

## **Building Bridges: Catholic Mission’s Interfaith Encounters Program Secures Major Grant**

**Catholic Mission’s Interfaith Encounters Program has recently been nominated as one of the recipients of the Multicultural NSW COMPACT Program grant 2024-2028 round of funding, a state program dedicated to empowering young people to build a cohesive future by funding and supporting key projects.**

First created in 2020, the Interfaith Encounters Program aims to address the growing need to foster cross-cultural bonds and understanding between various faith-based communities. The program has demonstrated positive results over the years.

A newly released report from Western Sydney University highlights the Interfaith Encounters Program as a transformative initiative addressing Australia’s increasing racial and religious tensions. With incidents of Islamophobia and antisemitism on the rise, the program offers a powerful, community-driven response to promote inclusivity, empathy, and unity across diverse communities.

As Australia grapples with growing divisions, Catholic Mission, informed by the wisdom and experience of its global mission work, has pioneered the Interfaith Encounters Program to unite young people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. These encounters create safe spaces where participants explore common values, build friendships, and learn to appreciate different perspectives.

“Promoting dialogue and understanding is not just a priority; it is a necessity for a more cohesive and compassionate society,” said Catherine Towiro, Program Coordinator for Catholic Mission.

The report, conducted by Western Sydney University’s Centre for Western Sydney in collaboration with the Challenging Racism Project, affirms the program’s success. It highlights measurable outcomes, including increased empathy, reduced prejudice, and stronger bonds between participants.

The Multicultural NSW COMPACT Program grant will secure the program’s future and ensure the delivery of this life-changing experience to students for years to come.

COMPACT fosters collaboration between communities and sectors. Its Partnership Projects are led by skilled and experienced partners who work to create meaningful, positive change for young people.

“The COMPACT Program demonstrates the power of young people to shape a stronger, more inclusive society,” said Joseph La Posta, Multicultural NSW CEO. “By equipping them with the tools

to lead with empathy and resilience, we are fostering a generation that is not only prepared to tackle hate and division but to build enduring bridges of understanding.”

### **A Partnership for Unity**

The Interfaith Encounters program is delivered in collaboration with:

- **Together for Humanity**
- **Western Sydney University’s Centre for Western Sydney**
- **Challenging Racism Project**

Together, we are working to build a stronger, more united Australia. Visit [www.catholicmission.org.au/get-involved/interfaith](http://www.catholicmission.org.au/get-involved/interfaith) to learn more about the program and to download the report.

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### **About Catholic Mission**

Catholic Mission is the Australian agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies – the Catholic Church’s global organisation dedicated to continuing Jesus Christ’s mission in the world: that all may have life to the full. Catholic Mission contributes funding and project support to critical church-run initiatives in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and South America. These include spiritual formation, pastoral care, education, health, sanitation, and agricultural programs. Here in Australia, we form people to go out and be missionary in their professional and personal lives; to pray, advocate and act for those on the margins. Catholic Mission has offices in 27 Australian dioceses.