



Reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel

National Reconciliation Week in Australia kicks off this week. It started as the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation back in 1993, which was the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples — and was supported by Australia's major faith communities. This makes sense to me, because reconciliation as a concept is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and probably also at the heart of many other faith traditions that I know less about.

Living in right relationship with each other is hard, but good, work. It makes sense that we fail at it fairly often. In Australia— within a family, a community and at a societal/economic level, patterns of personal behaviour as well as unreflective systems and structures and associated use of power and control can all be powerful in shaping our contemporary relationships, between people but also with creation, often in negative ways. We see this in wide-scale perpetration of domestic violence, homelessness, and the pollution we release with dire consequences. The sheer demand on CSSV member organisations' services are one testament to the need for support and healing of our relationships broadly, as well as material inequality. Reconciliation processes should probably be an almost constant companion in our day to day.

Reconciliation Week of course holds particular meaning in a colonial context, and moves us to think not just of the personal and our present moment, but also towards the impacts of history on us all, as a country. It is really about the relationships, personally and institutionally, that those of us/our families who came here at some point during the past couple of hundred years have with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who, with their families, have been living here for a very long time prior.

For me, what does it mean to live, breathe, enjoy and experience life, and now raise a couple of small children, on a land that was not too long ago completely in the care of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples? Dispossession included deception, cultural misunderstandings, and straight forward brutality in Victoria. Reconciliation's dance is between history as abstract and tangible: the mediation of our personal relationship to the past, also our families' and society's past actions, and how all of these continue to have real impacts today on us and others, in our current moment. This is an important dance and the Australian Bishops' [2023/24 Social Justice Statement](#)'s title holds the secret to doing it well: Listen, Learn, Love. [The Yoorrook Justice Commission](#) will have a set of recommendations as to what should be done into the future when it releases its final report in 2025.

This Reconciliation Week, CSSV [commits](#) to this ongoing work of reconciliation as core to a more just and compassionate society, as the Bishops' so well articulated in their statement last year: "Our prayerful reflection on what we have heard and learned from them in the light of the Gospel has convinced us to make a commitment to renew our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to accompany them in their struggle for justice."

Unless we are wrestling with what Reconciliation means, personally and at a structural level in our organisations, Church and community, both prayerfully and in action, there won't really be justice for any of us.

In Solidarity —
Josh Lourensz, Executive Director



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