
Around the Well

The Newsletter of Concerned Catholics
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Voice Edition

As the Voice referendum on 14 October looms and we approach the fork in the road, the impact our decisions will have for the future of Australia and all Australians weighs heavily. First and foremost, we face a grave moral question, and where better to seek guidance and inspiration than Jesus' teachings! Jesus' preference was for the poor and marginalised; he taught us to love, to seek what is best for others not just for me, and to fight injustice. Catholic social teachings arise out of the Gospels and include the importance of the dignity of each human, the preferential option for the poor, and subsidiarity, the right for people to have agency in decision-making that affects their lives.

Our recent session reflected on the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, Catholic Social Teachings and the Voice. The overwhelming response from those present was one of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition and for enshrining a Voice in the Constitution. **The CCT Committee then decided that, whilst respecting that some may not agree, CCT would take the position of full support, in line with the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR, with which we are affiliated) and many national Catholic organisations and ministries.** The Committee was also moved to contribute an opinion piece to the *Mercury*. This piece was published in the *Mercury* today and is printed below.

I invite you to read the article. If you are still deciding which way to vote, I implore you to fact check the information in the media and in our letter boxes, much of which is mis- or dis-information. Do what you can to have respectful conversations with others.....and let the Spirit work.

Sue Chen

CCT Opinion Piece (published Mercury 30.09.2023)

The symbolism found in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is striking. Uluru is near to what is called the 'heart of the Red Centre' of Australia. Our own hearts are the living centre of each of us. Such an emotional appeal or plea as the Statement from the Heart is, calls out for a gentle response, especially when its roots are anchored in many decades of neglect and maltreatment.

The Statement from the Heart is the culmination of 13 community dialogues across Australia in which the emotions and hopes of First Nations Peoples were heard,



Some extra links for more readings...

Two bishops speak in support of the Voice, [Bishop Charles Gauci](#) (Darwin) and [Bishop Vincent Long](#) (Parramatta).

Australian Electoral Commission official [Yes/No pamphlet](#)

[Statements from Catholic Organisations](#)

[One Journey Together](#) NATSICC, the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops

[Why Yes?](#) Campaign arguments

[Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) (includes video link)

[ACBC Social Justice Statement 2023-24](#)

[Catholic Social Teachings](#)

"The establishment of a new society for Aboriginal people cannot go forward without just and mutually recognised agreements with regard to these human problems, even though their causes lie in the past....what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off to tomorrow."

Pope St John Paul II
Speech to Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islanders in Alice Springs 1986

concluding with a generous invitation for all Australians 'to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.' Reading this clear, gracious and hopeful statement should dispel any fears.

How is it fair that the First Nations Peoples have significantly lower life expectancy, fewer educational opportunities, poorer standards of housing and a lower standard of living? Surely, fairness requires that providing for the needs of each person is the main concern. Fairness, equity - a fair go – are all a part of the Australian DNA.

Much is made of the claim that all Australians should be treated equally. The words *equality* and *equity* are often confused. *Equality* means that all are treated the same. However, *equity* means that people are treated differently in order to accommodate their particular needs. The demand for equality should not preclude addressing need fairly.

There have been past efforts to correct disadvantage, which have largely failed. Often those efforts were rooted in paternalistic, bureaucratic and remote decision making processes resulting in poor identification of need and appropriate remedies, shaped by an inability to listen and to hear the very people they were meant to help.

At a recent gathering hosted by Concerned Catholics Tasmania, part of a national network of organisations seeking reform in the Catholic Church, the invitation of the Statement from the Heart was reflected upon using the lens of Catholic Social Teachings. Teachings such as the Dignity of the Human Person, standing with the poor and marginalised (Option for the Poor) and Subsidiarity (people and groups have the right to participate in decisions affecting them) are particularly helpful when discerning how to respond to the call from indigenous Australians in the Statement from the Heart.

While the hierarchy of the Australian Catholic Church has chosen not to take a lead on whether or not to support the Voice, preferring to leave it to individuals' discernment, Catholics are encouraged to use those teachings in deciding how to vote.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council is the peak advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops and, applying those teachings, supports a Yes vote. Likewise, many other Catholic organisations, including the St Vincent de Paul Society, Caritas Australia, Catholic Religious Australia through its various affiliated religious orders, and Catholic Social Services Australia, have publicly backed the Voice. Those organisations have direct day to day experience of the extent of inequity that they hope and pray will be addressed more effectively by the Voice.

The Statement from the Heart is simply seeking a voice to Parliament for First Nations Peoples like that of other minorities and interest groups in our society. What is being sought is a means of engaging First Nations Peoples in addressing their particular needs in their different communities in a distinctive and tailored way: one that is advisory, has no legislative power but is embedded in the Constitution. This will ensure that First Nations Peoples' advice is always available to the government of the day, regardless of election cycles and who forms government. Such a change provides the best chance of addressing many of the long-term challenges that have existed over numerous election cycles.

Let us also respond "from the heart" and accept that the way in which our hearts react to this inclusive invitation should guide how we vote on October 14th. As Catholics in Tasmania, what does the example of Jesus tell us? He brought life and hope to the poor, the powerless and marginalised as he listened to his heart and responded out of unconditional love for all.

So, equity and a fair go please, not equality. We are inspired to vote YES and encourage all to do the same. A Yes vote is a vote for hope, a positive vote to give our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sisters and brothers better chances in life for their benefit and indeed, for the benefit of all Australians.

Our hope is that by enhancing the welfare of First Nations Peoples, our own welfare and spirit as a nation will be enriched. That is both their wish and ours.

Sue Chen, Chair, Concerned Catholics Tasmania