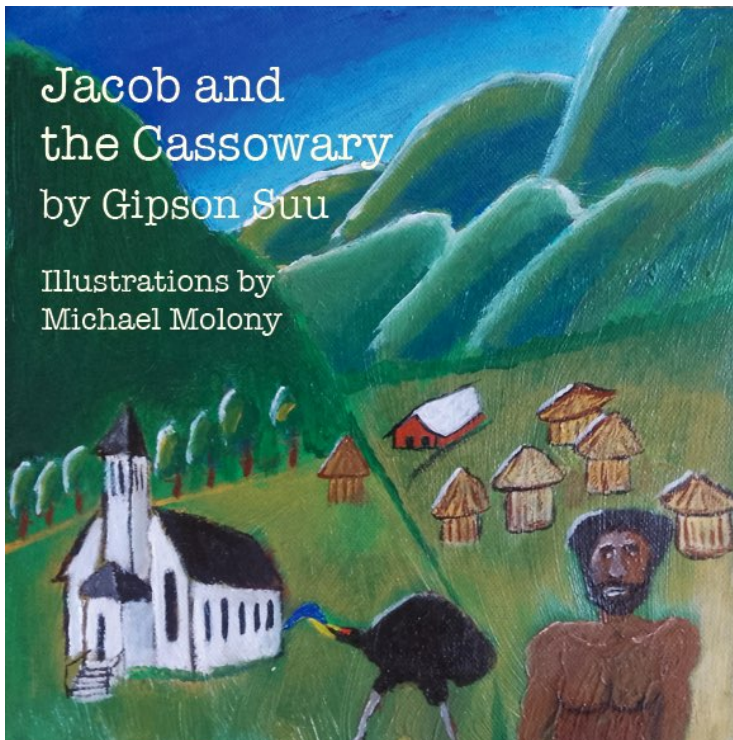


## ***Jacob and the Cassowary*, the short story from West Papua that's become a parable for high priests of the sacred church and the secular state**

"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 fatidic short story about the West Papuans' David and Goliath struggle against the Indonesian colonial occupation. Author Gipson Suu has been a refugee in Melbourne since his mother insisted that her student-son request protection and asylum in Australia. He befriended Michael Molony, a teacher at the Academy of Mary Immaculate Catholic girls' college in Fitzroy, who illumined the text with a palette of vibrant colour and identifiable design.

The story's cast includes, obviously, a cassowary but also a crocodile equally keen to help its human kin. There's also two Papuan rivers, the Puldama and the mighty Mamberamo. Papuan women and village

pastors who for decades have nourished the body and soul of the freedom fighters. Indonesia's there too: four shadowy figures on galloping horses, and 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."

One month after it was published *Jacob and the Cassowary* embarked on a journey to meet Pope Leo XIV. The odyssey began on 31 January 2026 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 (<https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/?p=22804>).



Roundtable, Focolare Institute, Melbourne, 31 Jan 2026

Two Roundtable participants, Augustine Doronila and Cecilia Capuzzi, were flying to Rome the next day for the General Assembly of the Focolare Institute, and they offered to introduce the story to the Pope.

It was an idea that needed a miracle. The



*Bishop Huggins, Yob Daronila, Cecilia Capuzzi with Gipson Suu at the Focolare Institute on 31 Jan 2026*



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



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



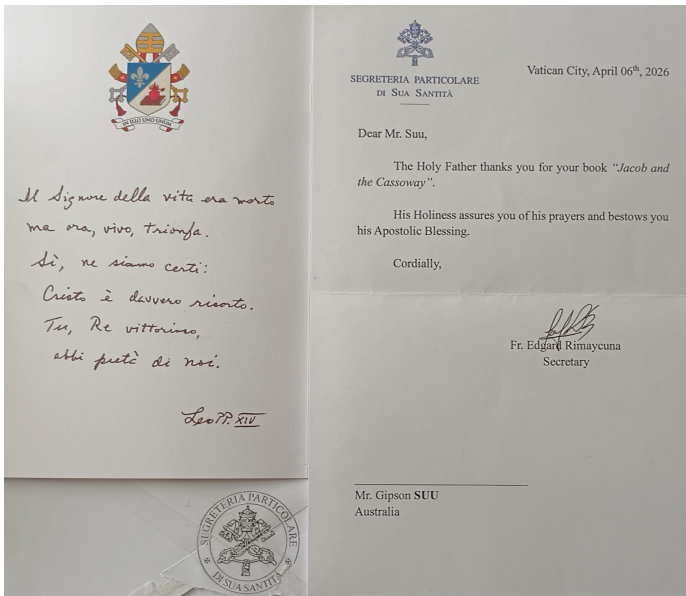
West Papuans, Jacob Rumbiak and Gipson Suu, were hopeful, as the Pope had visited West Papua as a young priest in 1989, and again in 2002 as head of the Augustine Order.

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 the Emperor Trajan tied to an anchor and threw into the sea. (Paradoxically, for the Papuans, it was a Dutchman, Paul Bril, who painted this magnificent Renaissance mural).

Back in Melbourne, Michael Molony's paintings for *Jacob and the Cassowary* were on exhibition at Bard's Apothecary, an Irish bar in Melbourne owned by Matt Molony and his sister Carmel. Guest speaker, Dr Olivia Ball, the only Greens member of the Melbourne City Council gave her interpretation of the story:

"Gipson's story is a beacon of international law, of the ideal of a just world. In his 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 and read. Some of it was in Italian. David Sornig (author of *Blue Lake, Finding Dudley Flat and the West Melbourne Swamp*) 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*



*Gipson's letter from the Pope, Vatican City, 6/4/2026*

*sure about it. Christ has risen. You, victorious King, have mercy on us." The rest of the letter, in English, thanked Gipson for his book. "His Holiness assures you of his prayers and bestows you his Apostolic Blessing."*

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 Street, Docklands) or online at <https://westpauwawomensoffice.square.site/>.



*Gipson Suu opening his letter from the Pope, with MC Maeve Clancy, the grand-daughter of Nonie Sharpe who wrote the first substantial analysis of Indonesia's occupation of West Papua in 1977, and was a founding driver of what became the Mabo decision in the High Court of Australia in 1992.*