



*"... we keep the culture going, we need to keep our culture strong."*

Janice, a Wagilak woman

## CARITAS AUSTRALIA

*Project Compassion* is the annual Lenten appeal of Caritas Australia, the Church in Australia's international and development agency. *Project Compassion* runs across the six weeks of Lent.

Supporting over 3 million people across around the world, Caritas Australia works in the most disadvantaged and vulnerable places using long-term sustainable practices, such as working with local communities and NGOs, to build resilience and empowerment into the future.

## PROJECT COMPASSION 2022

This year's theme comes from the Genesis story of Noah's Ark. When the flood waters subsided, a rainbow appeared in the sky and a dove returned to the Ark with an olive branch, symbols of a new beginning. God said: *This is a sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.* (Gen 9:12)

Each year, Caritas shares the stories of resilient and



inspiring people from their programs around the world. This year, the stories come from Mozambique, India, Australia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Solomon Islands. Caritas believes that 'Together, we can create lasting change.'

Especially during Lent, Caritas invites everyone to participate with them in ending poverty, promoting justice and upholding human dignity. Participation can be through prayer, advocacy and financial donations. The invitation is to make the world a better place by working together now to find long-term solutions to global issues.

## ENCOUNTER THAT BECOMES CULTURE

The word 'culture' points to something deeply embedded within a people, its most cherished convictions and its way of life. A people's 'culture' is more than an abstract idea. It has to do with their desires, their interests and ultimately the way they live their lives. To speak of a 'culture of encounter' means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. *Fratelli tutti* n 216

## ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS

Noel Pearson writing in a collection of his essays and speeches titled *Mission*, explains:

*We Aboriginal Australians have lost most of our land, our sovereignty and most of what was ours. The necessary solace in this grief is to speak with my children in my ancestral and historical tongues. The necessary solace is to speak my Australian language, to read and sing the old texts from classical times and from the mission days that have been written down ... We do need economically and socially sustainable lives, but it is our cultural link with the past - a link that would break without language - that makes our lives spiritually sustainable as members of a conquered people.*

## JANICE'S STORY - KEEPING CULTURE STRONG



Janice, a Wagilak woman, is a traditional dancer who tells stories through movements handed down over generations. When she was 5, Janice began to learn to dance her father's culture and her mother's culture. When Janice dances, she feels strong and connected to her parents and grandparents before her. *'When I dance, I feel strong in my heart. It's like my grandfather and grandmother are here with me.'*

Janice is 44. She moved to a remote community in the Northern Territory when she was a young girl. She is very aware that, as elders in her community grow older and pass away, she must share her knowledge with the younger generations.

## CHALLENGES

Janice faces a range of challenges. There are very few jobs; opportunities for education are limited and First Nations people have lower life expectancy and poorer

health than others in Australia.

Loss of land, language and culture and the ongoing effects of colonisation also add to the problems for young people living in remote communities. Many leave their homes in search of work, moving to towns and cities where they may be more vulnerable.

## DJILPIN ARTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

The Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation is playing an important role in helping to keep Janice's community and culture strong. It established a contemporary arts and culture centre in 2002. With the support of Caritas Australia, Djilpin Arts provides training and employment for young people who work in the art museum and shop. <https://djilpinarts.org.au/>

The museum features a permanent showcase of culturally significant West Arnhem Land artworks, while the shop sells traditional wood carvings, fibre art, prints and jewellery.



Elders run pandanus weaving and printmaking workshops, inspired by the colours of the environment, with designs featuring water lilies, turtles and fish.

## A SAFE PLACE

Janice loves Djilpin Arts. *'This is a safe place, a place we come with family and get away from problems. We, here in the art centre, work as a family.'* Janice says. *'It's important to me because me and my brother, we got knowledge from our great grandfather, he told us to take care of your culture. It's even more important for us to work here because we hold our culture here and love this place.'*

## CARITAS ASSISTANCE

In 2021, Caritas Australia helped to provide a shed for the Arts Centre In Katherine. During Covid, this has helped the Djilpin Arts community continue to make an income, when there were few visitors. The shed is used to display and store artworks for shipping to online customers.

