When the publishers asked Max to revise *A Story of Fire*, it seemed a very difficult task, because Parkinson’s disease had made it impossible for Max to visit the Aboriginal people and places where the fires of the Holy Spirit were burning. But Bryce Clark, who had worked amongst Aborigines in the Riverland, offered to help. He visited all locations and interviewed the leaders suggested by Max. He recorded interviews with Aboriginal men and women in remote regions and capital cities. He taped telephone conversations with those who were in distant places such as the Kimberleys, Kalgoorlie and Kununurra.

There emerged a story of many fires springing up in many communities involving leadership by Aboriginal men and women.

*Photos:* Above: Johnny Warrangkula—Cover Artist (courtesy of Pastor Norm Wurst FRM)
Below left: Max Hart; Below right: Bryce Clark
A STORY OF FIRE,
CONTINUED
ABORIGINAL CHRISTIANITY

MAX HART
Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank all those who contributed to this book, especially all those Aboriginal people who willingly and freely gave their time and made the effort to put onto tape their own experiences and ideas, without which this book would not have been possible.

Also, to the many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men and women who have agreed to be interviewed for the updating of this book; to Bryce Clark, who has given his time and skills to travel to so many places and interview so many people; to New Creation Publications, and to Geoffrey Bingham in particular, for the help and encouragement they have given for the revision.

COVER DESIGN

This is a design taken from Johnny Warrangkula’s ground painting. The footprints indicate people walking about collecting bush tucker near the various camp sites. The symbol of concentric circles is widely used in Central Australia to signify a camp site which includes a camp fire. The two ‘U’ shapes represent the imprints made by people as they sit down and talk around the camp fire.

Instead of one fire there are many fires, showing that the Gospel has spread around the land. Many Aboriginal people in many fellowships feel their hearts warmed by the Spirit of God.

Thanks to Johnny Warrangkula and Tula Arts for allowing me to use the painting.
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I was flying in a small plane between Yuendumu and Lajamanu—then called Hooker Creek, on my annual trip around Northern Territory Aboriginal schools to visit students on teaching practice. There had been some good rains in Central Australia early that year which brought a good growth of grasses and shrubs across the usually dry centre. As we flew across the Tanami country the pilot pointed out the wall of smoke and flame of a bushfire burning steadily across the land and moving slowly but surely without anyone trying to stop it. It was a spectacular sight to see a fire, miles wide, flaring up every now and then as it reached some bush or mulga tree, and relentlessly burning everything in its path. It looked as though it could burn right through the land from coast to coast although that would depend on the direction of the wind, and naturally it did eventually burn itself out.

That fire stuck in my memory and I often wondered how it started and what happened to bring a fire like that into a seemingly uninhabited country. How did fire first come into the land? Some years later, up in Arnhem Land, I met an Aboriginal artist who painted on bark the stories of the coming of fire.

THE MYTHOLOGY

The stories told by the bark paintings have been recorded by Anne Wells\(^1\) and by Louis Allen\(^2\) who describes the fire spirit as a person who came down from the sky to bring fire to the people on the earth. He saw their need of warmth and cooking but was so fiery that he set alight to everything he touched, the grasses, the bushes, the trees and even the stump on which he sat. Wells describes how some of the animals escaped into holes, into the river and into the sea, and how the people ran away in

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1. A. E. Wells, *This Their Dreaming*, University of Queensland, 1971, pp. 60–62.
terror. Allen gives an account of the young men who with their fathers and mothers were burnt to death in the blaze.

The dilemma of how the fire spirit could safely approach humans was solved by the painting of the fire symbol on the spirit’s body. The form of the elongated diamond shape was used, presumably because it represented the tongues of the flames. Using this symbol, the fire spirit was able to approach people and show them how to use fire.

In traditional Aboriginal society fire was used for a variety of purposes. There were special ways of cooking kangaroo, emu or fish and these ways were carefully observed with almost ceremonial precision. Different tribes had their own special methods which, they say, were taught to them by their ancestors, such as this spirit. Hunting was sometimes made easier by the burning of a semi-circle of the bush which forced animals to flee in the direction of the waiting huntsmen. The fires used in hunting, intentionally or unintentionally burnt off the coarse dry grass and, after a rain, brought up the fresh green shoots which attracted the animals to graze. Fires were also used for warmth at night and as there were no blankets before white men came, Aborigines gained warmth by sleeping between two small fires.

During the day, when the cold winds blew in Central Australia, the people carried firesticks to warm their naked bodies. These firesticks were used to light small clumps of spinifex and the smoke from these fires indicated to other members of the group just where their companions were travelling. In other places more sophisticated smoke signals were used to convey messages to neighbouring groups. Fire was used in the preparation of weapons in a variety of ways: straightening green shafts by heating them and bending them while still hot, hardening mulga digging sticks by scorching the sharp end, or preparing spinifex gum by melting the flakes of gum to act as a plastic glue, such as for joining a quartz flake onto a spear thrower for a cutting edge. One unusual use of fire was demonstrated at Milingimbi on one occasion when I was there. A small shelter was built on stilts and a smoky fire was lit underneath so that the men could sit up in the house free of mosquitos while the women kept the smoky fire burning underneath.

To such people, who used fire so extensively in their everyday lives, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as tongues of fire would be especially significant. Like the fire spirit, Kurta, coming to bring fire to the earth, the gift of the Holy Spirit would bring a great change to their lives and social situations.

This book is written to recount, often in the words of the Aboriginal people who experienced this change, what a difference ‘tongues of fire’ are making in their lives and communities. To collect this information I visited
Aborigines in their own homes, talked with them and asked them to recount for me onto tape just what happened in their own lives and amongst their own people. From the time when the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship started its annual conventions at Port Augusta in 1970, I have heard stories of people whose lives have been changed.

I spoke to two men outside the Port Augusta Town Hall after one of the first convention meetings and they told me how they used to go out each weekend to the sandhills away from the town and get themselves drunk. One day they went out and began discussing their lives, concluding that there must be something better to do than just get drunk, so they left their flagon and came into town where they heard about the AEF meetings. They were surprised to hear that there was an Aboriginal speaker that evening so they went along. Eventually they gave up their drinking and found a new purpose in life—to live for God and for His son, Jesus Christ. A new fire and enthusiasm was evident as they spoke to me.

I have deliberately concentrated on recounting the positive effects of the power of God in the lives and communities of Aboriginal Christians. So much has been written about the negative side of the effects of the European colonisation of Australia and the subsequent damage to Aboriginal life and culture that we see in the media almost nothing but gloom. Some writers and speakers deliberately choose the worst situations to highlight the ill effects and no doubt try to shock others into a feeling of guilt and action. I remember a speaker at a conference on Aboriginal education who outlined the dreadful situation of urban Aborigines to highlight the need for his organisation and its services. An Aboriginal woman stood up and said, ‘Mister—, you are rubbing us Aboriginal people.’ There is no need to outline what Aborigines are doing for themselves under the new policy of self-management; nor to ‘rubbish’ them, but to allow them to present an account of what positive things are happening among them and what they see as hopeful for the future, not only for themselves but also for the whole of the country of Australia.

I have chosen, where possible, to encourage Aborigines to give their own account of what happened, though their opinions and explanations are not always the same as mine. Some have been influenced by the renewal movement, some by evangelicals, some by fundamentalists or other theological groups. Some value their ancient culture whereas others reject their past way of life as sinful and satanic. Whatever the emphasis, the purpose of this book is to record the way God has worked in their lives, without drawing too many distinctions.

Most of the Aboriginal people I spoke to were men, but this does not mean that Aboriginal women are weaker in their Christian faith. It was
easier for me to talk to those of my own sex, even though I know that Christian women generally outnumber Christian men.
About December 1994 I received a letter from the Executive Director of New Creation Publications, Geoffrey Bingham, asking me if I would revise *A Story of Fire*, as the first edition had been sold out. He realised that I wasn’t able to travel around Australia to do the research necessary to bring the book up to date, but suggested I could contact Bryce Clark who would be free to help me. I rang Bryce and found that he had experience with Aboriginal people in the Riverland, and I offered to pay for his travel expenses to Port Augusta AEF convention and then later to Katherine Convention, Darwin and Elcho Island, Groote Eyelandt, Cairns, Sydney, Melbourne and back to Adelaide. We bought a pocket-size tape recorder and borrowed a video camera and collected tapes and films needed to make an accurate record of his contacts. There were several gaps in the record which Bryce filled in by recorded phone calls to places in Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and country towns of South Australia, and Adelaide.

We met weekly to consult about the revision, putting the new edition on Bryce’s computer, making the necessary changes to the original text where the situation had developed.

We have called the new edition *A Story of Fire, Continued* because we believe that God has continued His work using the foundation that was set by missionaries and then by Aboriginal evangelists and teachers.

There is a concentration on Christian conventions such as those held at Katherine and Alice Springs, because it was there that Aboriginal Christians were able to be contacted and interviewed. It seems that Aboriginal Christians are more influenced by conventions than by the regular weekly services.

It has been an exciting and uplifting experience to record what God is graciously doing in bringing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians together into one family, and humbling to realise that Aborigines have spiritual insights that we non-Aborigines lack.

When I went out to Uganda in 1938 there were African Christians who challenged us missionaries about joining the revival that had begun
sweeping across the country. Most of those missionaries who refused to join, gave us their reason; the negative side of the revival, the detailed confession of sin. But for the Africans it was a very positive experience to be free from their immorality and to have a daily experience of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The genuine nature of that revival is seen in its spread right across East Africa, Kenya, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Zaire.

Most of the time there was no visible sign of this spread except for small group meetings outside the church after the service and the continuous singing of the revival hymns. But there were larger gatherings in which hundreds and thousands of people came together in conventions in which the Word of God was expounded and explained, people were converted, openly confessing their sin and finding cleansing in the Cross of Christ.

In Australia today the big ‘explosion’ of the work of the Holy Spirit happened in Arnhem Land in 1979 and in Western Australia in 1986. The missionaries moved out from Warburton and God used a team of Aborigines to preach to their own people. He gave them the message of the Gospel and the power to change their lives. Although it has settled down to a less spectacular work in many other places, it is *A Story of Fire, Continued*. The Holy Spirit is working in the hearts and lives of individual Aboriginal people giving them confidence and courage to become missionaries and leaders to their own people.

God’s work continues. This is a story of God’s Holy Spirit working amongst people in different communities. The fires will continue to be lit and to burst into flame in new places as the firestick is carried. Even as it is being written there are new developments. Over the past fifteen years some quite unexpected ‘fires’ have started and no doubt the next decade will see many further surprises.
CHAPTER ONE

The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and the Port Augusta Convention

THE FIRE IS BORN

The kindling of the fire started slowly with the formation of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF). Christian Aborigines began to come together in both Western and Eastern Australia in 1967 to form the AEF, which is now the largest Aboriginal movement in Australia. When I asked who would be the best person to tell me the history of the AEF, I was referred to Pastor Jack Braeside, Pastor Bob Brown and Rev. Graham Paulson. The late Pastor Ben Mason gave a brief account at a Missions Conference in 1984, which I have used to supplement what Jack told me.

AEF was formed as a result of Christian missions, and the leaders mentioned above gave thanks to God for the work of missions in bringing the Christian message, in establishing homes, schools, hospitals and farms for Aborigines. Black radicals claim that missions have destroyed everything of their culture, but as Ben pointed out, Aborigines in missions a few years ago were increasing in numbers, but in the 1970s, since Aboriginal community councils took over, there has been a decline in the Aboriginal population. Of course, there are many factors involved in such statistics, but it is clear that missions protected Aborigines from being obliterated completely.

Pastor Jack Braeside had done Christian work in Western Australia, then in Adelaide, and later returned to Western Australia. At present (1995)
he is working in Mildura. The late Pastor Ben Mason came from the Mt Margaret Mission in Western Australia and was based in Alice Springs, but had travelled around Australia from Perth to Brisbane conducting evangelistic missions, or just encouraging and strengthening Aboriginal Christians. He was called upon at times to preach in white churches and to promote the cause of Aboriginal Christianity among those to whom a black preacher was a novelty. He could speak both Pitjantjatjara and English, and played a gumleaf like a mouth organ. These men, with about a dozen other strong Christian leaders, had tended the fires over the past fifteen years.

There are several younger men who are taking up the firesticks and carrying them to other camps, but AEF would have burned out without the steadfast zeal of the older men who, under extremely tough conditions, had kept the AEF convention at Port Augusta going. There had been others who started well with the Aboriginal church, whose fire had gone out on the way. Here, then, is the story of how the AEF originally took fire. The 1984 Port Augusta Convention leaflet reads:

The AEF was born in fire. The verses that brought tears to the eyes of many pastors were from Exodus 3:1–15. Moses saw God’s glory in the burning bush and God told him he had seen the affliction of his people in bondage. ‘The cry of the children of Israel is come up to me, I have seen their oppression, I am come down to deliver them.’

Such, then, was the fire and fever in which the AEF was born.

THE HISTORY OF THE AEF

Pastor Jack Braeside—January 1982

‘I came to South Australia in 1967 because some friends, who were managing Tanderra Hostel in Adelaide, came back to Western Australia and told us of the spiritual need of Aboriginal people in South Australia, particularly in Adelaide. They needed someone to go around to witness among them, so a friend of mine, Jack Ridley, and I came over from Western Australia. We came to Umeewarra Mission, and then to Adelaide.

‘Later, I went up to Indulkana where I found there were some tribal boys whom their people had brought over from Warburton Ranges. They asked me to take them back to Fregon, because the people at Indulkana did not have any vehicles. I was asked by the tribal people to accompany the boys back to Warburton. Then I went on to Mt Margaret Mission, then on
to Kalgoorlie where I saw Pastor Denzil Humphries. We talked about forming an Aboriginal evangelical fellowship.

‘I went on to Perth and talked to Pastor Ben Mason. He told me that there was a need for an Aboriginal fellowship. I said, “We have already talked about that”. We then talked to a United Aborigines Mission (UAM) missionary, Keith Morgan, and between us we arranged for a conference at the Keswick Convention at Orange Grove, in 1967.

‘There we contacted a number of Aboriginal Christians and we formed the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship in Western Australia. There was Sonny Graham from the Churches of Christ; Rev. Cedric Jacobs from the Methodist (later Uniting) Church; Pastor Denzil Humphries from the People’s Church; the late Pastor Ben Mason from Nunga Church; and Colin Green, a teacher from the Education Department. Dr Graham Miller (Presbyterian) and Rev. Dr Geoffrey Bingham (Anglican) were our advisers who told us about fellowships being formed in other countries, such as the Maori Evangelical Fellowship.

