



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Media Release

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### Bishops approve Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit

Australia's Catholic bishops have approved a liturgy which incorporates elements of Aboriginal language and culture.

A motion was passed at the plenary meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in Sydney on Tuesday approving the Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit (*Missa Terra Spiritus Sancti*) for use in the Diocese of Broome in Western Australia.

The Mass will now be submitted to the Dicastery for Divine Worship for what is known as "recognitio", or official recognition by the Vatican.

"We have to walk with Aboriginal people. I am so pleased that after such a long period of use the *Missa Terra Spiritus Sancti* has been given official recognition by the bishops of Australia," Bishop Administrator of Broome, Michael Morrissey, said.

"We recognise there are many Aboriginal cultures in Australia and we pray that they all be guided by the Holy Spirit to develop the best way of celebrating the Eucharist in the most appropriate ways with their people, within the life of the Church."

Two elders from the Bidyadanga (La Grange) parish - Maureen Yanawana and Madeleine Jadai - came to Sydney to present a printed copy of the Mass to bishops and talk about their experience with it.

Maureen said of the sung Mass: "Singing at the top of our voices brings us peace."

"We would like to see you, all our bishops, stepping in our shoes, be invited to sit around our people, have that patience and just listen," she told bishops at the presentation event at Mary MacKillop Place.

The motion was brought to the plenary by the Bishops Commission for Liturgy and co-sponsored by the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Mass has a history of use in Diocese of Broome for over 50 years. It is celebrated in multiple local languages.

It has been celebrated by the Apostolic Nuncio to Australia, Archbishop Charles Balvo, and has over many decades been known to and discussed by officials of the Holy See without any objections to it having been raised.

It was given official permission for use by the Bishop of Broome in May 1973 as a culturally adapted liturgy to be used "ad experimentum".

Since that time, the Mass has been known as *Missa Bidyadanga/Indigena/Kimberley* and has been celebrated weekly in remote communities.

It originated at Bidyadanga in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia.

The late Fr Kevin McKelson together with the late Tommy Dodds and other Aboriginal elders from five local indigenous communities carefully translated the English version of the Mass of the Roman Rite into each of the five language groups spoken in the community – Garadyari, Nyangumada, Yulbaridya, Dyuwaliny and Mangala. With the support of the then Bishop, John Jobst, Fr McKelson refined and developed the texts of the Mass to the needs of the community.

The current Mass of the Land of the Holy Spirit was published by Liturgy Brisbane in 2018 after being carefully studied and refined by a group of qualified liturgists who are also consultants to the Bishops Commission for Liturgy.

The Mass was ritually presented to the priests and their communities in the Diocese of Broome by Maureen Yanawana and Madeleine Jadai. It was celebrated with the Warmun community and has been well received ever since.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council described it as a “distinctive Mass that beautifully amalgamates Catholic tradition with Aboriginal culture, thereby creating a unique celebration of faith that has served the diocese for over five decades”.

“The 'Missa Terra Spiritus Sancti' is not merely a liturgical practice but a testament to the deep-seated connection between our faith and the rich tapestry of Aboriginal culture. It symbolises a bridge that unites our spiritual beliefs with the ancestral wisdom of the land's original custodians,” the Council said in its letter of endorsement, presented to the bishops.

“It is a tangible expression of the Church's commitment to recognising and valuing the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Indigenous peoples' lives, thereby fostering an environment of inclusivity and respect.”

Pope John Paul II told Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during a visit to Alice Springs in 1986: “You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.”

Fr McKelson arrived at Bidadanga in 1963 and began to learn the languages of the five tribal groups who were gathering close to the Lagrange Telegraph Office, 200km south of Broome.

Every traditional story or dreaming has a song and the singing of the song is said to strengthen the story, in the same way that in the Catholic tradition the repetition of formulae of faith in the Roman liturgy cements in the minds of listeners the beliefs held by the group.

Fr McKelson set out to make the Roman Rite accessible to Aboriginal people. With the assistance of local people, he translated the text of the Mass into the local language. The major obstacle was that much of the phrasing and the terminology of the Roman liturgy did not have an equivalent in Aboriginal language and culture.

His solution was to take the core concepts used in the Roman Rite and recommend a cultural equivalent that could be understood by the local people.

The translated liturgical texts became songs, with each intrinsic part of the Roman Rite being expressed in a way befitting the ancient local cultures. The end result was for the first time an inculturated version of the Roman Rite emerging from, and now accessible to, local Aboriginal communities.