

The Stolen Generations Then and Now

In the 2023 – 2024 ACBC Social Justice Statement, Listen, Learn, Love: A New Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Australia's Bishops spoke of the Church's involvement in the injustices experienced by the First Peoples:

The Church has participated in many of the grave injustices and contributed to the racism which is at the heart of all these wrongs. For example, Church missions and orphanages took many of the children forcibly removed from their families over many years during the 20th Century. We must continue to accept responsibility for our part in the pain and suffering experienced by these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, known as the Stolen Generations, and the other injustices our sisters and brothers have endured.

It is vital for us in the Church to keep learning about the history of the Stolen Generations, but also to learn how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still being removed from their families at high rates. To make amends for the wrongs in which we have played a part, we need to be active in accompanying First Nations Peoples in their struggle for justice.

Key Facts

- Thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their families and communities from the start of colonisation. They were either placed in institutions or fostered out or adopted by non-Indigenous families. They have become known as the Stolen Generations.
- The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission issued the Bringing Them Home report in 1997. It detailed the history of forced removals of children, presented case studies and demonstrated that many children were not removed for their welfare.
- In 1998, thousands of Australians participated in the Sorry Book campaign which culminated in the first National Sorry Day being marked on 26 May.
- On 13 February, 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd led the Australian Parliament in a national apology to members of the Stolen Generations.
- Twenty years after the Bringing Them Home report, the Healing Foundation issued an action plan to ensure that all 54 recommendations of the report were fully implemented.
- Target 12 of the Closing the Gap Agreement commits to reducing the rate of First Nations children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031, but the rate keeps rising. In 2023, over 22,000 First Nations children were in out-of-home care, accounting for 42% of all children in this situation.

Learning More

More information on the Stolen Generations may be found on the AATSIS resource:

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/stolen-generations#:~:text=Thousands%20of%20children%20were%20forcibly,known%20as%20the%20Stolen%20Generations.>

In the 2023 – 2024 Social Justice Statement, NATSICC members shared the story of an Aboriginal woman in Palumpa whose granddaughter had been removed from her family and put in the care of a non-Indigenous family. The result of this practice is loss of identity and further inter-generational trauma. More information on out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may be found in an ABC report at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-13/concerns-over-indigenous-children-out-of-home-care-statistics/103458394>

What Can You Do

- Read the Healing Foundation’s Action Plan for Healing to discuss what action still needs to be taken.
- Read the report on out-of-home care for First Nations children and discuss how it affects them and what should be done to address the problem.
- Organise a discussion group or an event with a guest speaker to throw more light onto the on-going impact of forced removals.
- Find out when and where a National Sorry Day ceremony will take place in your area and join with First Nations Peoples in remembering the impact of forced removals on them.
- Reach out to local elders and community organisations to find ways to support their efforts to overcome the injustices experienced by members of the Stolen Generations
- Connect with the Link-Up office in your State or Territory to find out how you could help them to help members of the Stolen Generations to be reunited with their families.
- Include this intercessory prayer at Mass on May 26:

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, who were forcibly removed from their families and communities as children, That they may be given support to find healing from the trauma and pain they have suffered. Or pray a National Sorry Day Prayer at Mass such as the prayer on the following page.

For more information about this resource, please contact the ACBC Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace at ojep@catholic.org.au.

Almighty and loving God,

You who created ALL people in your image, lead us to seek your compassion as we listen to the stories of the violence in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories.

You gave your only Son, Jesus, who died and rose again so that sin is forgiven. We place before you the pain and anguish of dispossession of land, language, lore, culture and family kinship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced.

We live in faith that all people will rise from the depths of despair and hopelessness, and in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who have endured the pain and loss of loved ones, through the separation of children and their families.

Touch the hearts of the broken, homeless and inflicted and heal their spirits.

In your mercy and compassion, walk with us as we continue our journey of healing to create a future that is just and equitable.

Lord, you are our hope.

Amen