‘We were concerned about the rise of black nationals in Australia and black power movements in America, but we didn’t want our people to be involved in the critical and destructive sides of these movements. We wanted our people to work together in an organisation that could arrange an annual convention, encourage evangelistic meetings and encourage each other in Christian ministry.

‘We couldn’t read the smoke signals from five thousand kilometres away in the eastern states, but they were also considering the same ideas over there. Later, we contacted the Aboriginal Christians in the eastern states because we heard that they had formed a similar fellowship in 1968, two weeks after us. We had learned about that through the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM) literature.

‘In August 1968 we had a conference at Singleton Bible College, and from there we formed a steering committee for the AEF and settled on the date of Easter 1969 to have a further conference at Brookton in Western Australia. The eastern states delegation consisted of Geoff Higgins, Lyal Browning, Pastor David Kirk, Rev. Bill Bird and Pastor Cecil Grant. There we settled on a national convention at Port Augusta in January 1970. We invited a number of Aboriginal Christians from different denominations and missions. That was the beginning of AEF in South Australia.

‘Port Augusta became the venue of the national convention from then on. The AEF work in South Australia was made possible by the Maori pastor, Pastor Keith Mildon, coming from New Zealand to start the work in Adelaide, and then I came over later to help in the city work while Keith was doing the outreach work at Murray Bridge.
‘We went around the other centres in South Australia, helping other missions and visiting the tribal people, and also the people at Copley, Nepabunna and Gerard, as well as on the West Coast. We formed an AEF committee, and they became responsible for the work in South Australia. That is how things started.

‘The first convention was at Stirling North, near Port Augusta. I was then the National Secretary and organised the first few conventions. We had two conventions at Stirling North. The first attracted about seventy delegates. This year we had over two thousand people at some meetings. We met in the hall there, but, when more people came, we shifted into the Port Augusta Town Hall.

‘The commencing year, 1970, was an interesting year. Looking back, and putting the AEF into a world perspective, we learned that the Canadian Indian Evangelical Fellowship commenced their organisation in 1970, and also in that year, there was a revival in the Solomon Islands. We also learned that the Maori Evangelical Fellowship commenced in New Zealand in 1959. Other fellowships all over the world were springing up, while we thought that we were the only ones.

‘In the first convention at Stirling, we tried to contact as many people as possible from different denominations, but only seventy responded to the invitations and came to Port Augusta. In the second year we had Maori people. We hadn’t known about their fellowship until after the first convention. Rev. Miller, the Principal of the Auckland Bible College, told us about it and we invited them.

‘The year they came, 1971, it was very hot but they worked hard to put on a Maori feast, a “hangi”, for us. About five hundred people came to it. That occasion was when they saw their first snake because apparently there are no snakes in New Zealand. The Maori people went wild and chased it until they got it, just to see their first snake in Australia.

‘The tribal people have a real contribution to make to the AEF. Three Pitjantjatjara men came to the second convention, and the numbers increased rapidly up to 1982. It was an education to the urban people just to meet tribal people. Sometimes these were the first tribal people they had met. There are few tribal people in Port Augusta and other areas they can talk to.

‘In a later convention, in 1982, they had been witnessing to the Yalata people who had come for the first time. Also they taught us about faith and simplicity in their approach to the Gospel. They were not tied up with a lot of material things, nor the necessity for logical reasoning in everything. They just accepted the simple accounts and stories, so their faith was more straightforward. They gave more Aboriginality to the meetings with their tribal ways, language and singing.’
In 1988 Jack said, ‘I would like to see more church planting right throughout the nation, and all the Aboriginal people, urban, rural and tribal, taking leadership roles in their churches. Also I would like to see the day when Aborigines form Aboriginal fellowships in the Aboriginal evangelical churches of Australia, along lines similar to what the Uniting churches are trying to do.

‘I would like to see the missions gradually contributing to that and phasing out their own work. They should be handing over to Aborigines to encourage their strength and unity and fellowship, as the political climate may change and we might be expecting persecution and hard times in the future. Aboriginal churches should come together and strengthen each other. In South Australia (1985) we had churches in Prospect, Ottoway, Salisbury, Murray Bridge, Meningie, Tailem Bend, Raukkan, Noarlunga, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln and Ceduna.

‘From the beginning we had help from the Umeewarra Mission in making their properties at Port Augusta and Stirling North available each year for the convention. We did not get any help from the government as we were a religious body. However, the army helped us by lending us tents, crockery and other equipment. People paid their own fares, and for their meals. Generally we don’t get much help from outside as we are a religious organisation. The value of the convention was that people came into a deeper experience of God and went back to their own places contributing to their churches and fellowships. Others were being inspired to start churches of their own and became an asset to their community churches. People were being educated as Christians in organising things in the convention, contributing choir items, preaching and attending council meetings. Doing this ourselves has been an educational exercise.

‘Of course people can’t become mature Christians on just excitement; they needed deep Bible teaching and grounding in the Word of God. I’ve seen people who go back into the bush by themselves, where they had no fellowship, and no excitement; they just fell away and lost their joy and their witness. There is need for a balanced experience.’

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONVENTION

Pastor Bob Brown—January 1982

‘The significance of the convention to Aboriginal people is that it became a symbol of hope and a place of unity. It became a place for Aboriginal expression of the Gospel among our people. Our traditional people turned
up in ever-increasing numbers. Their lifestyle has been disrupted to a very disturbing level over the years. The convention provided something that gave a quality of life back to their own society. Some kind of a model of a future Aboriginal society in the midst of an Australian society was being worked out there at the convention.

‘Our people from both the non-traditional society and the traditional society were coming together in an atmosphere that was really very good. I doubt if such an atmosphere was being provided anywhere else in Australia at that time.

‘One of the special things that happened is that people saw that Aboriginal leaders could do things successfully themselves, like financing and running the convention. The speakers, the organisers and the cooks were all drawn from the communities round about. That was a very strong and positive example. Whenever you get love operative among people—I’m not talking about the physical love we generally associate with that word, but the love of God—there is a fellowship and a bond that never goes away. This brings people back each year.’

Rev. Graham Paulson—January 1982

‘I would endorse all that Pastor Bob Brown said about the annual convention. In itself, it produced a place for the expression of political views and provided a forum for the discussion of various aspects of Aboriginal community life with the Gospel running through it all; there was a common call which came with quality of life, and this in itself was the sign of hope that our Aboriginal people were looking for.

‘Back home there was a disintegration of community life, where the old standards and values were breaking down and, because of the commercialism and the relativism of the Australian way of life, our people were looking for something concrete and absolute—a way out—and they found it in the Gospel.

‘I believe that there is every indication at the moment that, where the Gospel is growing amongst our people, there the Aboriginal people could end up becoming the primary mover to the greater Australian community. I don’t think that the convention was just a good time for people, it was a time when a lot of the people came and then returned to their communities with new ideas about how to improve their lifestyle, and the quality of life in their communities. They spent a lot of time talking about issues, not only the Gospel and the relevance of the Gospel among our people, but also about community standards and how to improve them. This didn’t take place from the platform, but where there was a cross-pollination of ideas of
people from different areas finding out what other people were doing. It was very helpful.’

THE AEF AND MISSIONS

Pastor Ben Mason—September 1982

‘In 1967 the Australian Government held a referendum to decide about giving equal rights to Aborigines so that they could be classed as Australian citizens and equal to all other Australians. The Government policy on Aborigines had changed from “protection” to “assimilation” to “self-determination” to “self-management”.

‘Missions should see that they change from protection, too, and give Aborigines the right to self-management, to direct their own affairs and their own policies. The Port Augusta Convention has shown that they are able to do this. It has shown the value of Christian leadership and the ability of many Aboriginal speakers, evangelists, choirs and organisers.

‘AEF is not a threat to Christian missions, but it does show the need to develop and train Aboriginal leaders and teachers, and especially to help those who can speak the word of God to their own people in their own language. The AEF is picking up the tabs in our cities where people have drifted in from missions. They don’t find their niche in city churches; they feel uncomfortable. There may not be actual racism, but there are race, hygienic and cultural differences. When a couple of Aborigines come into a city church, people look around and say, “Aborigines”, and the Aborigines never go back to that church again. The AEF churches are picking up the dropouts from those “white” churches. AEF will never be a black church because so many people have intermarried. They can take their white or black partners to an AEF church without feeling ashamed, as they may in some white churches. The Port Augusta Convention has promoted the policy of black and white being all one in Christ Jesus.’

REPORTS—PORT AUGUSTA CONVENTION 1982

It was a very hot afternoon when we arrived in Port Augusta and drove out to Umeewarra, the site of the convention. Most of the Aboriginal people had gone for a swim, to cool off in the water of the Gulf, but a few sat about, talking in the shade of the outdoor dining area. A group of men stopped their discussion to make us feel welcome and direct us to the
office. There seemed to be no camping space left on the oval, covered by marquees and tents of all shapes, sizes and colours, as well as cars, buses, caravans and canvas shelters set up on all the available space on the grass except for the central meeting area and the access roads to it.

The dormitories of the Umeewarra Mission were full; the staff rooms had been vacated to make extra rooms. There were people everywhere. Over a hundred tribal people from Yalata were camped amongst the bushes surrounding the oval, as we discovered later when we visited them to buy artefacts, such as carved boomerangs and wooden kangaroos.

We were shown a space where we could put up our tent, but warned of the troublesome three-corner jacks with prickly seeds that can quickly deflate an air mattress. As people returned from their swim we found that there were tribal groups from Indulkana, Ernabella, Fregon, Amata, Yalata and Yuendumu. Some of the Elcho Island people had been expected, but they had reached Pitjantjatjara country and had stopped there. Many of the tribal people had come by bus, a thousand kilometres, mostly over outback roads. The large bus displaying the sign ‘Pukatja’ had come from Ernabella, while the bus from the north-west of Western Australia was marked ‘Fitzroy Crossing’. They had travelled over five thousand kilometres to get to Port Augusta, taking a couple of weeks for the journey. Those from Mareeba in northern Queensland also had had a very long trip by road.

Having meals in the large, covered space used for a dining room, young people’s meeting area, country and western Gospel auditorium, and women’s meeting place, was an interesting experience. The number of diners could vary between nine hundred for breakfast and twelve hundred for lunch. Nobody could tell how many would be there for the next meal. The cooks prepared hot meals in the Umeewarra kitchen and nobody had to go without. How they estimated the right amount of food for each meal is difficult to know.

Among the many positive reports of how individuals and groups had been helped by the Gospel there were stories of cruel acts of blatant discrimination by whites. A boy starting at his local high school found it impossible to continue in his home town because of the attitude of his teacher. Life became a misery because of the sarcastic, racist remarks of this man. His people moved the boy to Coober Pedy, over six hundred kilometres away, to stay with relatives and attend school happily with a more understanding teacher.

Another Aboriginal group, travelling down from the north to the convention by rail, were crowded into older carriages even though they had booked well ahead. They were not offered concession fares although many
could not find a seat for the overnight journey. A white person travelling with them was offered better facilities in modern airconditioned carriages, but this offer was refused because it did not include the group. They did not make a public complaint of this discrimination, but it was obvious to them that they were not considered or consulted about the hot, uncomfortable carriage they were given.

The Queensland group from Mareeba included an older, but very strong looking man whose father had been employed as a tracker by the police to track down and capture the famous bushranger, Ned Kelly. Norman Mitchell, or Uncle Norm, as he is known in Mareeba, spoke one evening from the convention platform. He had been a drover in north Queensland, could still speak his own language, and had a chequered career. His broad shoulders and chest, even at the age of about ninety, spoke of his active, outdoor life. Often it had taken many police to subdue him. He said, ‘I told them: One at a time! But there would be half a dozen of them giving me a thumping up, saying that I had no right to cause them these troubles and no right even to speak to them.’

His account of his father’s history reflected the savage massacres of the north Queensland scene last century. ‘First he worked on a cattle station, and then he learned the dialects of our people right from Cairns up to Cooktown to try to protect our people from being slaughtered altogether, and wiped off the face of the earth.’ Later his father went down to New South Wales with a group of police trackers. He helped to track down a notorious bushranger. ‘While he was down there the police captured Ned Kelly in his homemade armour. He wore armour to protect his body and a headpiece for his head, so he was able to escape for a long time. Day after day and night after night they followed him, until at last they finally captured him.’

Although Norman had learned about Christianity from missionaries, he also remembered well what his father had taught him in his own language, and the verse from John chapter three that his father had carved on a tree.

‘My uncle told me that if I wanted to become a Christian, I had to pray about it and learn from His Word all I wanted to know, because His Word would educate me. I had lived a very hard life, down in the gutter most of the time, drinking, fighting and gambling and getting into trouble with the police. I was really convicted about my own way of life and wanted to change. I tried to move up into a better way but our people were treated very badly. I was sent to Palm Island for eighteen months, then I was sent to another government settlement, Woorabinda, for twelve months, but was kept there for five and a half years. Down there was really hard, almost impossible for me to cope with this strange, cold unfriendly place.'
‘Since 1944 or 1945 I have been a Christian. Since becoming a Christian I have gradually left my wild ways. In 1972 and 1973 I went to Singleton Bible College in NSW. After having two years of training I went back to my own people. I had learned from Europeans about Christianity, but father had told us in our own dialect about the Father who made the heaven and the earth and all things. He said, “Keep these truths in your heart and you will not forget them”.

‘One time after I had been sugarcane cutting at Woorabinda, I met a police officer who had sent me away from Mt Carbine years before. I came in to renew my permit each month, and I met him face to face. The last time I had seen him I had threatened to put his lights out. When I said my name he gave a start and seemed to panic, looking round for help. He thought I had come to get him. He said, “You are not the bloke I sent away from Mt Carbine?” I looked straight at him and said, “Well, I never, if it isn’t my friend the sergeant! You can thank the Lord that I have become a Christian.” He said, “I didn’t think this would be coming out of your mouth”. I told him, “You pray about it and ask the Lord to come into your life as well. You may dislike me because of my brown skin; but it wasn’t just you who sent me away, but God had planned it so that I could learn His Way and His Truth.”

