

A research project undertaken by the Australian Catholic Social
Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of
Religious Institutes

“A PIECE OF THE STORY”

National Directory of Records
of Catholic Organisations
Caring for
Children Separated from Families

November 1999

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Foreword

It is an honour to be asked to write this foreword.

This publication *A Piece of the Story* demonstrates what can be achieved when a commitment to reconciliation becomes a reality.

I acknowledge the effort put into this two-year project.

It fills me with a great deal of hope that my work as Social Justice Commissioner and that of so many others during the Stolen Generations Inquiry has made this initiative possible. I congratulate the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission, in conjunction with the Australian Conference of Leaders, of Religious Institutes and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council for their commitment to this project.

The difficulties associated with accessing historical records and files became very apparent to us during the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. Records were difficult to locate. Clearance for access was difficult to obtain. Welfare records were often ambiguous and very often hurtful and disturbing. Knowing where to look and how to look for heritage records was confusing and extremely difficult unless a person was able to know the right questions to ask and the right processes to take. This process was often beyond a person's knowledge or resilience.

Incentives like *A Piece of the Story* will go a long way in helping people who were associated with the many homes, orphanages and schools run through the Catholic Church.

Not only is this publication an acknowledgement of responsibility, it is an acceptance of that responsibility. Above all it provides part of the solution. This publication is a positive step towards reconciliation and justice.

I will follow the implementation of the initiatives undertaken by these organisations of the Catholic Church in assisting indigenous peoples with records that could help establish their identity and sense of belonging.

Following this publication I would urge all institutions and organisations with a history of involvement in Aboriginal affairs to recognise and acknowledge their responsibilities. I would urge these institutions and organisations to take similar steps towards accepting their role in the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. As adults these former children are now separated from their homes, their communities and from their identity.

“A Piece of the Story”

Reconciliation can only be achieved if responsibility and action is instigated to make some of the wrongs of the past right.

These organisations of the Catholic Church have acknowledged the records they hold and accept their responsibility towards reconciliation. I again congratulate them.

Mick Dodson
October 1999

Acknowledgements

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report *Bringing them home*, launched in May 1997 included an examination of the role of churches in “the removal and placement of indigenous children through the provision of accommodation, education, training and work placements.” Its recommendations included specific references to the need for appropriate apologies, access to records and the provision of counselling services.

The Australian Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Social Welfare, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council and the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission issued public apologies during the National Inquiry. For other Catholic Church organisations the first step was taken at the time of the publication of the Report, with the issuing of an apology to members of the Stolen Generations by the President of the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Orders. Individual religious orders have also issued apologies in their own name.

This document is a second step, providing information on records held by organisations of the Catholic Church.

The National Directory has been two years in the making. It has been made possible through the willing commitment of the Leaders of Catholic religious orders throughout Australia.

Its authorship belongs to those many people who freely gave their time to undertake the required research of archival materials and records necessary to complete the details in this document. The assistance of Leaders of religious orders and archivists in supplying information and discussing drafts of the material for this publication has been greatly appreciated.

The final document also belongs to those who provided expert advice during the development of guidelines to assist people with their own search for information held by an organisation of the Catholic Church.

In particular we wish to thank the members of the National Working Party for their contribution to the progress of this initiative even though the size of the original task grew considerably and the scope of the research looked daunting:

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Sr Patricia Rhatigan SJG	Sisters of Saint John of God
Rev Larry Finke CSB	Diocese of Broome, Western Australia

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We gratefully acknowledge the producers of *Connecting Kin* (1998) the New South Wales Department of Community Services Guide to Records. The involvement of religious orders from New South Wales in that project provided a valuable reference point in the evolution of this national document. Thanks are due to Mr John Sharman of the Department for his ready assistance and advice.

We acknowledge the Report of the Minajalku Aboriginal Corporation into Aboriginal children and churches in Victoria. This project highlighted the need for the National Working Party to extend its research to organisations that did not formally record aboriginality, but may have information of importance for people covered by the National Inquiry. Consequently the project was extended to all organisations of the Catholic Church that have provided out of family care for children.

Thanks are due to Coral Kendall in her role as coordinator of the aboriginal family search organisation “Link Up” New South Wales for her advice and assistance, and to other “Link Up” agencies and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council members who provided advice on drafts of the document.

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