



*Bringing Indigenous Issues Back to
the Centre Through Women's Stories*

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Artwork © Cassandra Ambrym

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Explanation of the cover artwork © CM Ambrym

The artwork represents the message of weaving. The traditional materials that are used by ladies from both Indigenous groups: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultures are the pandanus leaf which is used for the weaving of dilly baskets and other accessories; and the coconut leaf which is used for weaving purposes as well as for such things as baskets and hats and for traditional dancing. These leaves are important for both cultural groups because the knowledge of basket weaving is passed on from the elderly ladies, onto the younger ones.

The cross signifies the Gospel. The hands around it are those ladies who have received the gift of weaving which is given by God.

The pattern on the outer area of the Cross represents the tracks where the ladies have walked around to various areas gathering the materials they needed for their weaving, the dots represent the markings of their footsteps. The seven curled lines represent strands from the starting point of the weaving process. The story informs us how the ladies have received their gifts of weaving from God, and have restored the skills of weaving through the passing down of knowledge to the younger generations. Indigenous ladies from both cultures have been weaving their way to the Gospel, over the years, with Christ being the centrepiece.

NATSIEC would like to gratefully acknowledge the following women for their faithful work and enthusiasm in preparing the workshop material:

Louise Campbell, Lisa Jackson, Revd Penny Jones, Sr Trish Madigan

Introduction

Aim

To enable Indigenous and non-Indigenous women to sit down together and share their stories about being women in the church and how to move reconciliation forward in the church context. It will provide an opportunity for non-Indigenous women to learn how they can support their Indigenous sisters and therefore to increase Indigenous women's meaningful participation in church.

Outcomes

- We are hoping to put together a book or other resource at the end of the workshops around the country that will tell the stories of the participants.
- Please take lots of photos as they may contribute to the resource.

People involved

- 2 facilitators – one Aboriginal woman and one non-Aboriginal woman.
- Someone (if possible someone who is not a facilitator) who can act as a chaplain in case any participants need to talk to someone.

Venue

- it's important that the venue is a 'safe' place for Aboriginal women to go to. Check beforehand to make sure your choice of venue is suitable.

Catering and registration cost

- You can ask participants to bring their own lunch or provide catering for the day.

Registration

- It's always helpful to have name tags as this facilitates people talking to each other.
- You may wish to allow Aboriginal women to attend the workshop free. You may need to ask the non-Aboriginal women to sponsor Aboriginal attendance.
- It would be helpful for NATSIEC if the contact details of the participants are recorded (see Appendix 1 for a template)
- Please ask participants to fill in the feedback form (see Appendix 2)
- See Appendix 3 for a suggested program outline

Other

- The NSW Ecumenical Council's 'Walking with Indigenous Australians' Kit has been included in the kit given to participants.
 - You may like to add to the worship by reading out statements by the churches on Reconciliation.
 - You may wish to suggest that participants (particularly non-Aboriginal participants) go home and think about the questions contained in the 'Walking with Indigenous Australians' Kit.

An Opening Liturgy (40 minutes)

Equipment Needed

- A long piece of blue cloth, to represent the river of Mordecai's dream
- A Bible
- A small bowl containing ash
- Heart shapes cut from red paper, sufficient for each person to have one (see Appendix 4 for a template)
- Teardrop shapes cut from white paper, sufficient for each participant, and pencils(optional) (see Appendix 5 for a template)

GATHERING

As the women gather, they are encouraged to collect from the immediate environment a small token of themselves, in the form of a leaf, flower, handful of soil or whatever else is locally available with which they recognise a connection.

The women gather in a circle. As the following words from the Book of Esther are read, the piece of blue cloth is unrolled in the worship space, and the bowl of ash placed upon it.

“Mordecai had a dream. In his dream, the people cried out to God; and at their outcry, as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river, with abundant water; light came and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted”*

**This text is taken from the 'New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition' and is not found in many standard versions of the bible.*

The women then place the symbols of themselves which they have collected on the 'river', as a sign of their participation in this gathering.

SILENCE OF SORROW

For a time (perhaps five to ten minutes) the women keep silence together, as Esther did when first she lived as the king's wife. It is a time to remember the grief of the past and to join our sorrowing with the sorrowing of God. 'Teardrops' may be distributed, so that participants may write or draw the things which grieve them and grieve the heart of God, and place the teardrops on the 'river' during the silence.

HEARTS OF COURAGE

A time of intercession follows, in which participants are encouraged to offer their paper hearts (perhaps grouping them around the bowl of ash) with a simple verbal prayer eg.