The statistics from the 1982 convention are quite staggering. Three thousand people attended, travelling distances of up to five thousand kilometres from all states in the mainland of Australia. Some came from Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia; some from Doomagee, Normanton and Mareeba in north Queensland; others from the Northern Territory, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

Some accommodation was found in the Umeewarra Mission buildings, but most people camped on the oval in tents, marquees or caravans. Others stretched a tarpaulin between bushes just near the oval, or slept out in the open. Tribal people from Yalata and Pitjanţatjara country mixed with urban people from Port Augusta, Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne and Sydney. Many people provided their own meals, but up to twelve hundred had meals cooked in the mission kitchen. Not many cooks would volunteer for the job of cooking in Port Augusta’s near-century heat, especially when it was impossible to forecast whether the number of diners would be nine or nine hundred! Despite the long queues waiting for meals, nobody missed out or found there wasn’t any food left.

There were prayer meetings at 6.30 each morning, well attended despite the early hour. The morning meetings were held in Port Augusta ETSA Hall for adults, and at the mission for young people. Business meetings for AEF members were held in the afternoons on two days, and there was a
country gospel concert on another. The evening meetings, out on the oval, were a real celebration. Each evening was allocated to a different state or group to conduct the meeting and provide choirs, leaders and speakers. Most of the singing items were very well presented, with choirs often in special uniforms for the occasion. There were choirs of twenty or more people, quartets, duets and solos; some in Pitjantjatjara or other languages, and some in English. The accompaniment was usually one or more guitars.

Testimonies were given confidently and eagerly, telling what Jesus Christ meant to each one. The opportunity to join the singing and the presentation of the Gospel message had helped many Aborigines in their own communities to begin small fellowships and meetings all over Australia.

The main speaker each night was chosen from the state or group controlling the meeting. On occasions the speaker would speak first in English and then translate what he had said into Pitjantjatjara, then go on again in English for a while. The tribal people had one night in which the message was in their language. Enough English was interspersed for others present to understand what was being said.

Appreciation was expressed for the many years of patient work undertaken by missionaries. The AEF recognised that, without the help in both the past and present, the fire at Port Augusta could not have been kindled and spread to so many places in Australia. There was never any suggestion that the fire could not be shared.

**1987 REPORT**

The Port Augusta Convention has declined in numbers and effectiveness with the loss of some of its older leaders. Pastor David Kirk died on November 2, 1986. He had been a foundation member of AEF, and was one of the main organisers of the convention. He and his wife Dawn pioneered the AEF Bimbadeen Training College at Cootamundra, but came under tremendous pressure when he ran the college’s academic program almost single-handed. While he attended the 1986 convention, he was unable to take the very active leading role he had maintained in previous years. His last year was spent, not in quiet retirement, but as secretary of AEF in Australia. He was not a man who could retire quietly, but he had burnt himself out over his thirty-five years of ministry.

Pastor Ben Mason had been songleader, choirmaster and also general organiser of the convention. He spoke Pitjantjatjara and was always ready to help the tribal people. He travelled throughout Australia in his ministry as AEF evangelist, and also helped to set up the Aboriginal church in
Prospect, South Australia. It was in connection with this church that he suffered some bitter disagreement over many months. He publicly made peace with his opponent at the beginning of the 1986 convention meetings, but was attacked at the annual meeting of the Fellowship because of his charismatic beliefs, and resigned from the council. He took up a position in Alice Springs as Aboriginal pastor of the Uniting Church there.

The convention motto ‘All One in Christ Jesus’ was not apparent in that annual general meeting, and the disagreement considerably weakened the AEF. It mirrored the same kind of disagreement in the UAM, where a number of WA missionaries were told to leave as it was presumed they were charismatic. They have since formed a language group translating the Bible into Ngaanyatjarra.

This was the resolution passed at the 1986 Annual General Meeting of the AEF:

We recognise that there are truly born again believers within the Charismatic Movement with whom we should be free to have Fellowship on an individual basis.

Although we may not agree fully with all their Doctrines since some of them are not in keeping with the Scriptures.

To ignore these born again believers is to ignore part of the body of Christ.

Such believers may be given the privilege of being members of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia if they so choose to be.

But we should make it clear that they should not teach their divisive doctrine on the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship platform, or cause division among the ranks of the Fellowship.

Moved: Ossie Cruse
Seconded: Tom Coe
Carried 9/1/86

The previous spirit of love and unity present in the fifteen years of the convention was broken down by quarrelling over doctrinal differences. St Paul asked the Corinthians, ‘Is Christ divided?’ when they split into different warring factions. Despite the preaching on unity and love for each other at the convention, the forces of disunity prevailed, and bitterness, instead of love, has done its deadly work. However, as Pastor David Kirk has pointed out in his summary of the work of the Ernabella Convention, there are now many of these meetings being held throughout Australia. When the AEF commenced in 1970, there was only the one Aboriginal Christian convention at Port Augusta, with seventy people attending. Now conventions are being held in many other places. Pastor Ben Mason reported
that a number of Central Australian tribes are combining to hold a series of meetings in Alice Springs in January 1987.

The question has been repeatedly asked: ‘How will AEF survive when its older leaders have gone?’ At the 1986 annual meeting, younger men asked very bluntly for a place in the action and for trust and help from the older generation. They complained at the lack of support in the years immediately after they had left college, and wondered why there were no positions for young men to learn as they worked with the older leaders. There had been a number of casualties where young people were expected to make their own way to success and to prove themselves without recognition or support at the time when they were sadly inexperienced and vulnerable.

Now that some of the main leaders have gone from AEF, perhaps the older men will look after the younger trainees and organise more careful supervision of their work in the years immediately after graduation from college. What has been done in the past by AEF may continue in a different form. It has certainly given Aboriginal Christians confidence that they can work effectively in promoting the Kingdom of God amongst their own people. The absence of many of the older leaders from the convention in 1987 meant that the younger men and women were able to take more responsibility.

**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

**Pastor Ossie Cruse—President of AEF 1994–95, Reappointed for 1995–97**

‘I was very privileged to be one of the foundation members of AEF.’

Pastor Cruse points out three important developments of the Fellowship: ‘The AEF is firmly based constitutionally. The original concept of AEF was that it would develop into a denomination, an organised church. Its ministers were registered so they could conduct marriages and funerals. It would preach the Gospel to all Australians. It would embrace the needs of Aborigines all over Australia. Our members included Baptist, Uniting Church, Churches of Christ, evangelical members of other denominations. But as members of other denominations how can we become members of an Aboriginal denomination? It was clear that the AEF must remain as a fellowship. We recognised that we needed to enhance its secular ministries. By 1994 we had developed the constitution of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship as a church. To enhance the secular development of the AEF,
such as prison ministries and education, we developed another arm which we called “The Family and Youth Services”. Both these developments have enabled us to acquire government assistance without limiting the evangelical thrust. This is a fulfilment of the original vision.

‘Secondly, there is a development of deeper theological studies. We have always maintained a very strong Bible-based ministry and our constitution spells that out very clearly. We haven’t been drawn into secularism or materialism, but instead it has grown up into what it was intended to be. There are many young leaders coming up who have done deeper studies. In my day there were very few Aborigines who went on to theological studies, but now there are people coming through to theological colleges; even our own Bimbadeen College offers courses for theological studies.

‘We are working in close ties with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and with Rev. Wali Fejo the recently appointed Aboriginal principal of Nungalinya College.

‘The revival from Elcho Island that came down from central Australia has good and negative aspects; Elcho Island was a difficult place to live in because there was so much alcoholism. But then some eight hundred people came to the Lord through the revival, it moved down through the centre and across Western Australia. Sad to say there wasn’t a positive church follow-up and a lot of people who came to the Lord fell back. When I went to Elcho there were only about two hundred people still attending the fellowship. There could have been positive church development. This should have happened right across the country, but it didn’t. That was the negative side. But that happened almost everywhere. A lot of people are still very much alive and active.

‘Thirdly, the conventions have increased in number. We don’t look for the large numbers that we had at the earlier national conventions because they have developed into state and regional conventions, such as Alice Springs, Condobolin, Northern New South Wales and up in Queensland. Nowadays these conventions are not fading away, they are being spread out.’

In January 1996 at the AEF Annual General Meeting, members voted to have the Port Augusta Convention bi-annually with the next one being in 1998.

‘The gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal churches is increasing. Many of the white churches have lost their message and the number of their adherents has decreased. The mistake was made in thinking that the pastor or missionary did everything. The church is the Body of Christ and it is imperative that all the members should become active whatever their race or culture.’
CHAPTER TWO

Ernabella Easter
Convention—April 1982

CAMP FIRES—GLOWING DOTS IN THE DISTANCE

As we approached the camp for the Sunday evening service I could see many small fires of the families sitting outside their wiltjas (shelters). It was a cold, clear winter’s night with the stars shining brilliantly like a kaleidoscopic reflection of the little fires. The people were singing as we arrived, and then stopped for a few minutes of collective movement towards a cleared area. I was amazed at the beauty of the singing as they started again. They sang in Pitjantjatjara, unaccompanied and without any hymn books, in four-part harmony that sounded like any well-trained choir. The recording I made on the spot has been enjoyed in many places since, but I have never since experienced the thrill of amazement at hearing such wonderful singing in such a situation, where everyone seemed to be a trained and enthusiastic participant. It was my first visit to Ernabella, in a very dry and dusty year, so I was to receive another surprise later when rains came and the dry earth was covered with wild flowers. But that singing transformed the whole camp from an unknown place to one rich with memories of angelic song, more beautiful than the flowers.

Ernabella is a beautiful place. There is a creek flowing between the big river red gums that provides swimming pools for the children. I remember on another occasion travelling north to Ernabella, about fifteen hundred kilometres from Adelaide, by day, with a number of Pitjantjatjara people. We drove up a very rough road across the top of a steep rise and, as the Musgrave Ranges suddenly came into sight, one of them exclaimed, ‘What a beautiful country!’
The Musgraves are granite hills dotted with clumps of spinifex grass and, depending on the time of day, appear purple, blue, green, brown or red. After good rains, the valleys and plains are covered with many varieties of wild flowers, but in poor seasons dust and flies seem to fill the air.

THE CONVENTION

To plan a convention in such a remote place could seem crazy, yet Ernabella is the big centre for Pitjantjatjarapeople. Groups came here from places as far away as the WarburtonRanges, Meekatharra and Wingelina in Western Australia, and there were representatives from Port Augusta and Adelaide, and also from New South Wales.

I had not seen so many cars, utilities, trucks, Land Rovers, motorbikes and buses in Ernabellabefore. It almost needed a policeman on point duty to control the traffic. However, there were no collisions.

The church building was not designed for conventions of this size. The community hall was also far too small, so meetings were held out in the open, in perfect weather, with people sitting on the lawn or on the bare earth in front of the platform which looked like a large truck tray. Amplifiers blared out recorded music and announcements in the early morning to publicise the meeting times, and cars started to move along the sandy roads and across the creek.

When I heard, a fortnight earlier, that Ernabella had had a downpour of two hundred and forty millimetres of rain in a couple of days, I thought that the roads would be impassable, but the driver of a semitralier whom I met just near the turn-off assured me that I would be quite all right if I followed the tracks. Unfortunately he didn’t inform me that I ought to be careful about following those of the half-dozen cars that had recently been bogged at a sandy stretch just a few kilometres further on. I did follow their tracks and shared their experience, until, at the third time of sinking down to the axles, I was helped by a carload of Aboriginal men who had come through from Amata, so I didn’t have to walk the last forty kilometres, as one of the teachers did, or struggle for three hours to get out, as another group had done.

The meetings that I went to share were very informal. People sat down in family or community groups, with their children and their dogs. Where else would one see a small boy riding his bike unconcernedly through the congregation, or a dogfight right in the middle of an evangelistic address? Where else would one hear an announcement that the shop is now open,
then watch half the people leave, before the address, to purchase food for the weekend?

Accommodation was readily obtainable for visitors. They chose a place in a sandy area and lit a small campfire. They brought blankets and food, so there was no need for any elaborate booking arrangements or detailed planning for catering. With the weather beautifully mild, camping under the stars was no hardship.

The communities represented were Alice Springs, Finke and Mt Ebenezer (Northern Territory); Amata, Ernabella, Fregon, Indulkana, Mimili and Officer Creek Homeland (South Australia); and Blackstone, Jamieson, Warburton and Wingelina (Western Australia). Each had a choir, male quartet or women’s singing group, which had been obviously practising hard for this occasion. One group of boys all wore shiny blue jackets; a group of girls wore white sashes over their shoulders; the Ernabella girls wore specially designed T-shirts and skirts. There was no doubt about the popularity of the singing groups. Some had developed their own special rhythms and showed a natural feel for the balance of harmony in part singing. Others were just learning how to present their songs and hymns on stage.

Pitjantjatjara evangelists conducted the meetings and gave the messages. There were no non-Aboriginal missionaries or clergy on the platform because self-management in Christian meetings as well as in community affairs was well established. As the program proceeded, invited speakers began to be prominent in the meetings. There was a very definite sense of initiative and recognition of leadership within the church. Each community had its elders of the church and each fellowship of Christians retained autonomy to conduct its own meetings. Outsiders may have been invited to speak or read the Scriptures, but not to dominate the meetings. Rev. Peter Nyaningu explained to me that the leaders know the country, its water holes and mountains, they know the food that the people eat and they know what they need and what they are thinking. They didn’t want to be dominated by the AEF although they invited speakers from the fellowship to speak at conventions.

One speaker from AEF spoke very loudly in English, right into the microphone. His voice reverberated around the granite hills and the end of each sentence came back in an uncanny double echo. Once he started to speak no one moved. Some said they were afraid to get up and leave. This preaching, while emphasising the need for correct Bible study, reflected the approach of many earlier missionaries, particularly in a lack of understanding of tribal culture and in the use of English without an interpreter.

The messages were given with authority by speakers who seemed to have suddenly developed new confidence and boldness. Some men whom
I have known for years and worked with in teacher education had developed talents in public speaking that I had no idea they possessed. There was no doubt about the response to their preaching. On the first two days there was a great response from people needing help and counselling. The counsellors stayed near the platform and as people came out they prayed with them. Some wept, some collapsed onto the ground, others stood quietly while the counsellors placed their hands on their heads and prayed for them. The Christians were all invited to come forward and stand in a large half circle so that they could see who was coming out and help them fit into their own community fellowship. This was a new development, but as everyone in these communities is related in some way, they were very keen to see their fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, children and grandchildren come forward to be counselled.

