

# 'Education is key' says Brisbane's first Aboriginal deacon

"Dancing in two circles" is how Clinton McGoldrick describes his approach to spirituality and life as an Aboriginal Catholic in modern-day Australia.

As the first-ever ordained Indigenous man in the Brisbane archdiocese, Clint has a foot in both worlds.

"I have this Indigenous connection to land, lore and ancestral spirits," says Clint, a descendant of the Worimi people of coastal NSW, "and alongside that, I have this Catholic identity, a belief in the gospels and a sense of duty to ensure everybody has access to the narrative of Jesus."

A former schoolteacher who holds multiple university degrees, Clint is eager to endorse the phrase used by many Indigenous leaders: Education is key.

"How many aunties and uncles do we have around us saying, 'Education is the key', and absolutely it is," says Clint, who has completed master's degrees in Educational Leadership and Theology at ACU, and is currently pursuing a Master of Spiritual Direction.

"If we want to make a change with our mobs, to increase pathways and improve outcomes and quality of life, we need to express our knowledge in a way this society understands."

For Clint, this has meant engaging in research on themes of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While his long-term goal is to pursue a PhD exploring the impact of colonisation on Indigenous cultures, his current research investigates the relationship between Catholicism and Indigenous spirituality.



ACU Alumnus, Clinton McGoldrick, centre, has gone from high school battler to serving as a spiritual leader in his community.

Deacon Clint's ministry is currently centred on pastoral care as an army chaplain for the Australian Defence Force.

Two decades ago, he served as a combat engineer before moving into teaching. A self-confessed "battler" in high school, he says that military service put him on the straight and narrow.

"Growing up in a single-parent family without a father figure, I missed that structure

and rigidity," says the 44-year-old, who now has his own young family. "I needed guidance on how to contribute and be part of a system, and the army certainly gave me that grounding."

Clint has drawn inspiration from his mother Noeline, a nurse from Worimi Country who raised him and his sister in Brisbane. He forged a connection to country during frequent trips to Forster to visit family.

"There was certainly a strong connection to



Clinton McGoldrick is Brisbane's first Aboriginal deacon

family and sacred sites around Forster," he says. "Unfortunately we didn't have a depth of understanding of why these sites were culturally-significant, and in terms of the passing on of language, that was also missing. But that all comes down to history and the impact of colonisation."

Clint has found his calling in army chaplaincy and the spiritual guidance of Indigenous soldiers. He sees his role as giving a voice to the voiceless, and encourages other Indigenous people to "dance in two circles" while taking the leap into higher education.

"It can be a big ask to go to university and be away from mob, particularly if you're connected culturally and language-wise," he says.

"But these days, there are supports to help you find a balance between study and other commitments. The benefits of higher education are just huge: Building your knowledge, skills, language and confidence to better yourself, while contributing to your community in a positive way."



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E: [firstpeoplesoutreach@acu.edu.au](mailto:firstpeoplesoutreach@acu.edu.au)

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