

MEDIA RELEASE



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THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

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Archdiocese of Sydney establishes new university scholarship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP has announced the Archdiocese will fund a scholarship program through the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA), aimed at making tertiary education more accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Indigenous students studying full-time at UNDA's Sydney campus would be eligible to apply for the Aunty Elsie Indigenous Support Scholarship, worth \$2500 per year and covering up to three years of undergraduate study. Up to four scholarships will be awarded each year, commencing in July 2020 and benefiting up to 12 students by 2022.

The scholarship is named in honour of Wiradjuri Elder, Elsie Heiss, who has led Aboriginal Catholic Ministry programs for over three decades and was NAIDOC Female Elder of the Year in 2009. Elsie was awarded an honorary doctorate by UNDA in 2010 in recognition of her decades of service to the Catholic Church in promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Elsie was also created a Dame Commander of St Gregory the Great in 2018.

Archbishop Fisher said Elsie Heiss had earned the respect and affection of generations of Catholics across Australia and it is fitting that the new scholarship be named in her honour.

“Many will know Elsie through her founding work with the Reconciliation Church in La Perouse, but this is only a small element of her broader leadership in Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, which has covered World Youth Day in 2008, numerous papal visits to Australia and extending to the Vatican as the only

Aboriginal representative at the Synod of Oceania in Rome in 1998”, Archbishop Fisher said.

“Elsie knows first-hand the power of education to transform lives, having led Aboriginal education programs in schools over many years and I’m sure this scholarship program will also help transform countless lives, opening up valuable career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”.

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Notre Dame Australia, Professor Francis Campbell said the university was proud to support the new scholarship program.

“Dr Elsie Heiss embodies Notre Dame’s traditions and values. As a member of the School of Arts & Sciences Advisory Board at Notre Dame, she continues to champion the cause of reconciliation in NSW Aboriginal communities and to uphold her commitment to the life of the Church. We are very proud to be supporting the establishment of the Aunty Elsie Indigenous Support Scholarship”, Professor Campbell said.

Aunty Elsie Heiss said she was deeply honoured to have the new scholarship named after her.

“I have such a strong connection to the University of Notre Dame and it really is a wonderful place of learning and research. I can see this scholarship having a great, long term impact since it will open up great opportunities for our young Indigenous students”, Dr Heiss said.

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