I give thanks for ..who/which gives us courage **or**
I pray for ... that they may have courage

The liturgy concludes with the Lord's prayer and a simple invocation such as,

As we meet together this day,
May all we think and all we say
Be in harmony with you,
God within us, God beyond us
Creator and Lover of all that is.

Storytelling and Theological Reflection on Esther (1 hr 20 mins)

20 minutes Ask participants to find the Story of Esther in their kit.
Read the story of Esther to the group and give instructions on the task.
Explain why the story of Esther has been chosen:

“The story of Esther takes place in Persia where the Jews have been taken into exile. Esther is a Jewish woman who has to take on a Persian name, and her uncle who is her only guardian works hard at teaching Esther about her culture.

Esther is placed in the position where she is made Queen of Persia, but nobody knows her true identity. Risking death, Esther confronts the King when she learns that her people are going to be massacred because one official hates Jews. God works through her to rescue His people. Esther is a woman of great courage. When the time is right she stands up for her people and her culture. Her faith in God is very powerful in this story. This story shows how God uses us in our own culturally specific situations to bring about his plan.

The situation of Esther and her people is very similar to that of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were made exiles in their own country, they had to take on the identity given to them by the dominant culture. They fought and are still fighting to keep their culture. They have suffered through massacres and destruction and thank God have survived.

This story is a reminder of how God works through one woman to save his people and how that woman trusted and had faith in God and courage to do what was right.

We can all relate to Esther in some way.”

30 minutes Ask participants to find a place where they can reflect by themselves on their experience of one (or more) of the following (and in relation to the story of Esther):

Identity
Power / powerlessness
Trust in God
Maintaining Integrity
Strategies for overcoming racism / discrimination

(These will be on the sheet)

30 minutes Come back together as a group and share reflections.

Note down responses or record on tape or mp3. Or note down the people who have shared and ask them to write fully their reflection for inclusion in a resource to be published at the conclusion of all workshops.

Instructions for separate group time (1hr)

- 40 minutes** Separate into 3 groups –
- Young Aboriginal women (under 30)
 - Older Aboriginal women).
- It is common protocol that young women and older women are separated to enable the younger the space to discuss. They would not be able to do this if in a group with older Aboriginal women. *Please find out if this protocol is appropriate for your area.*
- Non-Aboriginal women

Aboriginal women

- To discuss further the Esther story and their experiences as outlined on the sheet **OR**
- The group to come up with suggestions for how Aboriginal participation in church life can be better facilitated, encouraged and valued. Any action points coming out of this discussion could be added to the brainstorming activity (p7).

Non-Aboriginal women

- To undertake some cultural awareness tasks. Options are:
 - Do the role play (Appendix 6) **OR**
 - Invite someone to attend who commonly does cultural awareness programs (try the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Aboriginal liaison officer of the Catholic schools office, Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress, ANTaR or the local reconciliation group.)

OR

If it is felt that the group shouldn't be separated into 3 groups (as suggested above), divide into small groups and go through the 'Questions to ponder' in the 'Reconciliation' section of the Walking with Indigenous Australians Kit. (See Appendix 7 for the bible passages referred to in the 'Questions to ponder'.)

- 20 minutes** 1 person from each group to give a summary of what was discussed by their group.

Update on Reconciliation (1hr)

Equipment – A4 sheets of paper and pens and butcher’s paper

40 minutes Ask a person from the local Reconciliation Group to come and give a talk about where Reconciliation is up to.

OR

Divide into small groups for each participant to share what they are doing for Reconciliation in their community.

20 minutes Point participants to the Resources, Contacts & Ideas for Action sheets in the kit.

In groups of about 4 or 5, brainstorm personal action points to further reconciliation within their church and community (provide the paper, pens and butcher’s paper for people to write these down).

A Closing Act of Commitment (15 mins)

Equipment:

Bowl of ash; this should be prepared beforehand by burning leaves in a fireproof container. Gum leaves are excellent for this purpose; other varieties may require the addition of a little oil, and charcoal as used for the burning of incense is helpful in starting the process.

GIVING A HAND

The women gather in a circle and share a moment of stillness together. The worship enabler then reminds the women that our hands are symbolic of action, and invites them as a sign of their commitment to act for reconciliation to take a little of the ash and anoint the palm of the hand of the woman sitting next to them..

As the anointing proceeds a simple chant may be sung. Something well known to the participants is appropriate, or this iona chant may be used

Kindle a flame, to lighten the dark, and take all fear away.

The liturgy ends with a simple blessing (given by one of the Elders if appropriate) such as:

An Australian Blessing

May you always stand tall as a tree

Be as strong as the rock Uluru

As gentle and still as the morning mist

Hold the warmth of the campfire in your heart

And may the Creator Spirit

Always walk with you

E. Pike, 1997

PRAYER (15 minutes)

End in prayer – either in small groups as an open prayer time or ask key people to pray for the group.

