

## Vignette

Vicki Walker

*I GREW UP IN MELBOURNE ON WURUNDJERI LAND. My strongest memories of Church in my childhood in the late 60s and early 70s were around school and going to Mass. All the kids in my area went to the same school and we used to walk to Mass together. Surprisingly, all these kids from the commission area went up to church by themselves on Sunday. We had a fantastic priest. I played the bongo drums in our church band. We had a responsibility.*

*When we moved out of that area, things started to change. I consider myself to be a normal Catholic: although you move away from the church for a while, you know that you belong. You feel respectful of the liturgical times during the year, and know that you have a responsibility with your children. This has been passed down from your family. But I did not have a place in church as such within my local parish where people were well-established within their networks. I really got back in touch with church when I started working at the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry. By moving back into the church through my work there and being guided by what Pope John Paul said twenty years ago, I accepted a challenge that opened up a possibility of being part of the church in Aboriginal way.*

*For a long time people have been asking me to speak about my Aboriginal spirituality. Some people feel there should be a tension with my Catholic faith. But there is no tension. Respecting the Catholic faith and respecting the things that my old people, the ancestors, taught me, and not letting one overtake the other, is a balancing act, but one reinforces the other. When people imagine a tension, sometimes they are coming out of a mindset that we are devil worshippers. I don't understand this. All the laws and the dreaming stories are ways we have been able to live in this land for so long. The ceremonies and rituals we have practised were given by God, the Creator Spirit, to our elders to continue.*

*As an Aboriginal Christian, I am happy when I meet with other team members, staff, and members of Aboriginal Catholic Ministries around Australia, knowing we are part of a bigger network. We are all striving for the same thing: our right for a place in the church, in terms of culture,*

*spirituality, and social justice. Social justice needs to be a practical way of land and a practical way of sharing resources, for example, in the areas of employment for Aboriginal people, education, and health. In terms of welfare, the churches around Australia are very supportive and Aboriginal people have tapped into programs run by church agencies quite well. But I think we need to look at a more holistic picture when it comes to changes in the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Church.*

*At international Indigenous conferences I have heard it said that inculturation is another form of genocide, that we are selling off our culture for everyone to share when intellectually it belongs to us. But I have a bigger picture: Australia should be embracing what we are willing to offer. We know what is sacred, we know what can and what cannot be shared by gubbah people. So what we can share, that is what we have to offer.*

Vicki Walker is a Mutti Mutti woman  
and co-ordinator of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne.  
Her DVD, *Knowing Home: A Reflection of Personal Spirituality by a  
Woman from the River Country*,  
was released in November 2004.