



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Church Celebrates 30th Anniversary of Saint John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs

Media Release

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On Sunday 27th November 2016, church leaders, parishes and Indigenous communities will gather together to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Saint John Paul II's (JPII) visit to Alice Springs in the heart of Australia on 29th November 1986.

The theme of the commemorations is, 'Walk Tall and Command Respect. The time for this rebirth is now'.

Bishop Eugene Hurley, Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (BCRATSIP) said, 'It is appropriate that we celebrate and observe the thirtieth anniversary of the visit of John Paul II as we prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in Advent. As with both, the theme is one of hope and rebirth'.

"This timely theme is an invitation and call to us to create and ensure a change in societal attitude and promote not only rebirth and hope but justice and equal rights of indigenous peoples.'

It is an opportune time to remind us of the important words of Pope St John Paul II, the Bishop of Darwin said. 'You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you.'

"This is the right time and place when we, the Church, are invited and encouraged to listen to our indigenous sisters and brothers and look at specific actions we need to take to ensure the meaningful roles and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our Church and society.'

Bishop Hurley added that, 'Not only is this commemoration a call to inspire faith communities to promote a greater contribution for First Nations peoples within our Church. It is also a call to actively face the massive assault and injustices on the very lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Those assaults include the high rate of suicide and incarceration among our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

Recalling JPII's visit, John Lochowiak, Chairman of NATSICC said, 'As Saint John Paul II spoke, a windstorm picked up the red soil from the Earth and swirled it amongst our people. The dust seemed to intertwine with the words of love, hope and empathy. The message touched our souls and it touched our skin. Never before had we felt so welcome in the house of Jesus as when Saint John Paul II spoke.

"If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now!"



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‘The impact of this day on our lives cannot be measured. It provided the encouragement for the establishment of Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministries all over Australia and it lit the fire in our hearts, which still provides the warmth, energy and strength for us to continue. We now have over 120,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia and the support of our Australian Catholic Bishops on our journey of faith,’ Lochowiak said.

In partnership with BCRATSIP, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) is preparing a day of celebration on 27 November 2016 with print and digital media resources available. Every Parish and Catholic School is invited to host a celebration of the visit.

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