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**Reawakening the Spirit: A Catholic Reflection for
NAIDOC Week at Ngani Pari-Arra (Formerly the
Otherway Centre)**

Archbishop Patrick O'Regan | NAIDOC Week 2025 |

My dear sisters and brothers, greetings I am very happy to be with you today.

This NAIDOC Week, as we gather to reflect, to honour, and to walk together, we are drawn into sacred memory — of land, of culture, of people, and of journey. The renaming of the Otherway Centre to **Ngani Pari-Arra Cultural Centre**, meaning *Gathering by the River*, is more than a change in signage. It is a profound re-grounding in place, identity, and sacred history. It reminds us that the river still flows, the people remain, and the Spirit continues to move.

Ngani Pari-Arra — the name itself speaks of return and renewal. It evokes the enduring connection between the Kaurana people and the First, Second, and Third Creeks, whose waters have shaped this land and nurtured its peoples for thousands of years. These waterways are not just geographical features; they are the veins of Country, rich with meaning, ceremony, and continuity.

As Christians, we recognise rivers as places of encounter with God. Think of the River Jordan, where Jesus was baptised (Matthew 3:13-17), and where the heavens opened, revealing the Spirit descending like a dove. Water in Scripture always signals transformation, life, and a return to grace. In the words of Pope Francis, *“Our defence of the land and of Indigenous cultures is not just a political act, but a moral obligation grounded in our faith.”*¹

¹ *Querida Amazonia*, 42

The Story of the Otherway Centre

The journey of Ngani Pari-Arra began in the early 1980s under the name ***The Otherway Centre***, born from the spirit of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and shaped by the leadership of Aboriginal women of deep faith and vision — **Aunty Shirley Peisley AM** and **Leila Rankine**. Their wisdom, courage, and commitment to self-determination became the founding values of the Centre.

A Ministry of Presence

From the earliest years, the Otherway Centre embodied a Christian ministry of presence — a space of listening, accompaniment, and solidarity. It welcomed Elders, families, and young people; supported those arriving in the city from regional communities; and offered creative workshops that celebrated Aboriginal identity.

The relocation to Stepney in the 1990s, alongside Second Creek, marked another chapter. The setting was quieter, the facilities more stable, but the purpose remained: to honour culture, promote healing, and walk with the community. The move near the Church of the Holy Name and Second Creek was deeply symbolic — bringing together sacred water and sacred space.

This ministry of presence reflects what Pope Francis calls the “art of accompaniment,” where the Church walks with people on their journey: *“It means listening to them, being with them, encouraging them and*

helping them discern."². That has been the heartbeat of this Centre for more than forty years.

Faith, Land, and Justice

As we gather this NAIDOC Week to rename the Centre in Kurna language, we are participating in the sacred work of justice. We are proclaiming that Indigenous voices must not only be heard, but centred; that land and culture are not disposable, but foundational.

Scripture reminds us that land is never a possession, but a gift entrusted to us: "*The land is mine,*" says the Lord, "*and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers*"³. The Kurna people have been faithful custodians of this land since time immemorial, honouring its rhythms, protecting its creeks, and sharing its story. Our role is not to override that story, but to reverently join it.

As the Church in Adelaide, we recommit ourselves to walking this journey — not as guests, but as partners. Not as saviours, but as friends. We acknowledge that the Church has not always walked justly. Yet today, we choose to walk differently. We choose the *Otherway*.

A Living Legacy

The legacy of the Otherway Centre will now be carried forward in **Ngani Pari-Arra Cultural Centre**. It remains a place where

²*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169

³Leviticus 25:23

culture is lived, where stories are honoured, where healing continues. It is where ancient springs meet new hope. It is where the Spirit reawakens.

The presence of Second Creek flowing nearby is not just a poetic image — it is a theological one. It reminds us of the living waters promised by Christ: “*Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst*”⁴. In this Centre, many have found such water — the kind that sustains dignity, heals wounds, and renews life.

As we bless this new name and vision, let us also bless the journey ahead. Let us support this Centre not only with words, but with actions — through funding, presence, partnerships, and prayer.

Final Words and Prayer

In this *Year of Jubilee* for our Church, let us remember that the true Jubilee is proclaimed when liberty is restored, when land is healed, and when communities are restored to joy.

May we, as the Archdiocese of Adelaide, stand in deep and ongoing solidarity with Ngani Pari-Arra. May we listen well, learn humbly, and love faithfully.

⁴ John 4:14

Let us pray:

**Creator Spirit, breath of life,
We give thanks for the Kaurna people, for their
custodianship of this land,
For the waters that flow through it, and for the
stories that live within it.**

**We bless Ngani Pari-Arra — Gathering by the River
—**

**That it may continue to be a wellspring of healing,
strength, and cultural renewal.**

**We honour those who have gone before — Aunty
Shirley, Leila, and so many others.**

**May their legacy inspire us to walk justly, to speak
truthfully,**

**And to build a Church that reflects the dignity of all
your children.**

**Holy Spirit, reawaken in us the courage to walk the
Otherway —**

**The way of Jesus, the way of peace, the way of
reconciliation.**

In your holy name we pray, Amen.

**“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called
children of God.”**

— Matthew 5:9