



The WYD08 Message Stick

At the suggestion of the WYD08 Indigenous Advisory Committee a Message Stick will accompany the World Youth Day Cross and Icon during their year-long pilgrimage around Australia.

The Message Stick is from the Aboriginal Catholic communities of Sydney to the indigenous youth of Australia.

The purpose of the WYD08 Message Stick is to invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to attend World Youth Day in Sydney.

What is a message stick?

Message sticks were used to relay messages to people of other Aboriginal Nations. They are made from wood, and can vary in size and shape from 20cm and 60cm long.

Some are cylindrical with tapered ends while others are just flat sticks.

Most message sticks have incised patterns and can be simple notches to intricate geometric designs. Other message sticks may be elaborately painted.

The messengers were generally young males. By displaying the stick to leaders in the groups through whom they passed, the messengers received safe passage. Where complex details of impending ceremonies were to be transmitted, messengers would be formally instructed before setting off on their journey.

The purpose of a message stick

Message sticks are a means of communication between Aboriginal peoples. They could be used to extend invitations to initiations, funerals and sacred ceremonies. A message stick could issue a challenge to settle a dispute, to invite people to feasts, explain where a group had gone, or be a simple request for trade.

Items were sometimes sent to emphasise the purpose of the invitation. For example a bullroarer would indicate an initiation ceremony, a club would mean fighting, while a pipeclay was a summons to a funeral and represented mourning.

Rationale for the WYD08 Message Stick

When Pope John Paul II spoke to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had gathered at Alice Springs in 1986, he told them that the Church in Australia will not fully be the Church that Jesus wants her to be until they have made their contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others. World Youth Day is a magnificent opportunity for the Church in Australia to take a step forward in recognizing the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the life of the Church, and to welcome their greater contribution. To make the most of this opportunity, the inclusion and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in all the events prior, during and after World Youth Day is crucial.

By making use of a traditional means of communication and invitation, World Youth Day 08 and the Aboriginal Catholic communities of Sydney want to ensure that the indigenous youth of Australia know that they are welcome to come to Sydney for World Youth Day from July 15-20, 2008.

The content of the message is as follows:

**“You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you.
And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the
Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your
contribution to her life and until that contribution has been
joyfully received by others”.**

(Pope John Paul II, Message to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, Alice Springs, 1986)

The WYD08 Message Stick is an invitation from Sydney Aboriginal Catholic communities as the host, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth across Australia to join in the celebration of WYD08 on the country of the Cadigal people of the Eora Nation.

Protocols for the Message Stick

The following protocols for the WYD08 Message Stick have been developed by the Aboriginal Catholic communities of Sydney.

1. Fr Chris Ryan MGL, Coordinator of the Journey of the Cross and Icon, is the custodian of the Message Stick and its small wooden stand.
2. The custodian of the Message Stick will only present the message stick to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander youth or community representative.
3. If there are no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples present when the Cross and Icon come to a location then the Message Stick remains in Fr Chris' custody.

4. Diocesan Aboriginal Catholic Ministries and Diocesan Aboriginal Education Advisers/Officers are encouraged to liaise closely with Diocesan World Youth Day Committees and planners of events with the Cross and Icon to prepare for the presentation of the Message Stick during events with the WYD08 Cross and Icon.
5. The protocol for the use of the Message Stick is as follows:
 - At Church entrance or suitable location Father Chris Ryan as custodian of the WYD08 Message Stick hands Message Stick to an Aboriginal youth representative. A Local Elder and the Aboriginal youth representative walk side by side to a place near the Cross and Icon.
 - The Elder does a Welcome to or Acknowledgement of Country.
 - The Aboriginal youth passes WYD08 Message stick to local Elder. Elder holds up WYD08 Message Stick for all gathered to see.
 - The Aboriginal youth reads out message.
 - The Elder and youth together place the WYD08 Message Stick on its stand near the WYD08 Cross and Icon.
 - At the end of the event the WYD08 Message Stick is presented back to Father Chris Ryan, as custodian of WYD08 Cross and Icon, to travel to the next Catholic community.

In the light of these protocols, the most appropriate time for the Message Stick to be presented is at the beginning of an event with the Cross and Icon.

Whenever the Cross and Icon are welcomed to a diocese, to a new location within a diocese (i.e. a new town), and/or to a different Aboriginal country within a diocese and there are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people present, then the Message Stick should be presented.

Diocesan Coordinators are asked to consider the times and places that the WYD08 Message Stick would be presented during the JCI itinerary in your diocese, and liaise with your local JCI contacts regarding these moments.