The women who led the choir groups who came out to give an account of the change in their lives, spoke clearly and confidently in front of the large audience. One woman spoke of her experience when she was an alcoholic and neglected her family, another of wandering from one place to another to find happiness.

**DYNAMITE**

A man called Wally had a dream on the Thursday night which was discussed by several speakers at the convention. He dreamed that he saw the outdoor convention area—the platform, the lawn in front of it and the shady trees around. He then saw someone planting dynamite right in the middle of the meeting area. He warned people that it was going to explode and urged them to run away. Wally himself ran away from the explosion. His dream of people running away from the dynamite was so vivid that he asked others what it meant. Rev. John Blackett suggested that the Holy Spirit was a dynamic force that would cause people to run away from the meetings or else stay and experience that power in their lives. It was quite prophetic because many people stayed only for the singing and then left when the preaching started. Many others stayed and listened, and quite a number responded when asked to commit their lives to Jesus Christ.

After the evening meeting on Saturday, a special farewell was organised for Katrina Nyurkana, the daughter of Kim and Angkuna. She had been a teaching-assistant at Fregon for two years and a member of the youth choir for about six years. Attending the Port Augusta convention, she got to know Pastor David Kirk. Indeed we all did, for he used to go around the camping area each morning at 6.00 a.m. with a loud hailer, waking people up,
reminding them of the prayer meeting at 6.30 a.m. In a group with some of her friends, she heard David say, ‘God might be calling you to train at Bimbadeen’. He seemed to point his finger right in her direction, and she wondered if God was really meaning her. After some time, she wrote a letter to David and was accepted by the College. Her mother, Angkuna, spoke on the last evening from the platform and asked everyone to pray for success for her daughter. The elders from most of the communities met to pray for her, gave her presents and sent her away to Bimbadeen Christian Training College in New South Wales as the first tribal representative from their area. Before those presentations were made, David told us that he believed the Christians from this area would carry the message of the Gospel to all Australia.

Then a most unexpected and beautiful ceremony took place in which the few Europeans present knelt in the church in a small circle as representative of the fifteen million white Australians, and the Aboriginal elders prayed for a revival right throughout the whole country.

At the end of the Monday morning meeting, which started about 9.30 a.m. and lasted till 12.30 p.m., there was an unusual incident. An Ernabella man called up some Ernabella people by name and spoke about a man there who had lost his wife, a talented Christian woman, about twelve years previously. The debate developed about whether a photograph of that dead person could be put up in the church. Although the widower agreed to change this custom of never showing a photo of anyone who has died, there was some opposition and, because there was no agreement, the matter was shelved. It seemed to be enough to discuss the matter and, because there was no consensus, it was left.

The traditional custom was never to mention the name of the deceased, and even to change certain common words that sounded like that name. The word for water in Pitjantjatjara used to be *kapi*, but after the death of someone with a name like that, the word *mina* was used. Aboriginal visitors to my house in Adelaide have sometimes asked to see my photo albums and have sometimes asked me to remove a photo of someone who has died. Rev. Ron Williams recently published a book to mark the tenth anniversary of the Central Australian Christian Convention. This features many photos of Aboriginal people including ones of the late Pastor Ben Mason.

**THE SPREAD OF EASTER CONVENTIONS IN 1982**

The late Pastor David Kirk recorded the following after a Saturday morning meeting: ‘I am very glad to be able to report that right across the nation,
during this Easter of 1982, a number of conventions are running with the support of AEF personnel. Firstly, starting from the West, there is one in operation in Perth. Pastor Cecil Grant is the speaker. He went across from Albury and he is there associated with Pastor Humphries and other leaders of the city, and we have been praying very much for these meetings.

‘Then, I’m led to believe that in South Australia we have three official conventions that are running. Special meetings are being held at Port Lincoln. Eddie Champion from Melbourne was able to go across there, and others with him. We’ve been praying much about that. Then another one is being conducted at Yalata. Mark McKenzie from Port Lincoln is reported to be there, and then where we are during this weekend, here at Ernabella. It is a tremendous thrill to be here. From the platform this morning it was reported that there are some fourteen communities present at this convention, and we had a fantastic time here this Saturday morning.

‘Going across into New South Wales, we have special meetings at two places in particular. One is Dubbo, in the western area of New South Wales. All the students from Bimbadeen Christian Training College are supporting the meetings there. Then at Fingal Heads, that is right up on the Tweed River, near the border of Queensland and New South Wales, there is also a convention. Rev. Bill Bird, Pastor Lyal Browning and others are involved in those Fingal meetings. Coming back to Dubbo, Rev. Wali Fejo and others are leading that convention. Down in Victoria, special meetings are being held at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve in the Gippsland district. Pastor Ossie Cruse from Eden is going down to support those meetings.

‘In Queensland for the first time, we are conducting, in the name of AEF, a convention in a little place called Childers, just outside Maryborough. A number of our people from the centre of Queensland are meeting together. Pastor Tom Coe is going up there to be the principal speaker on this occasion. They are the ones that I know about.’

He went on to say: ‘There are some differences between the Ernabella Convention and the Port Augusta one. The urban people are more regulated by the clock, as white people are, but when one comes from the urban situation into the tribal area, we’ve just got to flow with the time concepts of our people in the centre here. They don’t keep rigidly to time. For instance, the meeting last night went for a little over three hours. But it was still a good meeting. Then again, this morning it was scheduled to start at 9.30 a.m. and it just concluded a few moments ago, about one o’clock. This is the marked difference between the tribal and the urban situation. Naturally, of course, because our urban people are in close contact with white Australia, there is a need to keep to the time limit, but up here the meetings flow along freely, and one just goes with whatever comes from the platform.'
I believe that the meetings should take a twofold emphasis, reaching both to the unsaved and to the believers, and that’s why at the Port Augusta National Convention of the AEF we are very zealous that the believers be built up in their faith, and why each morning we have a devotional service. The whole meeting there is geared for the development of the Aboriginal Christians, whereas the night services, similar to what we have here in the tribal conventions, are basically evangelistic in character.

‘I think that the revival has taken hold here. That steady flow of the movement of God’s Holy Spirit across the nation among the Australian Aborigines is very evident here in these meetings. One cannot deny that, in the directness of the service this morning, so many people were spoken to in so many different ways. That would be readily seen in the response. There were young people who came forward; there were middle-aged people; there were both sexes; there were responses from all quarters; and then, finally, at the very last moment, it was very noticeable that some of the senior Aboriginal men were making a move forward. This proves that the whole spectrum of Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal society is being touched with revival blessing, and it is very encouraging to witness such a movement with one’s own eyes.’

**Tjinkuma Wells**

Tjinkuma works full-time for the Education Department at Ernabella.

‘We’ve got a church at Ernabella. They still have a singalong and fellowship meeting at Amata and Ernabella. At Fregon and Ernabella, we sometimes read from the Bible, sometimes share our experiences, or the Lord gives a song in a dream and it is shared.

‘About forty of us came from Ernabella to Adelaide, to the National Christian Youth Convention. On the last night of the Convention, when we were leaving to go back, I was crying in the prayer room, I was standing there and feeling very sad. God was talking to me.

‘The NCYC was very good, and so were all the friends from other places. When I went back to Ernabella, I was happy. School started when we got back; every morning I was thinking about it and so we got the key to Cane Hall from the Principal of the school, and I and some of the other ladies took the children and sang songs and read a story from the Bible.

‘Then some of the people became jealous of us. We had no leader or pastor, but the Lord wanted us to work for him. Some of the people didn’t want us to be in front. Before NCYC, I went to the meetings but sat in the back in the dark, and only my children went in. When I went back to
Ernabella and told the story of NCYC, now I will keep going. Before we went back to Ernabella, we were talking together. God wanted us to work together with other people.

‘Paul Eckert from Alice Springs comes down to Ernabella to teach from the Bible in Pitjantjatjara once or twice every year.

‘When people get sick there are some Aboriginal Christians who go and pray for them. Sometimes we get older Christians to come and read the Bible to the children in Cane Hall and teach them.’

THE GIFT OF SINGING

Trevor Adamson

‘God gave me the gift of singing’, Trevor told me. He had just had a cassette tape recorded with his group of 10–15-year-old school pupils. He hoped to sell two hundred copies, but, strangely, did not advertise these during the convention. As a small boy he had been fascinated by the guitar. Louis Ken from Fregon took an interest in him and showed him how to play. Although he had never learned to read music, he plays very confidently and came second in the Country Gospel Competition at Ernabella in 1981. He was one of the Ernabella choir who went on a singing tour to Fiji in 1979.

January 1975 was his first experience of the Port Augusta Convention where he sang at the meetings in the town hall. He knew that many people came to the conventions just for the singing, as he originally did. At the 1980 Port Augusta Convention, he came into a new experience of Christ. The following year he was taking part in the organisation of the Country Gospel singing and at the 1982 convention, he organised the amplification of speakers and singers. The Aboriginal Development Commission loaned him about two thousand dollars to purchase equipment, and he is keen to use it and look after it carefully. However, he makes no charge for its use at Christian meetings.

It would have been impossible to organise the outdoor meetings of the convention without someone to take care of the amplification. Some large singing groups stand in front of the platform and find that putting the microphone in front of the speaker boxes causes feedback squeals. Others have to be instructed about using the microphone for speaking about their Christian experience. Occasionally a connection gets broken, and Trevor is there to do the repairs. Because his time was taken up in this way, he was unable to do much singing in this convention, but helped with his guitar playing.
Trevor told me that singing at conventions is very important, because people can express their joy and happiness in songs and are attracted to the good news.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE ERNABELLA CONVENTION**

There were three main streams of influence in the development of the Ernabella Convention. The first can be seen in the development of the Presbyterian Mission, instigated by Dr Duguid in ways described in his book, *Doctor and the Aborigines* (1972).\(^1\) Another account of the development of the mission can be found in Win Hilliard’s book, *The People in Between* (1968).\(^2\) The training and development of the Pitjantjatjara church leaders has been described by Rev. Bill Edwards in his paper, *The Pitjantjatjara Church* (1979).\(^3\)

A definite policy to respect the culture and language of the people encouraged Aborigines to develop leadership skills in a settled community. By the time the Rev. Bill Edwards left in December 1979, there were church elders in each of the five settlements. When I visited some of these places in May 1980, we attended fellowship group meetings at Indulkana, Mimili and Ernabella.

The Ernabella choir was trained by Bill. I remember hearing them practising at his Ernabella house in May 1965, and recorded some of their four-part singing. Since then they have made trips to Adelaide, Melbourne and Fiji. They have made several recordings on discs and tapes. Brian Munti took over the conducting of the choir when Bill left. While this adult choir sang hymns and songs in Pitjantjatjara, Yanyi Baker trained a girls’ choir to sing in both English and Pitjantjatjara. This was a smaller choir, but very popular at the Port Augusta conventions and local meetings in the 1980s.

The second important influence was the AEF Convention at Port Augusta. Although only a few Pitjantjatjara men attended the first meetings, the number gradually increased until there were over two hundred tribal people present at the last convention (1982). The need for a convention in Pitjantjatjara country was seen by Kenyan McKenzie after he went to Port Augusta in 1974. With the help of other church leaders and Bill Edwards, plans were made for a Pitjantjatjara convention in 1975. Danny Colson and Pastor Jack Braeside were invited as speakers. Since then it has become an

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annual event held each Easter, usually at Ernabella, although Amata (1978), Fregon (1980) and Pipilyatjara (1981) have each hosted the meetings. Other mini conventions have been held at various places, including Kenmore (1981 and 1982) for those unable to go to Port Augusta, and at Mimili. In 1979 a small convention was planned for Indulkana over the October long weekend, and Mimili was chosen to host the same meeting the following year. Indulkana hosted a convention in 1995.

The third main influence was the visits of people from Elcho Island in eastern Arnhem Land who came to Amata for a couple of months in 1981. Peter Nyaningu had been in training for the ministry at Nungalinya College in Darwin. He became friends with some of the Elcho Island Christians there and invited them down to his country. A couple of families went and stayed for two or three months, playing guitars, singing and preaching.

**AMATA RENEWAL 1981**

The Renewal Movement took hold in Amata in quite a spectacular way. During the September holidays 1981, things started to happen. The church had seemed very insular. They weren’t reaching out to others. The usual Sunday morning service was being held in a relatively new church building. During this Sunday service, a group of the keen Christians suddenly decided to get their guitars and walk the streets. They went to a group of people who were gambling, and just stood around in a circle, singing hymns. Then they prayed as each one felt led, and some read from the Scriptures. A real movement of the Spirit was obvious. The gambling group just ended up in tears and then they followed the others back to the church, singing and worshipping. The group repented of their sins and gave themselves to the Lord. Many of them had been Christians previously, but had drifted away.

That was the beginning of outreach in Amata. After work, the group used to walk along singing, and usually visited someone’s place. One day they visited an old couple. The husband was blind and had to be led around by his wife. He regained his sight. They were sitting in their shelter and the old man came out and made a real commitment to the Lord. The couple were already Christians in a formal way, but since he made that commitment he has walked about with the group and encouraged others, giving an account of his experience of blindness. He testifies that God gave him back his sight.

After the Port Augusta Convention in 1982, two of the Amata men went over to Blackstone in Western Australia. There had been a revival there,
and those from Amata were particularly blessed and began to study the Scriptures for themselves. Unfortunately, drinking and petrol sniffing had increased in these isolated and changing situations as unemployment and frustration increased.

The danger with these three sets of influences was the potential for disunity. Some may say they are elders of the church, others may say they have been brought to Christ by the Port Augusta AEF conventions, while others may claim to have the Holy Spirit in their lives through the visit of the Elcho Island people. The annual convention at Ernabella lasts for four days in the year. During the rest of the time, almost every weekend, there is a fellowship meeting somewhere, or even a small convention.

Apart from these meetings, a few of the Christian men had been meeting after work. They caught a few rabbits, cooked them in the coals of a fire and studied the Scriptures together.

The effect of this convention was shown in the development of individuals who gained new confidence in leadership and public speaking, or in singing in public. There was a shared leadership in these tribal areas and each individual was able to develop his capabilities and talents. The community had certainly developed greater initiatives and this was possible because of the absence of drunkenness, which caused so much distress and breakdown of law and order in many communities.

