



CatholicCare NT

**For a Synodal Church:
Communion, Participation and Mission**

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*The Synod asks of us to consider the fundamental question:
“How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular church? What steps
does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow our ‘journeying’?”*

CatholicCare NT remains the Diocese of Darwin’s most significant expression of concern and care for the most vulnerable. With over 230 staff in 17 locations across the NT we are the missionary church in a very fundamental way. CatholicCare NT is a significant social service organisation that has been operating in the NT for nearly 30 years. We have operational sites and infrastructure in the following communities: Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tiwi Islands, Daly River, Wadeye, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Santa Teresa, Finke, Titjikala, APY, and Jabiru. Our investment in local communities ensures that our services are driven by local people and are responsive to community need.

CatholicCare NT operates a broad range of clinical, case management and community development programs. These include:

- Individual and family counselling
- School counselling
- Specialist Children’s counselling
- Specialist Domestic Violence counselling
- Men’s Behaviour Change
- NO MORE anti-violence campaign
- Remote and urban Alcohol and Other Drug programs
- Specialist youth Alcohol and Other Drug programs
- Tenancy Support programs
- Financial Wellbeing and Capability programs
- Remote Safe Houses
- Mental Health programs
- Community Development Program (remote jobs program)
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Remote Child Care Centres
- Parenting and family support
- Children’s Contact Services
- Indigenous Sport and Recreation Program
- Perinatal Mental Health
- Emergency Relief

Mission History

CatholicCare NT as an entity was established in 1993 by Bishop Ted Collins, the 3rd Bishop of Darwin. Of course, the starting point was not in 1993 as the Diocese has had a missionary presence in the NT for over 100 years. To understand CatholicCare NT now, it is important to consider our missionary past and how this has shaped CatholicCare NT in the present.

Historically, mission work in our Diocese was implicitly tied up with colonisation and the broader government practices of assimilation. Missionaries were the conduit for the implementation of Government policies which actively sought to assimilate Aboriginal people into a western way of life. This included controlling things such as housing, work, spirituality, language and education. This extended to practices of forced removal of children from their families and denial of participation in ceremony and rituals. This has been well documented, in particular detail, through Peter Hearn's *A Theology of Mission; Diocese of Darwin 1949-45*¹. The impact of early missionary work is further acknowledged in the 1997 *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* where it was identified that while in the Northern Territory the mission's stations/institutions may have provided a better level of schooling and practical care than the Government, it was nevertheless inadequate and wrong.²

'With the wisdom of hindsight, we can only wonder how as a nation, and as a Church, we failed to see the violence of what we were doing. Hopefully, today we are more vigilant regarding the values we espouse.' (Catholic Church of the Diocese of Darwin submission 536 page 2 of the *Bringing Them Home National Inquiry*)

In 1986 Pope John Paul addressed Aboriginal people in Alice Springs, where he spoke specifically about the impacts of colonialism on Aboriginal culture, beliefs systems, connection to land and spirituality, and on language. He acknowledged the mistakes, however well-intentioned, of the missionaries and how Aboriginal people could again get strength and dignity from drawing on their traditional culture and ceremonies.³ By the 1980's, the Northern Territory was well into the era of self-determination and the role of missionaries was at best minimal. Some Priests, Religious sisters and brothers remained on communities serving the local parish or as educators, but their numbers were few and remain so today. The significance of Vatican II in the 1960's was the move from an expansionist, rules-based obedience model of mission towards a model that recognized differences in cultural traditions and beliefs. It was characterized by the language of partnership, dialogue and liberation theology. In Australia this was occurring at time when Aboriginal people were emerging into an era of self-determination and recognizing their own capacity and desire to be in control of their own destinies. Just as the previous decades had not prepared Aboriginal people for this task, Peter Hearn suggests that nor were the missionaries adequately prepared for this new post Vatican II way of doing mission. The goal of mission work

¹ Peter Hearn MSC, *A Theology of Mission, Diocese of Darwin 1949-85*, Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit, Kensington, 2003

² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report *Bringing them Home Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* April 1997, chapter 9 & 19

³ Address of John Paul II To The Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs (Australia) 29 November 1986

with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory was to develop an 'enculturated Catholicism'; however, the changing environment and having a Bishop not partial to this change made this difficult. There was no adequate training for missionaries that could provide the necessary cultural and social work training.⁴ Mission work lost its identity without the practical work required of mission stations; the role of missionaries became less clear.

Despite the sense of unease that comes with our history of involvement with colonisation and the implementation of government policy, the legacy of early missionary provides us with a unique relationship and obligation to Aboriginal people today. It also offers those of us today an opportunity to learn from both the good and the bad of early missionary work.

