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RESPECTED ELDERS LEAD ABORIGINAL CATHOLIC MINISTRY

Two Aboriginal leaders have been appointed to the executive of the restructured Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Social justice advocate Graeme Mundine will join the ACM as Executive Officer and will be located at the present ACM's Alexandria property.

Elsie Heiss, who has been working with the ACM since 1989, will remain a key member of the Reconciliation Church and Ministry at La Perouse.

The restructuring of the ACM has been undertaken to serve the escalating and changing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Archdiocese and to ensure a long-term and sustainable future.

The ACM will continue to assist with the welfare and pastoral care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, supporting them in their faith.

Elsie and Graeme, along with an Aboriginal Advisory Group, will identify, facilitate and implement strategies and programs to meet the changing needs of those who have been traditionally assisted by the ACM.

To maximise these services the administrative work of the ACM will, in transition, be managed by CatholicCare.

The ACM property at Alexandria remains a pastoral and welfare centre.

Another property at Picton, located outside the boundaries of the Sydney Archdiocese, will be sold, with the sale proceeds going into a special trust to support Aboriginal pastoral initiatives.

Similar services to those previously provided at Picton will be available in Sydney, which will also be closer to professional assistance.

As a result of the restructure, two long time employees will conclude their service with ACM. In acknowledgement of their work they have been offered, and agreed to, very generous retrenchment packages.

In accepting his position with ACM, Graeme Mundine said he is very much looking forward to his new role.

"I am very excited we are moving in this direction," Graeme said.

Graeme, a well respected advocate for the rights of Aboriginal peoples and social justice, has been with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) of the National Council of Churches in Australia for the past eight years.

A highly respected Aboriginal elder, Elsie Heiss' work with community groups and students, reconciliation and pastoral care is widely recognised.

Last year Elsie was awarded the NAIDOC female Elder of the Year.

Elsie, who like Graeme is looking forward to the new direction and services of ACM, says the deep spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people have much to bring to the Catholic Church.

Previous services provided by the ACM prior to the restructure, will continue while new services and programs will be implemented.

The restructure will also examine the development of new ways in which the ACM can provide services, for example through alliances and development of educational transitioning and mentoring programs, along with training and development initiatives in relation to cultural competency and understanding.

For further information:

Katrina Lee

Director of Catholic Communications

Archdiocese of Sydney

Phone: 9390 5304

Mobile: 0403 950652

Email: katrina.lee@sydneycatholic.org



Catholic
Communications
Archdiocese of Sydney

Level 15, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

Telephone: (02) 9390 5300 Facsimile: (02) 9390 5306 Email: media@sydneycatholic.org