



Indigenous contributions to the Church and continuing blockages

**Fr. Paul Devitt
at St. Brigid's Church,
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Indigenous Contributions

- Impossible to generalize - significant contributions have been made in many communities where it has been possible to work with authorities and come to some agreement how contributions can be made in liturgy, decision-making, leadership...
- More often than not, more successful in remote communities than in urban parishes.
- Different faith traditions have enabled different levels of contribution to be made.
- Contributions have been made and received in places where positive relationships have been built up over a long period of time and there has been respectful listening on the parts of Aboriginal people and those people of other cultural and faith traditions (eg. Daly River, Wadeye, Turkey Creek, Broome, Bourke, Redfern...)
- Great contribution has been made in the area of spirituality - through personal sharing of individual and community stories and through all forms of media: books, video, radio, film. Many Australians of other cultural and faith traditions have been enriched by the approach and focus of Aboriginal spirituality and have thereby had their own spirituality deepened. Aboriginal spirituality has helped the church develop significantly in its ecological awareness and increased awareness of the importance of caring for the earth.
- Growing positive relationship with creation has become an integral part of larger faith traditions.



What blocks contribution being made and/or received?

- Racism - there are still many people in churches (at leadership and parishioner levels) who fundamentally believe that Aboriginal people have nothing worthwhile to offer. Exemplified in this very church when our painting symbolising welcome and reconciliation was vandalised in 2004.
- Too rigid leadership and authority structures - especially urban ones but also some remote ones (eg Yuendumu) - older people can't pass on spirituality to younger generations because communication has broken down due to high unemployment, poverty, depression, despair, alcoholism, drug abuse, petrol sniffing, sexual and physical abuse in communities, which leads to anger, violence and lack of respect for elders.

Into the future?

- Continue building positive relationship and listening carefully to each other
- Working together on the task of determining what can be left behind in our traditions so as to facilitate integrating the wisdom and experience of Aboriginal people into those traditions.
- In the Catholic Church - in liturgy - giving serious consideration and effort to enabling the development of an Aboriginal Rite so as to get away from trying to 'force' Aboriginal contributions into Western framework.
- Addressing the poverty, unemployment and social issues and naming and overcoming the injustices that lead to such things happening.
- Greater stress on self-determination for communities to give them a sense of identity and try to build pride in that identity in younger generations.