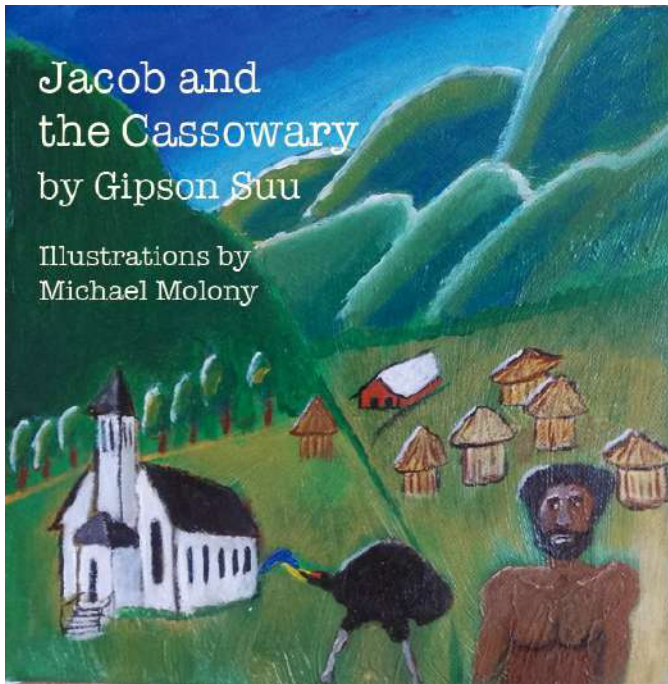


***Jacob and the Cassowary*, the fatidic short story from West Papua that both church and state claim is a parable**

"Jacob Rumbiak jumped on my uncle's cassowary in Nalca, my village in the highlands of West Papua, because he had to get to Jayapura down on the north coast for our independence celebration. The next day, near the Puldama River, the cassowary slipped in the mud and ..."



And so begins *Jacob and the Cassowary*, an illustrated short story about the West Papuans' David and Goliath struggle against Indonesia's colonial occupation. Author GIPSON SUU has been a refugee in Melbourne since his mother insisted that her son, a student, request asylum. Gipson befriended MICHAEL MOLONY, a teacher at the Academy of Mary Immaculate Catholic College, whose palette of vibrant colour and identifiable design illumines the text.

Besides the cassowary, the story's cast includes a crocodile equally keen to help its human kin, and two Papuan rivers: the Puldama and the mighty Mamberamo. There's also the women and village pastors who have nourished the freedom fighters for decades. Australia and

America are there too, as four shadowy figures on galloping horses, and so is Indonesia represented, as President Prabowo hiding behind a tree on his Lusitano stallion.

Anglican Bishop Philip Huggins and Melbourne City Councillor Dr Olivia Ball both describe *Jacob and the Cassowary* as a 'parable'; the Bishop seeing "the compassionate heart of God working through faithful souls;" Dr Ball seeing "a beacon of international law, the ideal of a just world."

In 2026 *Jacob and the Cassowary* embarked on a journey to meet Pope Leo XIV in The Vatican. The odyssey began on 31 January at the Focolare Institute in Melbourne during a Roundtable of faith leaders, educators, researchers, community organisers and citizens--interfaith, intergenerational, intercultural--wanting to contribute to a more peaceful harmonious Australia.



Roundtable, Focolare Institute, Melb, 31 Jan 2026
<https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/?p=22804>

Two Roundtable participants, Augustine Doronila and Cecilia Capuzzi, were flying to Rome for, and offered to introduce the story to the Pope during the Focolare General Assembly in Rome. It was an idea that needed a miracle, although the Papuans Jacob Rumbiak and Gipson Suu were hopeful as the Pope had visited West Papua in 1989, and again in 2002.



Bishop Huggins, Yob Doronila, Cecilia Capuzzi with Gipson Suu at the Focolare Institute in Jan 2026.



Focolare General Assembly with Pope Leo XIV in the Sala Clementina. Apostolic Palace, Feb 2026



Bard's Apothecary, 22 April 2026: Michael, Gipson and the Pope's letter; below: Dr Jacob Rumbiak with Dr Olivia Ball from the Melbourne City Council.