How has our history shaped CatholicCare NT

Missionary work in the Northern Territory looks very different today. Many people see the establishment of CatholicCare NT (in 1993) as something separate from the missionary endeavours of the past religious orders. The delivery of services is by a largely non-Catholic workforce with a primary goal of alleviating disadvantage and building capacity of individuals and communities to reach their potential. The workforce, which is largely comprised of professional social workers and community workers, is viewed with some scepticism by people who understand mission only as conversion and material aid.

We continue, however, to follow the path paved by previous missionaries. The Catholic Church has been an enduring and consistent presence in the communities of the Tiwi Islands, Wadeye, Daly River and Santa Teresa; CatholicCare NT continues this tradition and provides a broad range of social services in these communities. Although services are not delivered by Priests and religious, or even Catholics, it does not mean that services are not Catholic or are devoid of all spirituality. It does mean that we have to be more intentional about our mission and provide opportunities for staff to know and understand Catholic Social Teaching in a post Vatican II context. This means a strong alignment and fidelity with Catholic Social teaching on an individual level, leadership level and in direct service work.⁵ Missionary practice is now understood as the participation of the mission of Jesus and is reflected in liberation theology and a commitment to social justice and changing unjust structures. Whereas early missionaries were influenced by a missiology of the Church, we now understand the focus of mission as spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ; it is his mission and the Church is the servant. This understanding of mission encourages us to have a grassroots approach to mission that is based on subsidiarity and is directed by and for the benefit of the other.⁶ CatholicCare NT actively commits to be faithful to our values and mission and intentionally work to develop the understanding of how Catholic Social Teaching should be reflected in how participants experience us in the course of our work. We work within a framework that honours local experiences and history. Missionary work in the NT has evolved and adapted and we continue to be challenged in our endeavours to be faithful to mission.

⁴ Peter Hearn 2003 pp334,335

⁵ Beth R Crisp Catholic Agencies: Making a distinct contribution to Australian social welfare provision?, in The Australian Catholic Record; Oct 2010; 87, 4 pp440 -451

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Are we a Synodal Church - Journeying together?

CatholicCare NT has an important role in the mission of the Darwin Diocese. We potentially have the largest reach of all Catholic entities in the NT, being present in traditional Catholic communities and in other areas where the Church may not have traditionally had a presence. CatholicCare NT does not belong to any one Parish, however it is central to the Mission of the Diocese and is a reflection of the Gospel lived out every day. We journey side by side with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our community.

- However, we do wonder, how is our journey with the most marginalised in society seen or even known about by the people who go to Mass every week, some of them every day?
- How often is this important side of the Mission of God, the mission of Jesus, highlighted or talked about in Parish life or even in our education ministry?
- Now that missionary work is not the remit of our Clergy and Religious, is it seen as of less value to Parishes?
- How do we become more visible and connected to Parish communities?
- How do we operate/journey in an environment where local Catholic Social Services have to compete with other National Catholic entities?

There is opportunity for CatholicCare NT and Parishes to work together to understand each other's roles and how we work together to ensure that the missionary work of the Diocese is valued and known by the broader Catholic Community.

Spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ – Evangelising and Mission

We are encouraged by the stance of Pope Francis as he urges the Church to outreach to the poor and the marginalised. We have as our Gospel Image Jesus walking with and raising up the women and those downtrodden who accompanied him on his many journeys. We look to the woman at the well who gave life to Jesus in his tiredness and frustration while he spoke without judgement to the woman. He gave her hope as she went into her village and spread the word about a man who had given her respect and life.

In Luke 4: 18, we witness Jesus as he entered the Synagogue and proclaimed to those present:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

CatholicCare NT is on a continual journey of reflection and change as we examine how we remain truly missionary and reflective of Catholic values and traditions. We ask ourselves:

- How do we model mission in the way that we work?
- How do we embed mission in the living culture of the organisation?

- How does our experience with participants and the broader community shape and influence the way we work?
- How do we influence and shape parish communities to have compassion and love for the most marginalised in our community?

Reflecting on the passages from the Gospel including John 4:5-42 where Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well and the Good Samaritan Parable in Luke 10:25-37, we ask ourselves:

- Where are women today who reflect the Samaritan Women in their lives and work?
- Who are the people today who give life to Jesus and how do they receive life from the people that they encounter every day?
- Where does the Church fit in this Samaritan Story? Who are the people in the ditch?
- Who are the people who pass by?
- Where do we find the Samaritan today?
- Where are all the facets of the Church in these stories today?