There was an outreach to other communities, as evidenced by the growth of the Easter convention at Yalata and the other places listed by Pastor David Kirk. This kind of convention was possible because it did not involve large outlays of money. People came together at their own expense, they brought their own food, camped in the open and gave an offering for people like Katrina Nyurkana to go away for further training.

At most Aboriginal conventions there has been a strong emphasis on singing at the meetings. In the past this has been a feature of traditional tribal life. At the deepest level of ceremonies, the stories of the journeys of the spiritual ancestors travelling across the land and creating special physical features of the country on their journeys were told in song cycles. The songs of this mythology were practised and learned by heart, together with the accompanying dances and regalia. Children began learning corroboree songs from babyhood and grew up enjoying the entertainment of the lighter songs of gossip and mimicry.

At Ernabella Conventions there are no special programs for children. They sit down with their parents and sing the songs or choruses or listen to the choir items. This is almost a concert in itself, as this part of proceedings, interspersed with testimonies, can continue for a couple of hours. When the evangelists start to speak, some families get up and leave,
but many children and young people stay on as there is little that isn’t in their language, and the message is usually directed at the young as well as at the adults.

At some of the morning sessions, children wander off to have a dip in the creek or play with balls or clamber over the rocks and through the bush. Those who don’t go to the main meeting are able to amuse themselves happily with others of their peer group.

However, in some tribal areas where children are inclined to sniff petrol, this could be a dangerous time. Parents could be attending Christian meetings, unaware that their children are learning to sniff petrol. It would seem necessary for the Ernabella Convention planners to take note of the children’s programs at Port Augusta and to develop special stories and activities for the young people when the Bible teaching programs are introduced for the adults. This also has its dangers and problems, because there is little of the Old Testament translated into Pitjantjatjara and few tribal people understand English well enough to translate passages without help. While there are many who have the gift of evangelism, there are very few who have the gift of Scripture teaching and pastoring. No doubt, in the course of time, there will be enough Pitjantjatjara leaders and teachers to meet these needs, not only in conventions, but also in each community, for daily help for those who need it.

There is a need to emphasise what Pastor David Kirk said, that teaching sessions are important, but it is equally vital that this teaching is in the language and thought patterns of the people. It is not enough to have a great explosion of dynamic power at a convention. The fires must be kept burning in each community.
By far the most dramatic and spectacular of the Aboriginal Christian movements has been the Charismatic Renewal Movement, starting from Galiwin’ku on Elcho Island, spreading through Arnhem Land, and later through the Warburton Ranges and other parts of Western Australia.

This began soon after the Commonwealth Government’s policy of self-management was implemented by the missions, especially when the Uniting Church handed over the work of preaching and teaching the Christian message to a trained Aboriginal pastor in 1976. There was a new confidence developing as the Christians saw their own leaders take responsibility, and develop and use gifts of preaching, teaching, healing, song writing and singing. This confidence was built up as Christian groups travelled to other communities, and saw the message received with joy and enthusiasm by their own tribal groups and by others who spoke different languages, and even by those who had traditionally been hostile.

As Kevin Rurrumbu explained, the spread of the ‘skin group’ system from Central Australian people to the Arnhem Landers in the present century helped visitors like himself to be accepted in communities where he would otherwise have had no affiliation.

Briefly, this meant that Kevin and other members of his evangelistic team were accepted by their own skin group as brothers and sisters. On that basis, they could know their relationship to every member of a community. Once that relationship was known the correct behaviour patterns were understood and the embarrassing shyness and awkwardness disappeared.
When Kevin and his group went to the Warburton Ranges, he began his ministry on the basis of his skin group relationships, but as the people there became Christians and found an identity as sons and daughters of God, a new relationship was built up in which they became members of one family.

This explains the popularity of the chorus, ‘He is my brother, she is my sister . . .’, for even those who were previously enemies became one in the big family in Christ.

THE CHOIR

George Dayngumbu

When I arrived at Katherine Airport in May 1982, I met George Dayngumbu and his choir from Galiwin’ku. They had come to sing at the Katherine Convention. I told him that I hoped to visit Galiwin’ku and he invited me to write a letter to him as Chairman of the Council giving the reason for my visit and the dates. When I did make the visit later that month, George was able to tell me more about his education and his interest in singing. I was also able to talk with his half-brother, Kevin Rrurrambu (since deceased), who was Assistant School Principal, and with his cousin, Rev. Dr Djininyini Gondarra, the Uniting Church minister.

George started school in 1949, two years after the mission was established. He used the correspondence school course, where the lessons arrived by mail, which, at that time, wasn’t very frequently. George didn’t have any secondary education, but he was then Chairman of the Council and had a large family. He began to understand the Christian message when the missionaries taught him, and later saw its application to his new life when his cousin Rev. Dr Djininyini Gondarra became a minister, and explained the Bible in an Aboriginal way. That, he said, was when many of them came to understand and follow Jesus Christ.

The choir that went to Katherine in 1982 was composed of people from three different clans. They spoke the same ‘Yolngu language’, but had different dialects. Their songs had a very distinct quality which I attributed to Thursday Island influence, but George assured me there was no connection with Thursday Island songs.

He said: ‘When we pray for new songs, God gives us a tune and we fill in the words; sometimes He gives it to me, sometimes to my son, sometimes to my daughter, or to anyone in the group. We were given a new tune at the Katherine Convention, but we haven’t got words for it yet. The church elders choose which ones they will send as singers on evangelistic
trips. The singing group is chosen not just because of their voices, but because everyone should share in spreading the message. The ministry of singing and preaching should convey the same message.’

The choir had been to Lake Evella, Ramingining, Milingimbi, as well as to Katherine, and went to sing in Darwin at Christmas, but without an Aboriginal preacher.

**Thirteen Years Later—George Is Still Active**

‘After that the Lord spoke to the preachers and leaders to go out to other places. For instance, in 1994 I brought a group of about forty down here to minister to whites. We are now experiencing the Aboriginal people coming to Birdwood to preach to the white people. Now we are doing it. The Lord called us to come here preaching in several churches around here.

‘Revival started at Elcho in March 1979, with prayer every night. Aboriginal people in the past were not serious about God. Then my cousin Kevin got people together to pray. They could feel the power touching their lives, and then everybody started to come in; white people and Aboriginal people felt the power. Now the Aboriginal people are ministering to churches at Birdwood, teaching people about the Bible.

‘Nungalinya College teaches our ministers to worship God in our own ways. If Christ is our leader, and we follow someone else, the power of the Spirit dries up.

‘I have to be a strong man as leader, and strong as a Christian. We need teachers to teach us the Bible in our own language.

‘When the first missionaries came, they taught the message from the Old and the New Testaments. But when revival came people heard for themselves. The Aboriginal people have been told to think about the traditional ways. The Holy Spirit is breaking through. I have to go by what the Spirit tells me. People say, “You sit in white man’s chair and see things from the white man’s chair, but we need to sit in the Aboriginal’s chair”.

‘There are not many people who know our language, and who have been through the Bible college, who have a very strong culture. God knew that He would bless these people, that they would turn away from the evil things. God has the power, He has the light. The Lord is the light and He can help us to look into the land and the Dreamtimes. The Lord gave us the rocks and the trees but we have to believe in the Lord through our traditional things. In the past the missionary came to us and said you have to put away things that hurt God. You have to obey and follow the true way. This is a big change for the people today. If I follow two ways I’m not sure where I’m going or what is the goal for my life. We must receive the power from God and make our own decisions.'
The Holy Spirit has been spread around and burning all around in Arnhem Land, all around in Northern Territory right down to the Centre, right down to the Kimberleys area, right down to Queensland, and now something comes and presses down this fire.

Kevin, my younger brother, or really my cousin, is the one who was ministered to by the Spirit, and he had a group of people going out and praying on the beach and in the homes. Three or four or five people came together and prayed every night for the strength and the power, and for the blessing. During these times, the Aboriginal people were taught to know more about the Lord, but they didn’t go very close to him and were not very experienced about him until Kevin, who was a teacher at the school and had understanding to read the Bible, got the Aboriginal people together and prayed.

During the time when Djininyini came to live on Elcho Island as the minister, Kevin was an evangelist. They went out throughout the district of Arnhem Land, Yirrkala, Milingimbi and Lake Evella. We used to send him to other places, but not in the power of the Lord. But later on the children and women and the men could feel the power of the Lord. It was very exciting that the Spirit had really touched them, and some of them started crying. They felt different in a way they had never experienced before.

That’s how we personally experienced the Holy Spirit. We just waited upon God and everybody on Elcho Island felt the power of the Holy Spirit, there were only two or three left out. Then we started to get other groups to come in. Every community started to come in, the power of the Spirit was experienced by everyone, Aboriginal people, girls and boys, every one. But if you go to Elcho nowadays you will find there are a lot of people getting down to the stage where the Lord’s presence is there, but it is getting harder to experience what they had before.

Djininyini is our minister; he is a Bible teacher. A lot of trainees have been through Nungalinya College in Darwin. We have been evangelising. But we need the Word of God, we live by his Word. We need to teach the leaders, then go out to teach the people. We need the Bible in our own language.’

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AND EVANGELIST

Kevin Rrurrambu

‘My name is Kevin Rrurrambu and I am originally from this place. This is my country where I was born. It is a beautiful place. Nothing is better
than being at home. I went to Brisbane as a missionary scholar and I did a year’s study in the Methodist Training College and King’s College in Brisbane. After completing one year’s education, I stayed for another two years working in Brisbane. Finally I spent five years altogether there. In the final year in Brisbane, I did my first year of training at Kelvin Grove Teachers’ College, then I came back and did my second year at Kormilda in Darwin, and my third year at Darwin Community College; then I became a Commonwealth Teaching Service teacher. That was about thirteen years ago.

‘First I was a technical teacher, after I had worked for nine years with the Engineering Department as a fitter and turner, before I came to work in the school. I started to work in the school when Kevin Davis was Principal. I enjoy working in this place because I find that there is a real challenge in being an Aboriginal principal. This is my second year as Assistant Principal. We had a lot of problems earlier because the community did not want balanda [white] principals. There was a real clash with the Education Department. Then the Department decided to have a European Principal and an Aboriginal Assistant Principal, as my work was getting better. From what I’ve experienced so far, we are successfully working together. Not only is the organisation running smoothly, but the attendance is much better than it was.

‘They tried out the idea of one Aboriginal Principal at both Roper River [Ngukurr] and Goulburn Island. Apparently Goulburn Island was chosen because it is a small school, therefore it is easier for an Aboriginal Principal to handle, whereas this school has an enrolment of four hundred children. It is actually entitled to have three principals. We have the Principal, the Deputy Principal, and an Assistant Principal. There are about twenty-five members of staff.

‘Having an Aboriginal Principal is very important, not just because of the paper qualifications; people look for certificates, but often papers mean nothing—it is the ability of the person, the attitudes of the person and how he takes it; how he meets the problems from day to day and his capabilities as a leader. Especially from my own background where my own people know me, there is far better communication than outside people have, because there can be very complicated communication problems.

‘The children do respect me even though sometimes they don’t like me, but they do respect me, as they know that I am a person with authority in the school; they know that I could talk to the children and talk to the parents. They can understand what we are talking about. I am a person of their own tribe and people.

‘If there are people here from Milingimbi, Elcho, Ramingining or Gove, we all speak the same language and they accept me because I have had a
close association with them. Not only this, but I’ve been trying to meet the
needs of other people who are not my people. That is something I’ve been
trying to do in my work as an evangelist in the Uniting Church. I probably
know Aboriginal communities from here down to Warburton Ranges, and will
know those right up to Mornington Island, Aurukun and Cape York in another
few weeks time when we take missions in those places. I am related to all
people, especially in places where I speak their language. I
can easily be related to people down in the Centre, where I don’t yet
know them, because they have this system of ‘skin names’ which they have
given to the coastal people from the inland. I could probably just walk in and
tell them my skin name and find I am their brother or something like that.

‘If I go to inland areas, I can communicate in English. This is why it is
important that we learn to talk in English. I’ve been down as far as Fregon,
Ernabella and Amata in South Australia, and I had a really good time with those
people. They are still asking if I could get back to them.

‘We are wanting to see whether the community is willing to uphold us in
teaching our own culture. On Fridays we teach Aboriginal culture either in the
classroom or out in the bush. Before we had this idea, when the community
asked whether the teachers could help them in basic maths and English in their
day-to-day work, the teachers used to go out to the people and the community
used to come in and teach the children Aboriginal culture in the classroom. This
gives the community a feeling that they are part of the school and they
experience what is happening in the classroom.

‘I have to play a part called an intermediary role. The Education Department
is relying on me to relay their point of view to the community and the
community brings its point of view to me. But my sympathy is always with my
people. The community’s is the voice I should listen to, and the community is
the one the Department should be working for. Policy making should be the
role of the community, but that is sometimes hard and there is conflict, and it is
my responsibility to work out some kind of agreement between the two. This is
why my role is a very important one, even though I don’t communicate very
much with the Education Department because I become afraid of what is
happening. Sometimes I get ideas of upgrading myself but that is a long way
ahead and I have to find time when I can be free.

‘Another part of my education which I would most like to continue is a
flying course. I’ve done twenty-five hours already. I get across to Gove Aero
Club and do my training, but my student licence has at present expired and I
need to renew it. I leave it to God to show me where He wants me to be.’
One part of the Aboriginal culture taught to school children is the stories of their traditional mythology. The following is one example of these stories and the way they connect with their Christian belief.

When I visited the craft shop at Galiwin’ku an old man came in with a parcel of morning-star symbols he had made. They were painted on wooden poles with strings of parakeet feathers hanging down from the top. The paint on the stick represents the yams, groups of stars seen from the morning star and tribal colours of the Dhuwa people. The feathers on the strings are the rays of the star on which the spirits travel, the two short arms are the arms of the spirit being, all the other feathers represent the brightness or rays of the star as seen from the earth.

I saw some priced at three thousand dollars, but, even if I’d had the money to buy those, they had already been sold. I asked about the local story of the emblem and was told the following: ‘A long time ago in the Dreamtime a spirit being, guardian of all human spirits, looked down from his home in the morning star, on the Dhuwa people. He saw that it was early morning and they were hungry, so he stretched out his arm and pointed to the place where the yams were big and ripe. The people were happy and every morning they looked up, looking for the arm to tell them where food was. Time went by and some of the people died, their spirits were loose, wandering around with no home. So the good spirit of the morning star again stretched out his arms, gathered the spirits and took them to his home on the star where they rested in peace. To this day, the morning star, the last star visible in the early morning, is the final resting place for all the spirits of the people who have died. From there they watch their families and look after them.’

