



Reconciliation is an ongoing journey

The journey to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is not easy, but the Catholic Church remains hopeful of healing. That is the message from Chair of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Bishop Charles Gauci, as Australians mark National Reconciliation Week.

"We are reminded that reconciliation is an ongoing journey," Bishop Gauci said.

"There has been much that needs to be healed—there has been injustice, discrimination, dispossession, and all that accompanies these issues."

Reflecting on the path forward, Bishop Gauci emphasised the importance of healing and progress.

"As we journey together, we must continue to heal from the past while also looking toward the future. We need to find effective ways to ensure the common good is shared by all people of this nation, especially our First Nations People."

Bishop Gauci highlighted the critical areas that need attention to achieve equality.

"We need to narrow the gaps in life expectancy, housing, employment, and mental health," he said. "There are no easy answers. We need to prayerfully reflect, be guided by the Holy Spirit, listen to each other with respect, and walk together to find the best way forward."

He stressed the importance of mutual respect and equality, saying: "There is no room for paternalism, no room for pushing people where they don't want to be, and no room for any form of disrespect."

"This journey is not easy. Love demands sacrifices—it's about giving, respecting, and wanting the absolute best for others."

Bishop Gauci called on the Church to play a pivotal role in this journey.

"We, as a Church, need to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, working together to eliminate anything that prevents us from being brothers and sisters with equal dignity, equal opportunity, and equal rights," he said.

"We celebrate our differences, enrich each other through them, and find common points that reflect our deepest human aspirations. Having said all this, I am full of hope. May the Holy Spirit guide us forward so that we, as a Church, can be a leaven in the midst of the larger Australian society, healing trauma, and looking forward with hope to the present and the future."

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council underscored the need for unity and collective action.

"*Now more than ever*, we need to place our trust and hopes in the Holy Spirit and come together as a nation, undivided. We are one people under God, each with our own gifts and strengths, and now is the time we, as a Church, show leadership through unity and purpose," the council stated.

"Our communities and families live with daily reminders of the disparity in health, education, and life expectancy. The spirits of many of us are also low following the failed efforts of First Australians for our voice to be heard on issues that affect us. However, we have faced challenges before and remain the oldest continuing culture in the world."

The council called on all Catholics to join them in this journey of reconciliation.

"We will be your companions in making our Great Southern Land a better and fairer place for all. We need to walk side by side, with each other, and with Jesus Christ."

This prayer (below) is offered as an invitation to embrace the journey with open hearts and minds, guided by the Spirit, towards a future where all Australians can thrive together in harmony and respect.

Companion Prayer

Lord, we are companions on a journey

Only you Dear Lord know the identity and depth of me

You know my hurts and pains those frustrations I feel in this land

So please, I ask you take my hand and comfort me Reconcile and guide me in justice and in faith

For we're on our way to Alice (Springs) where you expressed your love for me Lord,

Set me free and let me be the servant I want to be Lord,

I thank you for hearing and understanding me

For Lord, You are always on my mind and on my lips and in my heart

And there's simply no other way that it could be.