Some examples of prayers are:

1. Prayer for the Journey of Healing

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 our past.

You gave your only Son, Jesus, who died and rose again so that sins will be 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.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have endured the pain and loss of loved
ones, through the separation of children from their families.

We are sorry and ask Your forgiveness.

Touch the hearts of the broken, homeless and afflicted 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.

National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission, 2003

2. To Face All of This

To Face all of this,
We will need courage.
We will need energy.
We will need vision.

Above all,
We will need to keep our eyes fixed
On the Lord, our God.

And then will will know,
As we have always known,
That the effort was worth
The gifts of our lives,
The best of our years,
The length of our days.

Adapted from a reflection of Clare Dunn CSJ and Judy Lovchik CSJ

3. Reconciliation Prayer

Holy Father, God of Love,
You are the Creator of this land and of all good things.

We acknowledge the pain and shame of our history
And the sufferings of our peoples,
And we ask your forgiveness.
We thank you for the survival of Indigenous cultures.

Our hope is in you because you gave your Son Jesus
To reconcile the world to you.
We pray for your strength and grace to forgive,
Accept and love one another,
As you love us and forgive and accept us
In the sacrifice of your Son.

Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history
So that we may build a better future for our nation.
Teach us to respect all cultures.
Teach us to care for our land and waters.
Help us to share justly the resources of this land.
Help us to bring about spiritual and social change to improve the quality of life for all
groups in our communities, especially the disadvantaged.
Help young people to find true dignity and self-esteem by your Spirit.

May your power and love be the foundations on which we build our families,
Our communities and our nation,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Prepared by Wontulp-Bi-Buya College Indigenous Theology Working Group, 1997.

4. Prayer for Reconciliation

In the midst of conflict and division, we know it is you
Who turns our minds to thoughts of peace.
Your Spirit changes our hearts:
Enemies begin to speak to one another,
Those who were estranged join hands in friendship,
And nations seek the way of peace together.

Let your Spirit be at work in us.
Give us understanding and put an end to strife,
Fill us with mercy and overcome our denial,
Grant us wisdom and teach us to learn from the people of the land,

Call us to justice. AMEN

*(Adapted from the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation II,
ACSJC)*

5. Prayer of the Aboriginal People

Father of all, you gave us the Dreaming.

You have spoken to us through our beliefs.

You then made your love clear to us in the person of Jesus.

We thank you for your care.

You own us. You are our hope.

Make us strong as we face the problems of change.

We ask you to help the people of Australia to listen to us and respect our culture.

Make the knowledge of you grow strong in all people, so that you can be at home in us and we can make a home for everyone in our land.

Amen.

Prayer composed for the meeting between Pope John Paul II and the Aboriginal people, November 1986.

Children's Program

This program is basically a child-minding service. However activities where possible should be related to reconciliation or Aboriginal culture.

Ensure that you have enough helpers to look after the children. Make sure that volunteers meet the 'Working with Children' criteria in your state and have filled out a 'Working with Children' form if required.

Equipment needed:

- Colouring pencils, textas, pens
- Plain sheets of paper
- Copies of the colouring-in stencils (see Appendix 8)
- Copies of one or more of the following childrens books (some may be borrowed from NATSIEC):

From Black Ink Press Ph: (07) 4773 5077; blackinkybi@ozemail.com.au

- *My mob going to the beach* by Sylvia Emmerton and Jaquanna Elliot
- *Molly the Grey Kangaroo and the Bush Clean-up Crew*, by John L Clark
- *How the Cassowary got its Helmet*, by Trevor Fourmile, illustrated by Lillian Fourmile.

From Wontulp-Bi-Buya College Ph: (07) 4041 4596;
wontulp@zoomnet.com.au

- *The Emu, the Brolga & the Jabiru* (including worksheets), by Pastor George Rosendale OAM, illustrated by Zane Saunders

From ANTaR Ph: (02) 95556138

- *When I Was Little, Like You*, by Mary Malbunka
- *The Rabbits*, written by John Marsden, illustrations by Shaun Tan
- *Jimmy and Pat meet the Queen*, written by Pike & Pat Lowe

From Streetwise Comic Production Ph: (02) 9560 3244

Everyone is Talking About it – But What is... Reconciliation?

From the Anglican Education Centre, South Australia Ph: (08) 8239 0091

Awi Irta, an Adnyamathanha Dreaming Story – The Story of the Red Breast Robin, written in Yura Ngawarla by Clem and Terrence Coulthard, illustrated by Anne Best.