A little later the people were singing a chorus in the church: ‘Jesus, how wonderful you are, like the bright, morning star’. I asked the person next to me if the people understood the significance of the song. He assured me that it was very significant, that their traditional story fitted in very closely with their faith in Jesus Christ.

ABORIGINAL PASTOR AT GALIWIN’KU IN 1982

Rev. Dr Djininyini Gondarra

Rev. Dr Djininyini Gondarra was very gracious in giving me half an hour of his time just before he left by plane to visit another community. We

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1 Galiwin’ku Artists Shop, duplicated leaflet, 1982.
sat down under the shade of a tree and I recorded the following account of the way the renewal movement began. Djininyini has since been a lecturer at Nungalinya College in Darwin for two years and in 1985 was Moderator-elect for the Northern Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

‘I am a parish minister here at Galiwin’ku Church. I did my training in Papua New Guinea, five years altogether in that country, two years in Christian Education and three years of theological training. I went to New Guinea because the Anglican and Uniting Churches were still thinking about Nungalinya College for the Northern Territory.

‘I applied as a candidate for the ministry to the Methodist Synod. This was the New South Wales Conference, because then there was no Methodist Conference in the Northern Territory. I was sure that it was God’s call to be a minister, because I experienced it when I looked at the needs of my people. If it hadn’t been for God’s calling, I wouldn’t be in the ministry here.

‘God has really blessed my ministry here among my own people. It has been a thrilling experience for myself, and for my people here. In my first year, 1976, the year of my ordination, I was inducted into this parish and found that first year very difficult in settling in to the work amongst my own community. I found it difficult to communicate with people because of some of the customs. The kinship system made it very difficult to talk directly to some people of my own age as well as to some of the older people. The saying, “A prophet is not accepted in his own country”, became a reality for me, but I believed that God was still calling me to be a minister.

‘So during that year I was a pastor to the people here, and I was beginning to see the fruit of my work. I preached the message in our language, as I knew from my experience in New Guinea the difficulties of working by interpretation. I learned in my field work there some new ideas on how to go about in a village area which I tried out among my own people. I was really just going and sitting with people, talking with them about the Gospel and making the Scriptures clearer to them. These were often informal meetings, openly going to their homes, then sitting and talking with them. They organised a small kind of meeting among themselves.

‘Sometimes there were children on the beach in school holidays when the school was still under mission control. I organised a lot of beach missions and camps for the children. There was a family camp where all the family went, wives and children and everybody. Sometimes there was a camp for the leaders, but still there was a great need for revival in this church.

‘There were some missionaries who learned, and began to preach in our own language, but they were still struggling. But now, when someone comes,
speaking in his own mother tongue, preaching to them and telling them this is what the Lord is saying in the Bible, about this and that, it is really Scripture being revealed, opening up a lot of new things. Since then some wonderful works have been happening.

‘The whole church had been praying for revival, and this is not something we have seen in other churches in the south, but we have been praying, as God guided us, to bring revival to the church. Many people continued praying for three years until March 1979 when revival took place.

‘There was a Bible class established to which five or six people came. It wasn’t a very impressive one. We used to call it “Yolngu Fellowship”, and we continued to have that fellowship every Tuesday. Every time we met, we prayed that God’s Spirit would move here.

‘I can remember the time that I came back from furlough. I had been away for the two months, January and February, and came back in the first week in March. Even before I had arrived here, people were starting to feel that something strange was happening, through dreams, through being woken up at night and seeing something wonderful. Some people were just going and praying for sick people and those people were being healed. They were starting to wonder. But exactly what happened on that night in March when I was right there?

‘We were just being filled with God’s Spirit and were starting to pray. It was a different and a changed pattern of praying. You could hear people praying over there, and people here, another here and another there. Someone here started to sing. I was afraid and just opened my eyes and saw my wife sitting down there. I used my sign language to ask her what was happening. How should I react as a leader and a pastor? I was frightened at what was happening and tried to draw myself out of it, but the Holy Spirit really took hold of me, and I couldn’t get rid of Him. It was a real blessing and my tears just burst out. Everybody was blessed on that night.

‘After that, the Lord was really speaking to us in that small group of people, saying, “Don’t stop”. That was what the Holy Spirit was saying, “Start to spread the message”. Next night they were in a camp and just a short message was given besides singing and praying. People were coming. They were sitting in the darkness, too shy to come closer. We could see them just crying out loud as the Lord touched them. So from there, people were added until hundreds of people were converted here in Galiwin’ku.

‘It was not only in the camp, but in the church and the community as a whole, in fact, the relationships with the church, the council, with the departments, the foremen, the bosses and the workmen, the family and village life with wives, husbands and children, were affected. It swept
through as though God had turned on a tap and was cleansing out the power of darkness. All the time we could hear singing; people would go past talking about it and at night we could go to sleep hearing people still singing Christian choruses. It was just like Pentecost.

‘When we read the Scriptures of Peter and others when they received the power of the Spirit, they didn’t stop, they went out. This was revealed to us, and we started to minister to other communities. First we went to Milingimbi, then to Roper River [Ngukurr], then Ramingining, then to our own people at Lake Evella and Yirrkala. We went to the Anglicans at Numbulwar, Umbakumba, Angurugu and Oenpelli, and then to Maningrida, before going to Mowunjum, in Western Australia.

‘I went to urban Aborigines in Brisbane [Paddington] and ministered there. Then I was sent to some white people’s churches and Alcorn College in Brisbane. There were many people who had been touched. Just this last year [1981] a mission team went to Alice Springs, to Ernabella, to Amata, to Fregon, and then across to Western Australia.

‘At Warburton Ranges there were great things happening, just as they did here. The people themselves are beginning missionary outreach to their own people right across Australia. A lady who came here with the Christian Women’s Convention Safari Team told me that the Warburton people reached Kalgoorlie to help some of their people there.

‘Now we have another mission coming up in North Queensland. We have been praying for a long time for an invitation to North Queensland, Mornington Island, Weipa, Aurukun and others. I’ve just received a letter from North Queensland finalising the arrangements for our people to leave in June, about the eighteenth or nineteenth.

‘Now that the revival has started to calm down, we are encouraging people to have solid Bible teaching, because, if we don’t establish a foundation of Bible study and learning to pray, there is sometimes a lot of strange teaching when a movement like this comes. I’ve been encouraging my church here to read God’s word, to test the spirits and to help the church to grow as a body.

‘Many people are experiencing gifts from God. I’ve been telling them when they receive a gift it is not their personal gift; it is for the church, the body that receives it. Some are called to be pastors, some teachers, some evangelists and prophets. They all work together as a body. We have a vision and I believe that God is going to lead us to minister to others.

‘When I was in Canberra, I went to one conference run by the National Fellowship for Charismatic Renewal in Uniting Churches. I met some who work with the African people. They were telling me that revival has been happening for many years in East Africa. I believe that the Lord is going to
raise up a lot of leaders, and we have one in Kevin, who is an evangelist part-time. He is an Assistant Principal at Shepherdson College. He does a lot of evangelism, while my role is teaching. If the church needs teaching they call me to go and teach.

‘I always tell my children and synod that we still stand as a Uniting Church. Some people, when the revival happened, had a fear that something would happen to cause the church to break up. But we still stand and believe that God is leading us to minister more and more, because sometimes, when a church has been filled with God’s Spirit, they separate. Before Christ died, He prayed for unity, and that unity is to remain.

‘Many people have been delivered from alcohol and from fear. The devil has tried to trap them, but they have been set free. I have been thankful to God that just after the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs said that Warburton Ranges was the worst place in Australia, now it has become a happy place. God has touched that area which was the worst place.

‘Every month we have a service of communion here and we pray for people who have problems, diseases, or are possessed with demons, and we have seen them healed. During that revival there was nearly a week when no one went to hospital. The nursing sister came in, “Nobody has been coming to the hospital, but the people are really rejoicing”, she said.’

Each year there are special services of thanksgiving when people from Galiwin’ku and surrounding communities gather to give thanks for the renewal, and to rededicate themselves to God’s work of spreading the Gospel. As a later interview with Rupert of Numbulwar will show, the communities visited from Galiwin’ku are expected to form their own evangelistic teams and to organise their own outreach programs.
Ladies group from Galiwin’ku Church—‘Jesus Christ set us free to serve’
CHAPTER FOUR

May Day! May Day!—
Katherine Convention

Relations between Aborigines and whites in the Katherine area had been a disaster from the beginning. There were many areas in Australia that had a history of savage brutality in their confrontation which has left such a legacy of mistrust of the white man.

One such area is that previously inhabited by the Wagaman and Djauan tribes. It was opened up for white settlers by the building of the overland telegraph line through that country in 1872. There was no police protection for the Aboriginal people. Some dreadful atrocities were committed just to rid the country of those blacks who might interfere with the establishment of cattle stations. There was no one to listen to the ‘mayday’ call of the tribal people over an area of thousands of hectares around Katherine when their men were shot down because they were black, women were raped and children had their brains dashed out against stones.

The crimes committed were beyond description, but at that time were regarded as a form of sport. Sunday afternoon hunting parties would go out, not to get meat for the table, but to slaughter human beings, and to leave their bodies decaying in the tropical sun. Stories of the carnage and atrocities can still be heard from many of the older Aborigines in that area.

Outlaws from other states could find an unprotected target for their crimes; ruffians from every part of Australia could remain undetected under assumed names on cattle runs. This district was a sanctuary for every kind of criminal. The history of this area will never be fully recorded because accounts of these dreadful atrocities were certainly not written down by
their perpetrators, and only exist now in the tales told around the camp fires by older Aboriginal people. I well remember hearing these vivid accounts from older people describing the cruelty of those early invaders, the chase through the bush, the pounding hoof beats of pursuing horses, the crack of the rifles, the helpless cry and the thud of the writhing body on the rocks. More horrifying was the story of the cruel way two little girls were picked up by the ankles, swung high in the air and their heads smashed against an outcrop of stone.

One elderly Aboriginal woman told me how her stepfather was shot by a stockman who was overseer on a cattle station. He shot the man in the shoulder with a revolver to get him to leave the station. The old men of the tribe ‘sang’ the stockman who was later killed by a flash of lightning that struck his tent. Such accounts are part of a grim oral history in the minds and attitudes of the survivors and their descendants. No wonder that today Aborigines distrust white men, and stereotype whites as vicious, greedy, immoral and brutally cruel. It is an unpromising situation in which to build good race relations and friendship, for even if the stories are exaggerated and not all the tales told are true, the attitudes of those who listen to such injustices do not predispose them to readily become friends with members of the same race that they identify as the criminals, ruffians, rapists and usurpers who caused such havoc at the end of last century and beginning of this century.

THE CONVENTION

The call of ‘mayday’ can now mean something else besides disaster. Each May Day holiday weekend since 1966 there has been a Christian convention in Katherine. It began with a discussion at Bethel Church presided over by Lloyd Kent, although as early as 1964, Christians in Katherine had held a meeting with a view to starting a convention. Instead of a weekend of shooting, there began a weekend of singing, worship and fellowship, building each other up. In the early years people camped at the Low Level Reserve, but these arrangements have changed considerably since Bruce Morrow bought a small farm near the Springvale Homestead. This was purchased as an unimproved block of two hundred and thirty hectares. Bruce and Barbara first built a shed, then a house, on it. A demountable building owned by the Scouts and Guides was also available for use over the weekend. Later, the farm had water reticulation and electricity, so that quite a number of people could camp on the area along the river bank.
To begin with, the only Aboriginal people who came were from Bamyili, Tennant Creek and southern areas, who came in groups from their missions. Local Katherine people also attended. But the May Day weekend convention soon became a popular trip for Darwin Christians who were looking for a different kind of holiday. The Rev. Philip Taylor encouraged Aborigines from Oenpelli to attend, and, with the possibility of camping at Morrow’s farm, others began attending from a number of different Aboriginal communities, especially as Bruce had worked at Oenpelli, and at the Groote Eylandt settlements of Umbakumba and Angurugu, so was known to many.

In the early years, different tribal groups who camped at the farm chose an area closest to their tribal territory, forming a geographic pattern which they followed each year. As well as associating with their tribal territory even when camping on the farm, Aboriginal people also associate closely with the Morrows who had been at Ngukurr (Roper River) and Numbulwar, as well as the other communities. Members of the convention committee from the Baptist and Aboriginal Inland Missions also attracted people from Beswick, Bamyili, Hooker Creek (Lajamanu) and Kalkaringi.

Trust of European people they knew well, attracted many Aboriginal people to attend the May Day weekend convention, known as the Katherine Convention. The evening meetings of the convention are held at ‘the farm’. In some years, over one thousand people have sat out in the open to take part in the meeting. Since 1985, Bill Murphy has set up the lights and amplification needed for the meetings. The morning meetings were held in the Katherine High School assembly area, and buses and an assortment of other vehicles provided transport each day to and from the farm.

**Means of Transport**

Transport from the various Aboriginal communities to Katherine was arranged in a variety of ways. Some people travelled in private cars or Land Rovers. Some organised charter buses or other community vehicles. Hooker Creek (Lajamanu) people travelled four hundred miles to Katherine on an open truck. Many groups in Arnhem Land organised charter planes from the Missionary Aviation Fellowship or commercial companies, and shared the cost amongst themselves. Europeans from Darwin usually drove down by car, but those from Alice Springs or Kununurra found it easier to use planes. It came as quite a surprise to me to see Aboriginal choir groups arriving from Numbulwar and Galiwin’ku. They came on twelve-seater chartered planes hired and paid for themselves. Some of the Aboriginal choir items were original tunes and words which had come to some of their
members in dreams, rather than being translations of traditional hymns and choruses.

At the meetings there were no special places reserved for white or Aborigines—people sat where they wished. There were Aboriginal and white singers giving items, and quite a lot of community singing. The speakers sometimes had problems in adapting their topics and language to such a widely diverse audience—from the city and from tribal communities; those who had been to many conventions and those who had never attended such a gathering before; those who had very limited knowledge of English and those for whom English was their mother tongue.

