



# HOLY SPIRIT SOCIAL JUSTICE

JUNE 2021 EDITION

Tree planting during Laudato Si Week in May  
Ngunnawal Elders and Archbishop Christopher



## A MESSAGE FROM FR THONN

I was delighted to attend the Archbishop's Laudato Si' prayer morning and tree planting ceremony on Friday, 21 May. Archbishop Prowse has encouraged us all to be active in following Pope Francis' direction and was

well supported by a variety of participants at the event including the Ngunnawal people. It was also good to see members from our Social Justice Group present along with many people from across the Archdiocese.

It is timely because on 25 May, Pope Francis launched a program to enact Laudato Si' throughout the Church. I encourage you to read the summary at <https://www.ncronline.org/>



Smoking Ceremony held during Laudato Si Week in May

[news/earthbeat/pope-francis-launches-program-put-laudato-si-action-throughout-church](https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/pope-francis-launches-program-put-laudato-si-action-throughout-church) and consider contacting Peter, Alison or any Social Justice Group member to see how you can help.

God bless you all  
Fr Thonn

## FROM THE CHAIR

Now is the time for action according to Pope Francis and Archbishop Prowse – see Fr Thonn's note. Once again, we thank you for taking the time to read our SJG newsletter and hope that it provides insights into a range of crucial issues.

Over the next few weeks, you will hear a lot about the formation of a **Care for Creation team** in the Parish. We ask that you consider your involvement in this opportunity for our Parish to make a stand about ways we can help our local environment. It might be by taking an active role or by providing prayer support and receiving information as it becomes available. The Parish and the SJG are committed to following Pope Francis' requests in Laudato Si'.

*Peter Peterson [peterimantpeterson@gmail.com](mailto:peterimantpeterson@gmail.com)*

## REFLECTION ON LAUDATO SI'

We hope that the reflection at the Masses last weekend on Pope Francis' letter to all people – Laudato Si' – got you thinking and enthusiastic to find out more about how our Parish is going to respond. Please join us in the Parish Rooms on

**Sunday, 20 June at 10.30am**

for further discussion and planning to form a **Care for Creation Team.**

Maybe you can't help now, but you might have some good ideas you'd like to share. All are welcome. Contact Maureen [maureenhilton@gmail.com](mailto:maureenhilton@gmail.com)

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DEATHS IN CUSTODY AND INCARCERATION RATES IN AUSTRALIA



The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was appointed by the Australian Government in 1987. The aim was to study and report on the underlying social, cultural and legal issues behind the high levels of deaths in custody of Indigenous Australians in the 1980s, and to make recommendations as to prevention of future deaths. The Royal Commission was expected to be a landmark enquiry.

The RCIADIC investigated 99 deaths in custody and issued its report in 1991, making **339 recommendations**, and several critical findings, including:

- Glaring deficiencies existed in the standard of care afforded to many of the deceased.
- There appeared to be little appreciation of the duty of care owed by custodial authorities to persons in custody. In many cases death was contributed to by system failures or absence of due care.
- Indigenous Australians died at about the same rate as non-Indigenous people, but the rate at which they came into custody was much higher, i.e., they

died at the same rate but more died because more of them were in prison in the first place.

- Indigenous Australians were disadvantaged in the areas of health, employment, housing and education. This was in part due to systemic racism, and government policies pushing a view that Indigenous Australians needed to be treated in different ways than the rest of the Australian population.
- These factors contributed to the ongoing disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians, including to what is now known as '**intergenerational trauma**'.
- Intergenerational trauma among Indigenous Australians has led to high rates of poor mental health and wellbeing, family breakdown, suicide and harmful alcohol and other drugs use. The above factors have also exacerbated the part played by alcohol and other drug use in arrest rates of Indigenous Australians.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDED

- Reducing the number of Indigenous people in custody; in particular, urgent action should be taken to reduce the rate of Indigenous children in the criminal justice system. Arrest and imprisonment should be a last resort for Indigenous people, especially young people; more should be done to provide community service work and other programs as alternative sentences, including trauma-informed and culturally aware programs that provide skills, knowledge and work experience to reduce the risk of reoffending. This is important particularly in remote and regional communities.
- Medical assistance should be called where necessary. Often what was perceived by custodial staff as drunkenness or drug use was in fact a medical condition.
- An ongoing process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Abolition of public drunkenness and offensive language as a criminal offence.
- Better collaboration with Indigenous communities.
- Annual reporting of Indigenous deaths in custody.

- Recognition of the ongoing effects of colonization and initiation of action to aid and implement self-determination.

