflame our hope to dispel the darkness.

Give us courage to act justly, love tenderly
and walk humbly with you on this journey of reconciliation.

Come Holy Spirit! Amen.

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Provincial