**Acting the Message**

At the 1981 convention, the Lajamanu people put on a Christian corroboree in which the body painting, the dancing, the songs and the sacred shields all followed their traditional Warlpiri culture and artistic gifts, to portray the message of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. This use of traditional dancing shocked some conservative people who tended to regard anything of Aboriginal culture as evil. However, it was an effective way of bringing the Christian message to those who still lived in tribal communities. The stories of the creation and of Ruth from the Old Testament, and the life of Christ from the New Testament, were later portrayed through this corroboree method and used in the Warlpiri settlements to teach the Gospel message.

At the May Day convention I attended in 1982, there was a dramatic presentation of Jesus calling his disciples and sending them out. It was acted out by a group of Nunggubuyu, with a commentary in English so that all present could understand. These Aboriginal presentations were enacted in the natural bush setting of Morrow’s farm, out in the open air, and attracted some of the tourists from Springvale Homestead. To some of them it may have been just another Aboriginal show, which gave them a chance to get onto tape and camera something of the tribal way of life. Spear throwing and social corroborees were performed at Springvale three nights a week by men of the Djauan tribe, so this could have been looked on as just another entertainment, but for those looking for a deeper understanding, it gave a deep sense of the grace and goodness of God as the scars of past enmity were being healed, and it showed that Aborigines could contribute their gifts to the combined worship of God. There was such an intensity of feeling in the singing that, although the meeting formally finished at about 9.00 p.m., the singing carried on until after midnight.
Reasons for Attending

In 1982, I asked several people why they came to the convention, and received a number of different answers. The Galiwin’ku choir had travelled right across Arnhem Land by plane because they felt they had an important contribution to make through their singing. Their items certainly made a lasting impression on me because of the beautiful quality of worship in their singing. Of course, they enjoyed listening to other choirs and items, and no doubt learned new songs and choruses from them, to increase their repertoire. Others said they were attracted by the friendship and fellowship of the whole gathering. It was certainly remarkable that tribes who had been traditional enemies could meet together in peace and friendship and contribute to each other’s lives by their singing, witnessing and preaching. People from Bamyili could meet with those from Elcho Island; Lajamanu people could talk together with those from Numbulwar and Ngukurr (Roper River), and, even more surprising, European people, whose grandparents dispossessed and even murdered Aborigines, could come together with their direct descendants and experience the forgiveness of God and the unity of knowing black and white can be one in the Cross of Christ.

Camping at the farm was another reason for coming. It was not that sleeping out under a canvas awning or in the shelter of a shed was particularly attractive, but it was a delightful holiday with fellow Christians and a good time of the year to enjoy the country around the banks of the Katherine River. The tensions and problems of life at home could be forgotten for a time in the enjoyment of a holiday atmosphere.

Last, but by no means least important, was that people valued the teaching given at the convention. The theme for the year I was there was ‘The Fatherhood of God’, as outlined in the Scriptures, particularly in Psalm 89:26, ‘You are my Father and my God, you are my Protector and my Saviour’. The theme chorus was sung at each meeting—‘Father God, I give all thanks and praise to Thee’—and helped reinforce the teaching. It was a theme that appealed to most people, whatever background they came from. Despite the distance of the farm from the high school in the town, most of the campers tried to attend each meeting.

The convention committee have tried to share responsibility for convention planning with Aborigines, but have found it difficult to get Aboriginal leaders to meet with them, partly because of distances and partly because of the different cultural methods of organisation. A solution to this, in 1982, was to have two different Aboriginal groups responsible for the two evening meetings—the Beswick/Bamyili group to organise the Saturday evening program, and East Arnhem Land churches—Ngukurr,
Numbulwar and Angurugu—to run the Sunday evening ‘farm meeting’. This arrangement did not limit participation by other communities at other meetings.

**Ralph and Patricia Forbes from Barunga—1995**

‘Mainly we are fellowshipping at Barunga. We’ve been there since last year. The Lord spoke to us to move out from our homeland to go and preach the good news everywhere. Some He told to go to Oenpelli, some to Barunga, some to Alice Springs, and that is originally where I [Patricia] come from. But my mother decided to bring us up here, and we decided to stay. We grew up here and went to school and we married into this Top End people, so we fit in with my husband’s family. For fellowship we go outreaching to other communities. We were in the Barunga community when the Lord first spoke to us at Bulman, and then we started doing service for him up there. Bulman is in north-east Arnhem Land on the Central Arnhem Highway.

‘Every time we felt discouraged because we were isolated, we used to go out for encouragement, like the Bible study, and to share with other Christians, and, when we became stronger in our faith, we used to go back to teach my husband’s people. Before we went there they didn’t know about the Lord, so when we were baptised we introduced the Lord to them. They didn’t know anything about Easter or Christmas, so we showed them what they mean to us as Christians, and they knew that there was a real love in that. When the Lord gave us the vision to move, we settled down in Barunga.

‘We go out for outreach, me and my husband lead the singing. He plays the organ, that is the gift that the Lord has given him, even though he can’t read music. A lot of the people write their own songs for the Lord, and put some English words into Creole so it can fit in with us and we can understand what they are singing; especially the old people and the middle-aged people.’

Ralph explained, ‘Many songs are written by people like my wife who write songs that people can play, and a couple of other brothers and sisters in Christ who write songs mainly for praise and worship.

‘We use the Creole Bible. Our minister reads it in English and sometimes we read the message in Creole to get it across to our people because that is the main language that people speak and can understand. The minister, Irvin Kuss of the AIM, is the minister of Barunga, Beswick, Bulman and Manyala. Those are the places we go for outreach doing Christ’s service. The children participate in the service by doing actions or singing songs.'
We get the kids to stand and do their actions together. The Katherine Convention in 1995 was their first experience on stage. They asked me how many people were there because they were a big mob. I asked them if I could have a prayer with them, and a couple of our sisters in Christ and I prayed with them. As they came out there was a big mob of people, but they had that self-esteem, that confidence. The Lord gave them the strength just to go out there and get the people’s attention. It was really good for those kids. It was the first time they did it in front of the people. Me and my wife and young cousins from Barunga are counsellors, all of us put ourselves down as counsellors so that a person from our group who doesn’t know much English can come to us for counselling. If they want to give their hearts to the Lord, or if they have other problems in their lives that are bothering them, they can ask us to pray for them, to give them a little bit of encouragement, they can find encouragement and understanding of the Bible and follow the Lord the right way instead of going two ways like the cultural way and God’s way. Talking to them about the way Jesus came into this world, how He led our brothers and sisters in Christ, how He died on the Cross for sinners, for each and every one—that’s what we as counsellors do.
‘Some of the Balanda [white] people use the Creole Bible because from the Katherine region right up to Roper [Ngukurr] and Central Arnhem Land, Bulman and Barunga, the people mainly speak Creole. Some of them just understand their mother tongue and they don’t speak it. Most of the young people today understand their mother tongue but don’t speak it fluently, they speak Creole as well as write it. Those people who had a good education can write and read Creole.

‘I would like to teach the white people about how to live the way Jesus lived, how He died for our sins, and teach them a little bit of Creole. Not mix it with cultural things, but to teach them what we’ve been learning through our minister. So that the white people can learn that the Aboriginal people can be Christian and still be Aboriginal, but not mix with cultural activities, to teach them straight-out the true ways of Christ.’

Patricia said, ‘The important thing is we like to teach the children our own language, not speaking English all the time, because most of our old people can’t understand those very hard words that are put in the Bible. But that is why we change some words when some Creole is translated into the traditional language that people usually speak, so that they can hear it and acknowledge that we have a loving heavenly Father.’

Looking back on the last century there seemed little hope for the survival of the Aboriginal people and for good race relations. Now, at this May Day convention, a basis for getting together as Christians has been established, with different races contributing to each other’s wellbeing. Although history cannot be forgotten, there is an acceptance of each other as fellow Christians and a willingness to forgive and help one another.
Closing ceremony Katherine Convention, 1995
CHAPTER FIVE

Report from Western Australia

Pastor Denzil Humphries is an AEF representative from Western Australia. His enthusiasm about the work of the Holy Spirit in his state is evident from the following recorded interview made in 1982. He spoke fluently and forcefully about the situation as it was in Perth and in Esperance, nine hundred kilometres south-east of Perth, where the Warburton team—the Crusaders—operated from a tent city. Besides being an AEF representative, Denzil was a pastor of a church near Esperance, where he lived with his wife Shirley and their four children.

His own Christian experience started many years ago after a drunken fight. He felt the Lord’s presence in his room, but didn’t see anyone because of the darkness. He could feel ‘someone’ standing near him and asking whether his life was going to be wasted because of drink and violence, or whether he would give his life to the Lord to help his people. He was trained at Gnowangerup Aboriginal Bible College and became pastor of Wongutha Christian Agricultural Training Centre.

When AEF began holding interstate conferences at Port Augusta, Denzil was one of those involved in the planning. He was in Adelaide early in August 1982 and told me something about the amazing events in Western Australia, where numbers of different communities experienced the work of God’s Spirit in their hearts. A team from Galiwin’ku visited Amata and Warburton in 1981, preaching the Gospel and calling upon Aboriginal people to come to Christ. Not only was the response at Warburton quite dramatic, but also a team was formed at Warburton to take this good news to surrounding communities at Kalgoorlie, Wiluna, Leonora, Meekatharra,
Wingelina, Mt Margaret, Laverton and several other places. Denzil described how this team went on to Perth, then to Esperance, Albany and Bunbury, preaching at mission stations and Aboriginal communities, in many different churches as they were invited. His account was recorded on tape and transcribed with his permission to capture this first-hand description of the work of God in these areas.

PASTOR DENZIL HUMPHRIES FROM WONGUTHA IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

‘I can clearly remember the Crusaders meeting in Perth when they landed there. The first Sunday night they were there in Condugal Hall, where we have our Sunday morning services. It is a great big hall, holding about four or five hundred people. On this Sunday night, I was sitting down in the hall trying to work out in my mind how to start this meeting. The people from Warburton, the Crusader team (they called themselves the Crusaders), just went ahead and started. They had tremendous authority, they had leadership, they were going ahead with the meeting and we just sat back. I sat there, analysed their procedure, and took notes. Then all of a sudden, towards the end of the meeting, I felt a tremendous urge within me to go out the front and plead for people, unbelievers, to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour. I was exhorting the Christian brethren to give their lives over to Christ. I felt I should do this as a pastor. I did it with tears running down my face because of a tremendous urge; the Spirit of God was there. I wasn’t there for the last meeting. We had three weeks in Perth, and everywhere we went there was a tremendous movement of the Spirit of God. He brought fellowship amongst the churches and believers who weren’t in fellowship with each other because of little squabbles. He brought unity and strength, and certainly power was evident even in the people who came forward to accept Christ and in those people who came forward to rededicate their lives to Christ; there was tremendous power evident. The people went on after they accepted Christ; they seemed to have a strength there that the Lord gave them at that specific time. A little incident here about how the Lord had worked in a place called Esperance.

‘There was this young chap who had gone through Singleton Bible College in NSW, he and his girlfriend then. Later they became engaged and got married. When they left the Singleton Bible College and went back to Western Australia, they got away from the Lord and both of them started drinking and, of course, they broke up. Six years they were apart from each other. The wife had taken the children to Perth. The husband stayed in Esperance.
While the meetings were on in Esperance, this young man, overcome with drink, appeared to be living a defeated life. He was always promising to come back to the Lord, and that night at the meeting he felt that someone had tapped him on the shoulder and then he was up the front, weeping his heart out. He became changed, just there, really changed!

‘Then he thought about his family. He got a ride up to Perth by joining the team which was travelling round there from Albany to Bunbury. When he got to Perth, he visited his wife. She very reluctantly let him have the children and he took them along to the meetings. He was part of the team and had the joy of seeing his children come forward to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord. Then, a few nights later, he asked his wife if she would come along. She hesitated, but came to the point where she accepted the invitation.

‘She came the first night, the second night, and then about the third night she responded and rededicated her life to Christ. Those two are united now in Perth with their family, and they are not only united as husband and wife, but also in the Lord. This is tremendous, this is none other than the work of the Spirit of God. No marriage counsellor or anything else could have done the work in their lives as the Lord did it.

‘Terry Robinson said they got down before the Lord and sorted out some of the things and accepted the things they felt were helpful and use-ful in ministry as they travelled around. One of the things was that some of the men felt led of the Spirit to come out and counsel those who came forward during the meetings. After much counselling with them, they would place their hands on their head and, one hand raised up, they would pray for deliverance for that person. Another custom was that when they sang the invitation hymn, “The Spirit of the Lord has moved through the land”, they would raise their hands, or when they prayed they would raise their hands. They kept that, too, because they didn’t see anything wrong in that.

‘There was tremendous evidence of brokenness in the way that many people came forward, really broken and weeping. It was emotional. I believe that when the Lord does touch us, our emotions are stirred, and one of the greatest things in life is emotion. If you love your wife you show it by your affection and emotion. This was very evident. There was weeping. The people came and knelt down in the front because the Lord was in the place.

‘Wherever the team went, they came in contact with missionaries in the various mission stations we have in the west, and right around there has been tremendous blessing for the missionaries and the children they are working with and the people they are working with.

‘I had the joy to attend an inter-mission conference at Wongutha Christian Agricultural Training Centre in the mission that I am associated with.
It is a training farm just out of Esperance. I had been a missionary associated with them for about twenty years, since I left Bible College. It was at that conference that we had tremendous fellowship, the whole group that was preaching, teaching and sharing the platform were AEF men. All the missionaries and all the missions represented there with us had a tremendous time of fellowship, love and joy. We were all determined that when we went back to our mission stations or whatever these were called, we would try more to reach others and be more dedicated to the Lord in our service.

‘After speaking to many there, I believe from that meeting that there was almost a hundred per cent agreement with the movement that was going around with the AEF. It was there that we spoke to the missionaries and left the challenge with them, that we would love them all, every mission in Western Australia, to be associated with AEF. Because it is from these missions that ones like myself were connected with AEF, so it would have been a double tie-in there. We have left that challenge with them.

‘The team from Warburton, I hear, have been praying very much and waiting on the Lord because they believed the Lord could be calling them up through the Kimberleys. They had been right around the south-west of Western Australia. I’ve mentioned earlier that they had done things that were not natural to them. They went to the different tribes that they had been enemies with. They went up to Wiluna and all through that area. Then down to Cundeelee. These folk had been fighting each other, both the tribal leaders and the people. Also they came down among our Nyungar people. I am a Nyungar person from the South-West. They came down right through that area even though it was cold and wet and it is not natural for them to do that. God has used them.