The Australian Government commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to review implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations in December 2017. The review's findings in 2018 found that 64% of the recommendations had been fully implemented, 14% were mostly implemented, 16% were partly implemented and 6% were not implemented at all. It found that of the recommendations designed to keep people out of prison – which was the main theme of the inquiry – just 55% had been implemented. (*The Guardian* 9 April 2021). **The rate of indigenous incarceration had almost doubled during the 27 years since the Commission's findings.**

*Since then, incarceration rates and numbers of deaths in custody have continued to rise.*

As at 19 April 2021, in the 30 years since the tabling of the Royal Commission's report in 1991, there have been a further **474 Indigenous deaths in custody**.

However, the government has used the Deloitte report to claim that the RCIADIC recommendations have been fully or mostly implemented. (Senator Stoker, Assistant Minister to the Attorney-General, Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, 2021, p.22).

To date it is questionable whether any of the recommendations have been implemented by the government. A recent working paper from the **Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)** at the Australian National University claims that Indigenous deaths in custody could have been prevented had the Commonwealth, state and territory governments adhered to the implementation of RCIADIC recommendations. Deloitte's review was based on a failure to recognise the scope and nature of the problem and therefore its findings were likely to misrepresent the extent to which the RCIADIC recommendations had been implemented. This misinformation could lead to inappropriate decisions being made to address both Indigenous deaths in custody and the widespread problems in public policy targeted at Indigenous Australians. (Anthony, Jordan, Walsh, Markham and Williams, 2021, p. 3).

The CAEPR paper claims that this failure to enact the RCIADIC recommendations has resulted in increasing numbers of Indigenous deaths in custody, and increasing incarceration rates. There has been an

average of 16 Indigenous deaths in custody per year since RCIADIC, whereas over the 10-year period covered by the RCIADIC, there was an average of 10 deaths per year. (Anthony, Jordan, Walsh, Markham and Williams, 2021). In addition, numbers of Indigenous children in custody are very high. They constitute 48% of the youth detention population and are 17 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-indigenous children. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021).

The rising incarceration rates and deaths in custody for Indigenous Australians indicate that the recommendations of the RCIADIC to address these tragic and shocking issues have neither been implemented nor successful.

The authors of the CAEPR paper recommend national independent monitoring, led by Indigenous Australians, of the RCIADIC recommendations. They also urge the Australian Government to fully embrace and enact the recommendations.

Human Rights Watch also urges the Australian Government to make a commitment to fully implement the Royal Commission recommendations. Indigenous people should be imprisoned only as a last resort, and general and mental health services in prisons and post-incarceration should be available, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate.

As we mark and celebrate reconciliation week, the question we must ask is: how is it that Indigenous Australians – who are *our Australians, our family, our community* - comprise only three per cent of the national population, yet of those in custody Indigenous Australians comprise nearly 30%?

**Is this 'reconciliation'?**

The treatment of Indigenous people has been, and continues to be, an international problem. Pope Francis calls us to be a community 'constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen' (Fratelli Tutti para. 77) and 'all of us have a responsibility for the wounded, throughout the world'. (para. 79). Therefore, let us here in Holy Spirit Parish be the Good Samaritans who bear the pain of our Indigenous Australians and

voice our concern and care for their needs. Let us act to bring about intergenerational healing, to seek to end the trauma that our Indigenous brothers and sisters have suffered, and work to enable health, wellbeing and peace in all communities.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allam, L., Wahlquist, C., Evershed, N., & Herbert, M. *The 474 deaths inside: tragic toll of indigenous deaths in custody revealed*. The Guardian. <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/Apr/09/the-474-deaths-inside-rising-number-of-indigenous-deaths-in-custody-revealed>.

Anthony, T., Jordan, K., Walsh, T., Markham, F., Williams, M. (2021). *30 years on: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommendations remain unimplemented* (Working Paper No. 140/2021), Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) *Youth detention population in Australia 2020*. AIHW. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2918941219>

Deloitte Access Economics (2018) Review of the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/rciadlc-review-report.pdf>.



## REFUGEE WEEK – SUNDAY, 20 JUNE TO SATURDAY, 26 JUNE 2021

The theme for this year's Refugee Week is **Unity**. Refugee week is celebrated to raise awareness of the issue affecting refugees. The theme aims to highlight aspects of the refugee experience and to help the broader community to understand what it is like to be a refugee.

It's hard to imagine the frightening experiences many people are experiencing throughout the world. Maybe we have become hardened and law bound when we think of people who are either refugees or asylum seekers in our own country? Let us pray for all refugees and asylum seekers who are mothers, fathers, children, young and older people, seeking a better life in Australia.

See page 1 or contact Maureen [maureenhilton@gmail.com](mailto:maureenhilton@gmail.com) for more information.

Our parish Social Justice Group would like to form a team of parishioner who are **excited about action!**

- The parish would like to form a **"Care for Creation Team"** to promote and act on ideas to make our community more environmentally conscious.

- Your ideas will be an important part of our action as a community!