

Australia Day / 26 January

Reflection and Discernment Guide 2026



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Introduction



26 January is a time of reflection, celebration, and for many Australians, deep contemplation about what it means to belong to this land and to one another.

In 1986, Pope St John Paul II stood with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at Blatherskite Park and spoke words that continue to shape the moral and pastoral life of the Church in Australia. Today, his message remains profoundly relevant. It is from this moment that this Reflection & Discernment Guide takes its foundation.

We invite Catholics to reflect on Australia Day through that lens: to consider how far we have come, how far we still have to go, and how the hopes spoken on that day in 1986 might speak into the realities of our own time.

May these reflections inspire both honest discernment and renewed hope, strengthening our commitment to a future in which all Australians are respected, included, and valued.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this Document may contain links to resources that may include the words, voices or images of those that have passed.

2026 NATSICC Statement



Each year, as 26 January approaches, Australians reflect on this day in different ways. For some, it is a time of celebration and National pride. For others, it is a time of reflection, grief, or unresolved questions about our shared history. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) acknowledges and respects that this day carries different meanings for different people, shaped by culture, history, memory, and lived experience.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 26 January remains a day of mourning and a reminder of the ongoing impacts of Colonisation. At the same time, many people choose to come together as Community in ways formed by their own journeys and circumstances, either through cultural practice, shared connection, or quieter acts of remembering and being together. These moments hold both sorrow and resilience, truth and hope.

In 1986, Pope St John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at Blatherskite Park in Alice Springs, affirming the dignity, cultural richness, and enduring place of Australia's First Peoples. He reminded the Church that it cannot be fully itself without the contribution of First Peoples. Forty years on, this Address continues to shape NATSICC's call to the Church to approach 26 January with honesty, humility, and a commitment to listening, reflection, and justice. It also invites us to ask honestly whether, over these past forty years, we have done all that we might.

Contemporary Australia is home to the world's oldest continuing cultures and to many generations who have come from across the world to make their lives here. It is a Nation of many stories, languages, and traditions – a place that invites ongoing reflection about belonging, shared identity, and how ancient cultures are honoured alongside a diverse and changing population.

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NATSICC recognises and knows first-hand the persistent disparities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in areas such as health, education, housing, and life expectancy, and acknowledges that Reconciliation remains unfinished work. At the same time, there are signs of hope. Across Australia, many local Communities are rebuilding relationships through dialogue, cultural renewal, and practical cooperation on Country. The commencement of Treaty in Victoria/Narrm represents one significant pathway, among several, being pursued, while in South Australia the establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament has opened another avenue for participation and shared decision-making. Alongside these efforts, young people are increasingly expressing leadership through art, storytelling, and advocacy, offering fresh vision for the future.

Today, Australians find themselves living in a time of heightened complexity. Global uncertainty, acts of violence both on our shores and in different parts of the world, and the growing pressures faced by families have shaped a national mood in which questions of belonging and identity are felt more acutely.

In such times, NATSICC believes it is especially important to approach difficult conversations through a lens of faith and with care, compassion, and a commitment to listening.

Within the Australian Catholic Church, NATSICC has represented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics for nearly 30 years. With the voluntary support of schools, parishes, and partner organisations, NATSICC continues to work closely alongside Australia's Bishops to strengthen relationships and support meaningful pathways toward Reconciliation. Last year, more than 300 Catholics gathered on the lands of the Wonnarua People in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle for the NATSICC Pilgrims of Hope Assembly - a powerful expression of unity and shared commitment that offered a tangible sign of hope for the future of our Church.

Guided by our faith, NATSICC invites individuals and communities to foster respectful conversation, support truthful education, listen to young voices, and take practical steps to address racism, as part of building a more just and inclusive nation.

