HEAD, HEART & HANDS

REFLECTING ON SAINT POPE JOHN PAUL II'S ADDRESS TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES, ALICE SPRINGS, 1986 — 40 YEARS ON

In November 1986, Saint Pope John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at Alice Springs — the first Pope to do so on their own Country. His words were a pivotal moment in the lives of First Nations Catholics, and forty years on, they continue to resonate. Head, Heart & Hands is an activity for parishes, schools and groups to enter that history together, with honesty, humility and hope.

Transcript of St Pope John Paul II's address: https://tinyurl.com/STPOPEJPII

Three lenses for reflection



HEAD

Knowing the Story
Knowing the history.
Sitting with truth.



HEART

Feeling the Truth
Lament, endurance, hope, and the invitation to genuine conversion.



HANDS

Walking Together
Moving from listening to action.

Setting up the yarning circle

A yarning circle is an Aboriginal practice of conversation and discernment used for thousands of years — a space where every voice is equal, every person is heard, and the Spirit is given room to move.

- **FIND** a quiet place. Arrange seating in a circle — chairs or floor, no head, no foot. There is no hierarchy here.
- **PLACE** something in the centre that represents both culture and faith — a cross, a coolamon, a stone from Country, or a painting.
- **EXPLAIN** the talking piece — a gum leaf, a stone, or a small cross. Hold it to speak; when you don't hold it, listen deeply. No one is interrupted.
- **ENTER SILENCE** before each question. Do not rush. The Spirit takes time to move within us. Silence is welcome.
- **BEGIN** with an Acknowledgement of Country and a short opening prayer.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

ONE QUESTION FROM EACH MODULE — AND THE WORDS OF SAINT POPE JOHN PAUL II THAT INSPIRED THEM

The words of Saint Pope John Paul II that speak to each of these modules are featured on the back page of this resource.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

1. Set up your yarning circle (see opposite page)
2. Turn to the back page — read each JPII quote aloud before discussing the question below it
3. Pass the talking piece and discuss — one question at a time, no rush
4. Close by writing your commitment in the box below and sharing it with the group

THREE QUESTIONS

1

HEAD

"What do you know — or what have you been taught — about the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in your region? What might you not know?"

2

Heart

"The image of the tree in the bushfire — scorched but rooted, scarred but alive. What does this image stir in you?"

3

Hands

"What is one concrete thing your parish, school or group could do to better honour and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?"

Pass the talking piece. Enter silence before speaking. All voices are equal in the circle.

MY COMMITMENT — TAKING A STEP

In response to this reflection, I commit to: _____

_____

_____

The full Head, Heart & Hands resource includes three complete modules, a Facilitator Guide, and a specially designed version for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

NATSICC has developed a full Head, Heart, Hands activity for full, half and part day sessions. For access, please visit www.natsicc.org.au.

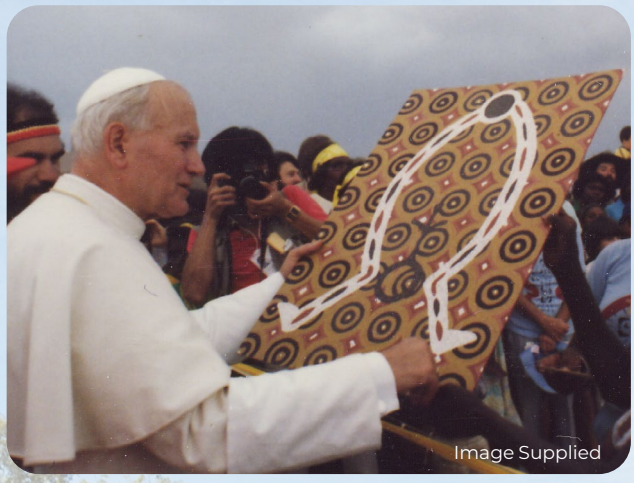


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In November 1986, something remarkable happened at Alice Springs. Saint John Paul II became the first Pope to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on their own Country — speaking words of respect, solidarity, and deep spiritual recognition. 40 years on, those words still resonate. Below are a Selection of his words.

HEAD

"Your 'Dreaming'... is your only way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit in you and in creation. You must keep your striving for God and hold on to it in your lives."

- Saint Pope John Paul II

HEART

"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!"

- Saint Pope John Paul II

HANDS

"You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them."

- Saint Pope John Paul II

These quotes are drawn from the Head, Heart & Hands reflection activity — see pages 20–21.
The full activity, including a Facilitator Guide and a version for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, is available at www.natsicc.org.au.

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