In the Encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Chapter 4 - The Special Dimension of Evangelisation - the Inclusion of the Poor in Society - (198,201,203), Pope Francis has been clear that he wants a Church which is poor and for the poor. *'They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.... The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid.'*

Pope Francis has said that it is time that the poor are given back their voice, that eyes be opened to see the state of inequality in which many families live, that sleeves be rolled up so dignity can be restored by creating jobs. Pope Francis is also quoted in an article in the Vatican News celebrating the 5th World Day of the Poor, through the Vatican Media in an article by Robin Gomes on 14th November 2021. He says: *"It is time to be scandalized once again before the reality of children who are starving, reduced to slavery, tossed about in the water in the aftermath of a shipwreck, innocent victims of every sort of violence. It is time that violence against women ends, that they be respected and not treated like bargaining chips. It is time that the circle of indifference be broken so as to discover once again the beauty of encounter and dialogue."*

We have a strong foundation and bold authorising environment, the Pope as well as our own Bishop who encourages us to be bold and to be the voice for the poorest, marginalised and saddest.

CatholicCare NT provides a hospitable and welcoming face of the Catholic Church in the NT. For many people, it will be their first experience with the Church and for some, a familiar experience.

CatholicCare NT is significantly informed and guided by Catholic Social Teaching. Staff form part of our mission and we pay particular attention to the formation of our staff. CatholicCare NT has a dedicated General Manager for Mission and Culture who works to ensure that our mission and values are embedded throughout the organisation from our strategy, to policies, codes of conduct and in the workplace. This include a mission integration framework which is a core framework that underpins the way that we work.

When thinking about evangelisation and mission we note that the plenary documents have a fairly limited view of this. We hope that through the Synodal journey we see a renewal of commitment to Catholic Social teaching in Parishes and a new appreciation for the works of the Diocese. We need to be in dialogue with each other, also with the broader community and with the Government. Our interaction needs to be intentional, and one of partnership, mutual learning, collaboration and incorporation of cultural knowledge and wisdom from Aboriginal people and other cultural groups within the Diocese.

The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching in Action

We hear the voices of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised who challenge us working in Catholic Social Services every day. For us in CatholicCare NT they are our inspiration and reason for coming to work each day.

In understanding mission in action, we look to Catholic Social Teaching as a significant way of understanding our work. Catholic Social Teaching, along with the gospels and the words of Pope Francis provide the context on how we understand our work and role within the Diocese. We hear the voices of the vulnerable and marginalised every day and try to give them a voice all over the Northern Territory.

- Our staff journey with women and children experiencing violence; we sit with the children who have been through the courts and now have the opportunity of supervised visits from their parents
- We meet with people who have financial difficulties and help them to negotiate the complexities of government and financial systems which are often unjust and inequitable
- We work with the men who want to change their violent behaviour
- We sit and listen to the many children and adults who come for counselling in the hope of finding new pathways in their lives
- We live and work out in the remote communities with our first nations people, offering the services they need
- We meet everyday people accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme, helping people with a disability to have a better life and live more comfortably
- We find pathways for those who have been excluded by other services
- We promote nonviolence by saying NO MORE to Family Violence in a number of settings engaging with sports groups and teams
- We have the opportunity to hear the voices of our Indigenous brothers and sisters promoting reconciliation, partnering with Reconciliation Australia

- We hear the voices of the people affected by climate change threatening food and water security. This applies especially in the desert areas of Australia where the heat and lack of appropriate housing, health and social services is all too obvious.
- We work with people trying to find a place to live
- We walk with each other supporting and learning from each other and hearing each other's voices
- We support the recovery process for people experiencing harms related to alcohol and drug use
- We support families where a young person has a severe mental health need

Conclusion

CatholicCare NT hopes that through this Synodal journey, the Darwin Diocese will have a renewed sense of mission. We know that God stands in solidarity with those on the margins and that the mission of the church is lived out when we are amongst the most marginalised and vulnerable. So, while at times it may feel that CatholicCare NT sits on the edges of the Church, on reflection, maybe this is where we, as a Church walking side-by-side with the poor and the marginalised, need to be.

We think that through CatholicCare NT we can support the Church to:

- be inclusive and accessible to all Territorians, especially Aboriginal Territorians
- advocate and work for the most marginalised and vulnerable in the community
- build social and cultural capital through building connections between people and communities
- increase access to support and help for parishioners who may be experiencing difficulties in their lives
- bring hope to people.

In the Introduction of the Handbook - Synod of Bishops - *For a Synodal Church* - Diocese of Darwin we are pleased to see that Pope Francis has asked us to dream and to listen to all the voices, the loud ones and those that are barely heard. As he says: *"Synodality starts with hearing from the whole People of God. A Church that teaches must be firstly a Church that listens. Consulting all members of the Church is vital because, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the faithful as a whole are anointed by the Holy Spirit."*

May we be open to what the Holy Spirit is seeking of us as we journey together.