Echoing St John Paul II's vision, Pope Leo, in the opening days of his Ministry in 2025, said:

“We want to be a small leaven of unity, communion, and fraternity within the world. We want to say to the world with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to Him! Welcome his word that enlightens and consoles! Listen to his offer of love and become his one family: in the one Christ, we are one. This is the path to follow together.” *(Pope Leo 2025)*

As a Catholic faith Community, NATSICC also recognises that genuine reconciliation is not only social or structural, but deeply personal and spiritual. A sense of real inner healing – where truth is named, wounds are acknowledged, and dignity is restored – helps to foster true freedom through Christ. This healing does not erase pain or history but allows individuals and Communities to move forward without being bound by it.

In Christ, healing opens the way for forgiveness, and the courage to walk together toward a future shaped by justice, mercy, and hope.

On January 26, we take up that call in Australia by choosing to listen before we speak, to stand beside those who carry pain, and to build Communities where truth, justice, and friendship can grow, trusting that in Christ we can become one family.



How to use this guide



This Reflection Guide is designed to help individuals, families, and parish groups explore the significance of Australia Day through the lens of faith, justice, and reconciliation. Whether used in a personal quiet time, a parish gathering, or a community discussion, the Guide invites you to reflect deeply, pray earnestly, and take meaningful action.

Suggested Steps for Use:

Begin with Prayer:

- Start your reflection by reading the Opening Prayer and Archbishop Coleridge's Prayer to centre your heart and mind.

Read the NATSICC 2026 Australia Day Statement:

- Reflect on the key themes and messages, allowing them to inform your thoughts and discussions.

Engage with the Reflection Sections:

- Move through each section at your own pace, considering the Scripture passages, reflection questions, and suggested Resources.

Discussion and Sharing (Optional):

- If using in a group setting, allow time for open and respectful discussion on each topic.

Commit to Action:

- Use the suggested actions section to identify ways you can contribute to Reconciliation in your daily life.

Conclude with Prayer:

- Finish by praying together, asking for God's guidance as you continue the journey of Reconciliation.



The Resources included in this guide are provided for reflection and educational purposes. They reflect diverse voices and experiences and are offered to deepen understanding and do not necessarily reflect the views of NATSICC, nor imply endorsement. Readers are encouraged to engage with the materials thoughtfully and in the spirit of respectful dialogue.

Opening Prayers



Begin with prayer asking God to guide your heart and mind in reflecting on Australia Day.

Opening Prayer

Loving God,

Guide our thoughts and reflections as we seek to understand the significance of this day for all Australians.

As we mark the 40th Anniversary this year of St John Paul II's words spoken in Alice Springs, open our hearts to receive the gifts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures with joy.

Make us peacemakers who act justly, love mercifully, and walk humbly together in Christ.

Amen.

Australia Day Prayer

(Archbishop Mark Coleridge - 2024)

God of all Peoples, Lord of the journey who always walk with us, in this land you have blessed us with the first inhabitants of the land who have loved it through the ages: for them we give you thanks.

You have blessed us in the settlers who made this land their home, and forged a Nation with their toil: for them we give you thanks.

You have blessed us in the many peoples of different languages and cultures who have found a new home here: for them we give you thanks.

We ask that you make a home among us, so that justice and truth may flourish here and all Australians may walk together into the future you are preparing: for that we give you thanks.

Through Christ our Lord

Amen

1. Reflecting on Australia Day

Read the NATSICC 26 January Statement to gain insight into the perspectives and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Reflect on its key messages and consider:

- What does this day mean to me and my family?
- How might it feel for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?
- How can I approach it with compassion, understanding, and togetherness?
- *Youth prompt: "What helps a Celebration become truly welcoming for everyone in your school/parish?"*

Many Australians are proud of their Country and understandably want to celebrate the gifts of our Nation together on a specific day. It is, after all, a time to acknowledge the achievements and diversity of our Nation. It is also important to reflect on the impact this day has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and to seek a path that embraces all Australians in a spirit of unity and respect.

