Educating for Justice Truth and Reconciliation

A New Partnership with Indigenous Peoples of Australia
A statement by the National Catholic Education Commission

Vision

The National Catholic Education Commission's vision for reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples of Australia is:

That all involved in Catholic education will act upon the words of The Australian Bishops, Pope John Paul II and the Vision of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Firmly opt for solidarity between all of Australia's inhabitants by individually and communally responding to a call to conversion based on hope, promise and love.¹

The Church of Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you [the Indigenous peoples of Australia] have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.²

A united Australia which respects this land of ours; Values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; And provides justice and equity for all.³

Mission

This expression of the mission of Jesus provides a key source of inspiration for all of us.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.⁴

¹ This statement was launched by Bishop Barry Collins in Melbourne on 5 November 1998
² No. 8 Pastoral Letter of Australian Bishops - Racism and the Conversion of the Human Heart Dec 1988
³ Vision Statement of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Feb 1992
The NCEC intends the statement "Educating for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation" to be a positive response to Indigenous people who have said:

*We call upon the Church - her people, her leaders and her children to listen with new ears, to see with new eyes, what always was and what always will be - to be awakened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lifeways, cultures and spiritualities.*

**Commitment**

For some people, this awakening has already dawned. This experience can and should be shared.

With this in mind the NCEC declares its commitment to:

- engage in the process of awakening which will bring about a new heart in the people of this land;
- acknowledge that Justice and Truth are at the heart of Reconciliation;
- support and encourage educators in the Catholic community to journey with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and work towards Reconciliation through education;
- reflect upon and evaluate progress of Catholic education in Australia towards Reconciliation.

**Values and Principles**

All involved in Catholic education are called to move beyond words and to express in action the Gospel values and principles they profess by:

- affirming that education has continued in this land in unique ways for thousands of years;
- recognising, appreciating and celebrating cultural diversity;
- acknowledging the dignity, self-worth and human rights of all Australians;

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*NCEC Conference ACT 3 May 1996*
sharing spiritualities and connectedness to the land and sea; and

seeking Reconciliation by…
- acknowledging wrongdoing,
- expressing sorrow in truthful ways,
- forgiving and being forgiven,
- undertaking, as far as possible, to restore the damage caused by wrongdoing, and
- celebrating Reconciliation with appropriate liturgy that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

NCEC will promote such action in full collaboration with the State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions in a spirit of Justice and Equity.

**Challenges in Education for Furthering Reconciliation**

All involved in Catholic education are urged to engage with present and future challenges. These will include the search for common ground and mutual understanding, learning to "walk in the other's shoes" and maintaining a particular focus on:

**Communication**
- The Reconciliation process will be furthered by the development of communication strategies based on understanding, mutual respect and negotiation.

**Improving Relationships**
- Fractured relationships need to be restored through:
  - individual, personal, internal reconciliation;
  - reconciliation within and between cultural groups; and
  - development of mutual trust.

**Countering Racism**
- It is essential to nurture educational principles and approaches which involve:
  - the pursuit of truth;
  - liberation from ignorance and prejudice; and
  - promoting relationships in harmony with gospel values.

**Addressing Disadvantage**
- Progress towards Reconciliation calls for a recognition "....that past injustice continues to give rise to present injustices for Indigenous Australians".  

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6 The Path to Reconciliation : Renewal of the Nation, Australian Reconciliation Convention 28 May 1997
Our Shared History

> A positive and productive approach to Reconciliation relies upon a deeper appreciation of the thousands of years of Indigenous Australian history with a deliberate focus on the implications and consequences of our shared history of the last 200 years.

Reading the Signs of the Times

> Renewal of Australia as a nation is the ultimate goal of National Reconciliation. It is crucial that education communities discern the signs of the times so that Catholic educators can contribute to Reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Renewal

> Restoration and renewal of right relationships among peoples is a necessary consequence of expressing sorrow and seeking forgiveness for the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. The process of National Reconciliation challenges Australians to work in partnership to create a better future.

Focus for Action

NCEC will collaborate with State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions to support and actively encourage participation with Indigenous peoples.

Respecting the previously stated values and principles, and in particular, the principle of allowing decisions to be taken as close as possible to the point at which they can be effectively implemented, an appropriate response would include:

> Critically reflecting on roles and responsibilities so that policy and practice will achieve genuine educational outcomes;

> Continually challenging Catholic educators to:
  - be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit;
  - affirm and value all people;
  - discern new ways to assist all Australians to understand their country's histories and cultural identities; and
  - exercise leadership in educating people to understand the process of Reconciliation.

Reconciliation is about building a new relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the wider community, one that heals the pain of the past and ensures we all share fairly and equally in our national citizenship.  

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7 Ibid