

# National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week

Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week are two aspects of the same mission. Sorry Day marks one of the worst episodes in the mistreatment of Indigenous Australians by the descendants of the colonial invaders. It records the forced removal on ideological grounds of children from Indigenous families and the lasting suffering inflicted both on the children and their families. Sorry Week was initiated in 1998 after the publication of the Bringing Them Home Report. It led eventually to the Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 and the Parliamentary commitment to close the gap between the lives of Indigenous and other Australians.

Reconciliation Week focuses on what remains to be done in ensuring that Indigenous Australians are not discriminated against. If that is to happen the wider Australian community must understand and want to change the conditions that entrenched inequality. Reconciliation must be based on a shared acknowledgment of the reality of colonial settlement in Australia, of its effects on the First Australians, and on a shared determination to change the ways in which Indigenous people are treated as second class citizens.

In 2022 the theme of Reconciliation Week urges us to *be brave, make change*. It calls on Indigenous Australians to be assertive in recognizing and insisting on their right to equal respect before the law and in its administration and institutions. That takes courage, as we have seen in the experience of Adam Goodes and other Indigenous Australians who have spoken courageously and insistently about their rights and have called out the discrimination and abuse directed at them.

Being brave and making change also involves courage from other Australians in acknowledging systemic discrimination against Indigenous Australians and pressing for change. Words carefully crafted to avoid offense are not enough. For example, Indigenous Australian children continue to be removed from their families at a far greater rate than other children. Indigenous children are also incarcerated at a far greater rate under conditions that are punitive and lead naturally to reoffending. Trying to change these practices and the attitudes that underlie them are central in our advocacy and policy work at Jesuit Social Services on behalf of the young people whom we serve.

Humility comes from seeking and knowing the truth. For that reason it is so important that people share the knowledge of past and present injustice, particularly that which unseen shapes attitudes and institutions. This year the Victorian truth and justice process has taken a step forward in the Yoo-rrook truth process to enable truth telling. It is part of a treaty process. This is a brave step which will require support and courage from all involved in it and interest and encouragement from us all if it is to make a difference, as will the establishment of a voice of the First Nations to Parliament.