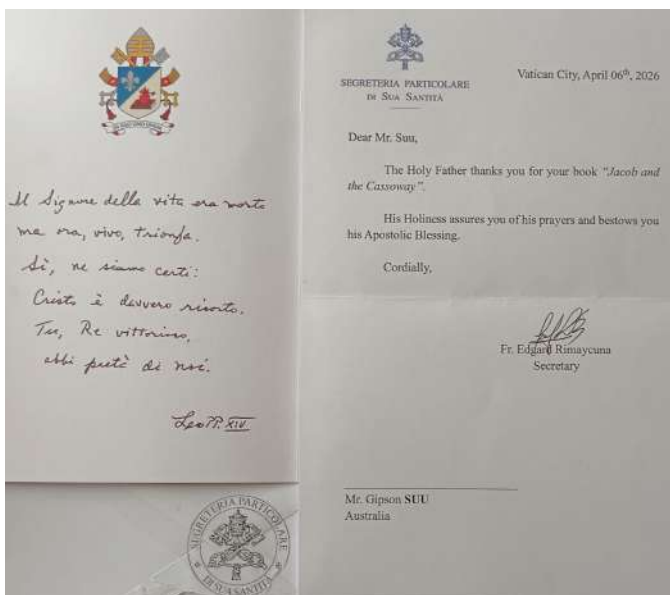
During their audience in Sala Clementina in the Apostolic Palace, Augustine and Cecilia gifted *Jacob and the Cassowary* to the Pope as part of peace building initiatives in Oceania. Their presentation took place beneath the huge fresco of St Clement, the 4th Bishop of Rome who was thrown into the sea by the Emperor Trajan. (Paradoxically, for the Papuans, a Dutchman, Paul Bril, painted this magnificent mural).

Back in Melbourne, Michael Molony's paintings for *Jacob and the Cassowary* were exhibited at Bard's Apothecary, a bar in Melbourne owned by Matt Molony and his sister Carmel. The exhibition was launched by Dr Olivia Ball, the only Greens member of the Melbourne City Council, who gave her interpretation of the story:

"In Gipson's story, Jacob lives up to his vision of a better world when he tells the crocodile to take the Indonesian president to the International Criminal Court in the Hague rather than eat him. This is not a soft option. This is justice. And moral courage. And more than that, Gipson's narrative sees an end to impunity: not just Prabowo, but *all* the Indonesian presidents who have colonised, oppressed, robbed and terrorised West Papuans since 1963 – the crocodile takes them all to the Hague! What a message of moral clarity in these times."

Then the Pope's letter to Gipson was opened. Some of it was in Italian, and Author David Sornig promptly tried to google-translate it. Later Matt Molony did it properly: "*The God of life was dead, but now He is alive and He triumphs. Yes, we are sure about it. Christ has risen. You, victorious King, have mercy on us.*"

The rest of the Pope's communique, in English, thanked Gipson for his book. "His Holiness assures you of his prayers and bestows you his Apostolic Blessing" wrote Fr Edgard Rimaycuna, the Pope's Secretary (who, incidentally, is of indigenous Peruvian and Spanish parentage).



Gipson's letter from the Pope, 6 April 2026



Gipson Suu with Maeve Clancy, grand-daughter of Nonie Sharpe who in 1977 wrote the first analysis of Indonesia's occupation of West Papua, and was a founding driver of the Mabo decision in the High Court of Australia that overturned the 200-year old law Terra Nullius ('empty land').

Bishop Huggins in describing *Jacob and the Cassowary* as a 'beautiful parable' explains:

"The Parable is God's graceful compassion connecting us all: from the idea of the story, the paintings, the publication of the book; to the providential way it reached the Pope via our Focolare friends; to the pastoral kindness of the Pope in writing a letter to Gipson, to the patrons in the Irish bar advocating for the freedom of their nearest neighbour."

Jacob and the Cassowary, paperback with full colour artwork, 32 pages, 210 x 210mm, available (\$24.95) at the West Papua Office (211, 838 Collins St, Docklands 3008) or online at <https://westpauawomensoffice.square.site/>.



Jacob and the Cassowary, and its companion short film is opening The Cultureel Papoea Festival at Molen de Ster in Utrecht (The Netherlands) on 5 September 2026.