



Elsie Heiss
Archdiocese of Sydney

Mrs. Elsie Heiss was born into the Wiradjuri Nation and spent most of her early days in Cowra and Griffith, in New South Wales. Elsie has represented New South Wales as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Councilor since 1999, and holds the position of Chairperson of this organisation at present. Joining the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in 1989, Elsie worked with Father Frank Fletcher in Erskineville for eight years, then moved to La Perouse.

Elsie is currently the Coordinator of the Aboriginal Catholic Church & Ministry at La Perouse, in the Sydney Archdiocese. The community celebrates mass once a month and incorporates Aboriginal culture into its services. Elsie's work includes talks and workshops throughout the metropolitan area of Sydney and country New South Wales on Aboriginal Spirituality, Stolen Generations, Reconciliation and Justice for Aboriginal people. Elsie also educates many school students who visit The Reconciliation Church to learn about these issues. In 1998 Elsie was the only Aboriginal Representative at the Synod of Oceania in Rome.

Elsie is also a representative on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Council of New South Wales as well as working hard for Reconciliation in the Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. The Indigenous Reference Group of Caritas is another important committee Elsie has worked on, and in 2005 she traveled across the Kimberley region, visiting and observing the wonderful work they helped initiate in Indigenous communities. Elsie is also a member of the Gender Commission.

As mother of five and grandmother to seven, Elsie is a highly respected Aboriginal Elder and in 2003 she was awarded the NAIDOC community award for her work with our church and health programs in the community. In July 2009 Elsie was awarded NAIDOC female Elder of the Year, which was a great honour for her. One of Elsie's priorities is to see a stronger commitment from the Catholic Church to the support of Aboriginal people, especially with acceptance of Aboriginal cultures and their practices. She believes that the deep spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people have much to bring to the Catholic Church.

