



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops' statement calls for 'new engagement' with First Peoples

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia's Catholic bishops have called on the nation to seek "a new engagement" with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their annual Social Justice Statement launched today.

Since the 1940s, the bishops have published annual statements that urge the Catholic community to reflect and act on social, economic and ecological issues. The statements are published as a focal point for Social Justice Sunday, which will be marked on August 27 this year.

This year's statement, *Listen, Learn, Love: A New Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, was launched in Western Sydney on Thursday morning by Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, chair of the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service.

"One of the objectives of this statement is that we want Catholics to understand that Catholic social teaching and Catholic social action are not simply theoretical and academic exercises," he said.

"We hear what God is saying to us about justice by being with our sisters and brothers on the peripheries of society."

While the Social Justice Statement is a teaching document of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, a large part of this year's statement was written by members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council. It is part of the message's exhortation to "listen".

"Listening is hard. Hearing about young people taking their lives, about so many people ending up in jail, of children still being taken away from their parents and grandparents and about the ongoing racism is tough," Bishop Long said.

"It must be so much more difficult for these people to tell us about their painful experiences. We are deeply grateful to those who shared their stories of pain with us."

The theme for this year's statement was chosen in May 2022, well before the Voice to Parliament referendum was mooted and before the timing of a vote was proposed. While the bishops don't suggest how people should vote, Bishop Long said "whatever the outcome of this year's referendum, we ask the Church in Australia to make efforts to lead the way for our fellow Australians" in pursuing reconciliation.

"Our attitudes and actions towards First Nations Peoples need to be grounded in justice, love and humility," he said.

"We need to listen with deep respect and learn from them about what needs to be done to improve their situations. We need to walk with them, day by day, and work with them to bring about change for the better – for their people and for all of us.

"Strengthening our relationship with our First Peoples is integral and indeed critical to the strengthening of the whole nation."

Watch the launch at: https://www.youtube.com/live/jz_5pam7nBs?si=XV-ox6EyCatkD98J

Access the statement at: <https://bit.ly/SJS2023-24>