

Respecting
The Traditional Owners
of Your Place

**A Resource for Religious Congregations
in the Year of Jubilee**



Prepared by

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in consultation with

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This Year of Jubilee provides an opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land which Religious Congregations now own. This acknowledgment can be seen as a way of recognising native title and of honouring the fact that this land was occupied for thousands of years before we came here and that it had great spiritual significance. In doing this, we acknowledge the fallacy of *terra nullius* and publicly admit that our ownership of land has come at the cost of the dispossession of the traditional owners. We also say sorry and show respect to the descendants of the traditional owners who continue to be custodians of the land.

What does this involve?

Recognition could be given to the traditional owners of the land by having a ceremony at which

- a plaque,
- a memorial stone,
- a memorial garden,
- a mural,
- a painting or
- whatever else suggests itself,

is placed on a building, in the grounds, on a wall or somewhere else. This can best be done when there is an opening of a building or an extension, or on some celebration day, e.g. Congregational Feast Day.

Noonga Place at Josephite Province House, Nundah Qld





The Sisters of Mercy in Boundary Street, Parramatta NSW had their house named by a *Darug* elder – *Wiangaberong* meaning “Sisters’ place”

How to go about it

- To discover which people are to be remembered and honoured at a particular place, contact the *Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action* (FAIRA – 07 3391 4677) or your local Land Council. They have good information about the traditional owners. They also have names of people still alive who belong to that group of people. This is important because this whole process of recognition and acknowledgment requires cooperation and collaboration with the traditional owners.
- Having found the names and contact details, make contact and tell them what you would like to do. It is important to seek permission. Discuss with them the most appropriate form of recognition.
- If those who are living are not able to assist, they may wish to nominate someone to act on their behalf.
- Contact *Aboriginal Catholic Ministry* in your area (e.g. *Murri Ministry* in Brisbane – 07 3891 1931), your local *Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council* or the *Council of Aboriginal Elders* for assistance if there are no living people of the group in question or if there does not seem to be anyone to assist with the project.
- Each step of the process needs to be done in cooperation with Indigenous peoples. This will include the wording, the commissioning of any artwork, how the ceremony will be organized, who to invite, etc.
- Be careful to plan the budget well, as artwork may prove to be expensive. If you are commissioning an artwork, be sure that it is within the context of the story of the people of the area. This is to ensure that there is a partnership with the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of the area.
- Make sure that the artist is approved by the traditional owners.

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- It is important for the Religious Congregations who are participating in such a project to prepare themselves well so as to maximise the experience at a heart, soul and mind level. This can be a great opportunity for real education and conversion regarding the history of the land and the traditional owners.
- Some of the preparation could include a rationale for taking on this project. In the *Year of Jubilee*, for example, there could be material relating to the theme of return of land, redemption of debts, or pilgrimage to the heart of a people. It could demonstrate how this action fits in with Congregational documentation such as Chapter Statements.
- A reflection process that allows the community to get in touch with their own agenda regarding their relationship with Indigenous people could also occur in conjunction with this process.
- Another aspect of the preparation could be to take a great interest in the natural environment of the area and discover how it would have looked prior to the arrival of Europeans and present development.
- The ritual itself is very important and must be organised in collaboration with the local Indigenous people.
- When the organisation for the event is finalised, inform and invite the local Indigenous community through such channels as Murri Radio, local newspapers, Indigenous agencies.
- If your preparation has been done well, the event itself will be more memorable and the plaque, stone, artwork or whatever symbol you have chosen will be a constant reminder of the traditional owners of this land. It can also be an opportunity to form an on-going relationship with the descendants of the people who once occupied the land where the event takes place.

Artwork by Estelle from
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