Bible Reflection:

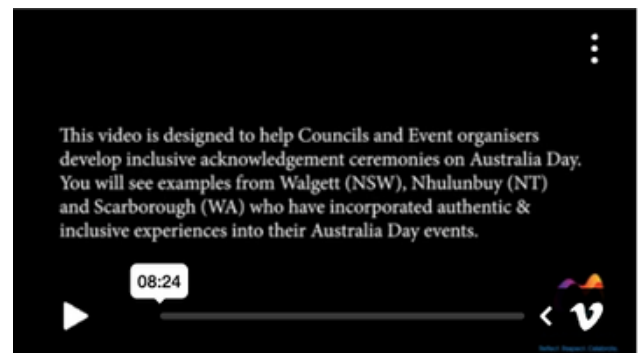
"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."

Ephesians 2:14

Resources



History of 26 January as Australia Day



Respectful First Nations Engagement on Australia Day

Australia Day, Invasion Day, Survival Day: What's in a name?

www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/australia-day-invasion-day-survival-day-whats-in-a-name/q71wyibeu

Three Aboriginal Perspectives on Australia Day

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/struggle-and-survival-three-aboriginal-perspectives-on-australia-day-20200117-p53sgk.html>



2. Understanding and Learning

Having listened to and reflected upon lived experience, Catholics are invited to approach the day through the lens of our faith.

At Blatherskite Park in 1986, Pope St John Paul II offered a framework for this discernment. He affirmed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples belong to this land, that their cultures are rich and enduring, and that their contribution is essential to Australia and to the Church. His words invite Catholics to see January 26 as a moment to reflect on dignity, belonging, and relationship.

Understanding Australia Day in this light shifts our focus toward how First Peoples are respected as full and contributing members of the nation. Pope Leo's call for the Church to be a "small leaven of unity, communion, and fraternity" reminds us that learning should lead to listening, humility, and action.

- How do St John Paul II's words shape my understanding of January 26?
- What does belonging and contribution look like in my Community?
- How might our Parish or school honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gifts on this day?

Bible Reflection:

"To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8

Resources

[Pope St John Paul II address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People - 1986](#)

[Rethinking Australia Day](#)

Listen, Learn, Love - A New Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

[Download the Social Justice Statement 23/24](#)

3. Taking Action



Think about practical ways to respond meaningfully to your reflection using suggestions from the NATSICC 2026 Statement.

- How can I contribute to reconciliation efforts?
- Can I commit to one concrete step that strengthens relationships with First Nations Communities?
- Could I attend a Mass at my local Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministry on Australia Day?
- Complete the [NATSICC Cross Cultural Online Training](#).

Bible Reflection:

"God... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

2 Corinthians 5:18

Resources

[Caritas Catholic Social Teaching Toolkit](#)

[10 Ways to be a genuine ally to First Nations Communities](#) (Amnesty International)

[Find Aboriginal Australia Day events on in each State and Territory](#) (australiaday.org.au)

Bystander Action Toolkit:
Guide from the Australian Human Rights Commission on addressing and intervening in racism.
[Download Toolkit](#)

4. Imagining a shared future



Australia Day invites us to look beyond familiar arguments and to imagine, through the eyes of faith, the kind of nation we hope to become — one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are honoured as the First Peoples of this land, and where every Australian can feel genuinely at home.

The deeper question is not only what we remember, but who we are becoming together. Imagining a shared future asks us to picture relationships that are just, respectful, and life-giving, and to allow Christ's call to love our neighbour to shape the way we see one another.

Imagine:

- What would an inclusive and hopeful celebration look like?
- What gifts from First Peoples could shape our National identity more deeply?
- How might young people describe the Australia they hope to inherit?

Bible Reflection:

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.”

Isaiah 1:17

Activities

Hold a Yarning Circle beginning with the question, *“If reconciliation is to be real, it begins with us. How can we nurture change within ourselves—both in heart and mind—to help strengthen and heal our community?”*

Encourage students or parish groups to compose a prayer for a shared future.

Discuss one change you could make to show greater inclusion on January 26.