‘The revival that started in Warburton Ranges came from Elcho Island, and, of course, from the Lord. These places were touched by the Lord. From the Warburton Ranges we were able, with the blessing of the Lord upon our lives, to march up to Parliament House in Perth, up the steps, have a little meeting there and have a little prayer there. We came right from the Sandy Desert to Parliament House.

‘In the Warburton group, the new leader was a dear Christian brother by the name of Terry Robinson; the others with him were his brother Donny Robinson, and also Bobby Scott, who came from the Leonora area, Mt Margaret, and Trevor Brownlee who was studying here in Adelaide. They hadn’t had a lot of training. Terry Robinson did go to Gnowangerup Aboriginal Bible College, but after his training, when he got to Warburton Ranges, he fell away. He got involved in the old law and other things.
But through this revival he has come back to the Lord and is one of the main leaders. Bobby Scott and Trevor had had Christian upbringing and teaching.

‘They were looking forward to the Mt Margaret Convention in August, and they expect to have two or three thousand Aborigines, maybe more, for this convention. [Scenes from this convention were later shown on Western Australian Nationwide.] I am hoping that I can get there but I haven’t been home for the last two or three weeks and I don’t know what lies ahead at the moment. I am also pastor of a church and have responsibilities there in that area.

‘The Lord has started to work amongst the AEF. We did have a talk with Terry and leaders of the team while they were in Perth. They do want to be associated with the AEF, which is reaching out amongst our Aboriginal people, and we are a national movement. Terry voiced his opinion that they would like to be attached to AEF as they continue this ministry. We could experience, and we are starting, I believe, to experience a wonderful work through AEF. The leaders are coming together. Their problems are being thrashed out before the Lord and there is confession, forgiveness, cleansing and a brokenness, and we have seen this happening. If this goes on throughout the nation, we are going to see a greater ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout this land.

‘They have a real genuine burden for the whites. I say this in no light way. They are not slinging off because of what they see in the white churches. They have a tremendous genuine burden and they want to go among white Christians and churches, and they have been used in this way. In the South-West there was a church that was split down the middle because the leaders, the deacons, the elders and the pastor didn’t get on with each other. Then, one Sunday morning, half the Warburton team went along and shared the service, and God moved there. First of all He touched the minister. He was kneeling down the front, crying. Then the deacons and others joined him there, and the whole church has been changed with tremendous unity now in that church.

‘Some of the finance for these journeys came from folk at home, at Warburton. They were praying for them and sent money on. Relations sent money to different ones to keep them going. Collections were taken up at the meetings, and this helped to finance the meetings and the team. Donations were also sent. I had donations from different folk towards the food. The people came to Perth and things were provided for them. Tents were loaned to them to stay in while they were in Perth. Also the churches in Perth have joined together in many instances to provide food and blankets while the team was in Perth.'
‘Both the Christians in Aboriginal churches, and Christians in white churches, and Christian welfare centres around the city, everybody united in standing behind them. Also they reached out into the gaols, Fremantle Prison and others. There was a response of about ten men who came to Christ.

‘Two or three newspapers wrote up about the work. We had never had any hard or harsh opposition or criticism about it.

‘I believe that AEF should continue to be supported by prayer, financially and in any other way by the Christian churches of Australia, because this would make a tremendous change in spreading the Gospel, and help bring about a real unity and fellowship in spreading the Gospel throughout Australia.’

**FIERY ARROWS IN THE SKY**

Terry Robinson, of Warburton Ranges, gave a more personal testimony at the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Leaders’ Conference, 10–14 January 1983:

‘Looking back on my life, I was a student in Bible College for three years and had all the knowledge I needed to go forth to help my people. I was stepping out, but I made a step in the wrong direction. I’d been a failure for seven years. In those seven years I’d done nothing for my people or for the Lord Jesus.

‘He is my joy, and I’m privileged to speak for my Lord Jesus here in Adelaide, to tell you how the Lord used me amongst my own people. First of all it started last year in August, in Warburton. I think the whole of Australia would have known about the Warburton Ranges being a place of violence and trouble, petrol sniffing and lack of schooling and education.

‘Here in this place, many Europeans worked and went back home because of fearing the people. The whole atmosphere of the place was just one of fear—fear all over the place. Here at Warburton, God poured out His blessing on my people. His Holy Spirit was poured out mightily upon us. He brought people who had been sniffing petrol and fighting, spending their lives in prison, into the presence of the Lord God Almighty.

‘The work began through our Lord Jesus in our community groups around Warburton. We started preaching and telling people about our Lord Jesus, teaching them about the love of the Lord God.

‘At the time I didn’t want to get myself too involved in that work, but I prayed for help, and that’s how I got myself in. My brother whose name is Arthur Robinson, and the church, had an old bus. We used to use that bus, taking it over the sandhills, teaching God’s word. During that time that man who knew what evangelism means, used to tell us to pray, so we prayed.'
One time the bus came up the sandhills and it couldn’t get any further, so it rolled right back. We had to get out and push. I didn’t want to push, but he said all Christians had to work together. Here we were, pushing that bus right up to the top of the sandhill. This was a lesson for my life, for the Lord was speaking to me, to pray and work.

‘We visited three or four communities round there with the Word of God. They all came to accept the Lord. During that time, we had been baptising people who were getting converted in those communities, and the Holy Spirit fell upon all of us. I’ve been a Christian for a long time, but I didn’t experience anything deeper about knowing God, and knowing my Lord Jesus. There is a deeper meaning, a deeper understanding, and I acknowledged the call again. I was out on the goldfields. If I had a map here, I would show you where we were sent, to Kalgoorlie and Leonora. Also we went to Mt Margaret. That’s where the Gospel came from. Then fifty years ago it came out towards us. The first step was for tribal people dealing with other tribal people. Mt Margaret was a place that someone said was too far gone, better leave it alone and start again. But this place, Mt Margaret, came alive. The church leader is on fire for the Lord now. In that church, men and women, boys and girls are having fellowship every night, and they are praying every morning, and they are having a singalong this very night. They are learning to work together because groups can let laziness and hardness separate men from each other. But the Lord, through His mercy, picked us up.

‘We went back to Warburton again, and coming back started speaking to people in Leonora. Anyway, it was a bad town, neither of us wanted to stop there at all. It was so bad we just drove through. The people locally wouldn’t even look through the window. People were fighting every night. But God showered His blessing on us in that place too. Through that place people came from Laverton and Kalgoorlie, and out in the station country, too. It was hard. We took some other people with us because when we preached some of the young people, who were drunk, threw bottles and stones between our legs, and at our heads, too. People were fighting in front of us. But the evangelists couldn’t fight. They have to stand up to that. That’s where the Lord taught us to love at Leonora settlement. Longsuffering: I started to experience it.

‘Because I am a man, when I got to drink, I didn’t fight with knuckles. I used to fight with crowbars, sticks and stones, or anything my hands could grab. But here I was starting to learn—I was experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in me—love, joy and peace, and gentleness.

‘From there we went out to Kalgoorlie, and then on to Cundeelee. At Kalgoorlie many people came out to the front there and they were broken.
Other people stood back, and they were broken too. Although the team were standing out the front, God was using us, we were broken too, because the Holy Spirit broke all of us. The young people came to know the Lord then, and they are still going on with the Lord now. We went to Cundeelee for three days. That is where the tribal people were. The Lord showed us something we had never known before. I started to feel the Satanic power. I started to experience it. We had to pray against it. It was like pushing that bus up the sandhill. I learned to pray, so we prayed against it. The whole of the Aboriginal people, and the power of darkness around our people, were broken. Many of our tribal people came to know the Lord. Most of them are going on with the Lord, but some young people have fallen. They need encouragement. They need the right type of people to go there to work. They need a man who is gifted by the Lord.

‘Then we went back to baptising at Mt Margaret and the Leonora people who had been saved.

‘There was a big arrow sign in front of us to call us out to Meekatharra and Wiluna. The Lord gave us a vision through a young man. We saw a map of Western Australia with a route marked out right from Wiluna right down to Perth, up to Geraldton and back to Leonora. So we followed that. I started to experience what it means to be a leader. The Lord taught me many things through experience. We say that evil spirits sometimes control human lives, and God’s power releases them. In the South-West I’ve seen people from broken homes brought together. People whose lives have been separated were brought together; white people as well as Aborigines have come to know the Lord. We went to Perth, then out to Geraldton and back to Leonora. Being the leader I learned a lot. I learned to love people. The Lord gave me a spirit of compassion for those who’d gone astray. When I came back I spent about two months back home. I thought I would do something, but the evil one, the old devil, tried to come in because of too much giving out all the time, giving out, giving out. The Lord was teaching me to start reading God’s Word, and praying to the Lord to lead me out again. One night my wife woke me up and told me there was an arrow in the sky. I thought the Lord was leading me out to Alice Springs, but God’s arrow sent me back to Leonora.

‘I had spent three or four months out there and the Lord asked me to go back and did not give me any definite answer. In the town I got my answer. In Ezekiel 38 it says, ‘Be thou prepared’. There may not be a vision leading me out again, so I prepared myself by praying. I prayed that the Lord would choose people. This time it would not be a man calling them, but the Holy Spirit. There were about twenty people in the team this time, but in the previous mission we had about fifty or sixty young people.
We went up on the same track where we had ended our first trip. We stopped at Morawa. We found many people hungering after the Word of God. That would be the first time they had heard the Gospel. They were brought to know about the Lord Jesus. They found their identity was being lost, peeled off them and trodden down. They weren’t recognised as Aboriginal people. And now the Gospel had been brought to them, they accepted it gladly, and their hearts were open towards God. There were many old people and young people.

I was discouraged there were no Christian people available to look after them. We had to press on to another town, but I’m still praying that the Lord will send a pastor to start a new church with them.

Then we went up to the town of Carnarvon. A lot of our people heard the Word of God, but they had nothing to do and were drinking heavily and fighting. Instead of the people coming to us, we went to them. We had a meeting in the church, on the football oval and in the reserve. A lot of people came to us and talked to us. We were there to help them.

While we were at Port Hedland, we were able to go to Strelley. In that place communism was in control. The Aboriginal people were in bondage, in slavery. There was no freedom in that place. Even the women and children were controlled by the elders. They go to school there. Someone told me they had better education there. They had more education than we had. They go through the school, but they have nothing to live for. They have introduced to them the law.

There is no future for those who live there. The only future is to look back and get it from the past. In that way they are able to control them. Many of these people are going into a lost eternity. We spent two hours there talking to the leaders. I heard that there had been quite a number of Christians who had come to the place. They were told to take the Bibles and get out. We talked about the Lord, and the deliverance they could have in Christ Jesus, but got nowhere. They said, “You gotta go, and take your God with you”. We went out, got our shoes and shook off the dust from them. We prayed that some of the people and the leaders would be saved.

We went back, and the following day we were on the way to Marble Bar. Some people there gave their hearts to the Lord and threw away their laws and wanted to follow the Lord. We had one night there and two nights at Jigalong. We came into Jigalong and set up our gear at the school. When we were unloading, all the people were sitting down waiting for us. There were old people and young people, with all the children running in front of us. They thought we would talk to them. We got out our guitars and sang to them and said we couldn’t have a meeting just then but to come at night. So that night we set up our gear, guitars and lights. They said, “We know
all these songs you are singing”. They had a cassette of all our songs sent ahead by Sid Williams. We thank God that the Lord went before us.

‘The Lord went before us all round. We had a good time there. After the meeting an appeal was given and we had a big response. Women came forward, leaving their babies on the ground. If the babies had been able to walk, I think they would have come forward too! We had difficulties there, too. One day when we went preaching, we were brought before the elders, not because of what we had done, but because of what the Lord had done. We stood before our people and they asked, “What have you done to our people? What are you trying to do? Are you trying to destroy our laws [traditional culture]?”

‘We answered, “We are not trying to destroy your law, we are preaching the Gospel to you. We want to show you the blessing of Jesus Christ. We want to tell you how we were blessed by the Holy Spirit. The Lord wants you to have the same blessing”. The people said, “What about the law?”; “That is not a worry, that is up to the Lord”, I said. “He takes something that is not right and kills that.” They said, “All right, you can have the meeting tonight”. So we were happy, and all gave our testimony to the people, telling them how we love the Lord.

‘We went back to Leonora. There were two things I had learned. First, I learned about the birth of a church. In the Acts we found that the Holy Spirit fell upon men, and they started to tell people about the Lord, and they spent time together. Also in Warburton we learned that the devil can attack you and come in. He has the cheek to come in, too. He attacks not only the young Christians, but the leaders also. But the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, opened our eyes to the devil’s work, that he was trying to destroy us, but we were holding out together and shaking hands. We need unity in the fellowship of His ministry.

‘I don’t care what you think of me. I’m telling you that the revival has come in Australia. God answered the prayers of faithful Christians, who prayed for many years; some have died, some have grown old, some are unable to see now. But the revival has come, not to white society, but to Aborigines. The white people have a lot of things, lots of denominations, lots of churches, a lot of new ideas, but the Aborigines have nothing at all. They are a poor and forsaken people, but God is going to use my people so He can get the glory. We want all people recognising the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour, not looking on the great power of any denomination or organisation, but only the Lord Jesus. When I look at the revival, I see that it is not just for Aborigines but for the whole of Australia. Isaiah 49:1–7 of the Living Bible says: “The Lord called me before my birth . . . You are my servant, a prince of power with God and you shall bring me glory”.’
PASTOR JACK BRAESIDE—1983

Approximately two years after the events described by Denzil and Terry, I asked Pastors Jack Braeside and Ben Mason about the situation there after the initial enthusiasm had settled down. Jack gave this summary of the events: ‘The work of evangelism in Western Australia was spearheaded by Terry Robinson with his brother Don, and the team from Warburton Ranges. The Lord has been using the tribal people from the centre, people from remote desert areas, to bring the Gospel to the more settled places. Their trips around Western Australia have been sensational news, reported in many newspapers. The first time they went around Esperance and Albany in the South-West of the state, then through Perth to Geraldton and back to Leonora. Then they came to Wiluna and Meekatharra. Many people, both adults and young people, have given their hearts to the Lord Jesus. We have seen many changes in the goldfields and everywhere else they went. Wiluna has been a hard place, reports have been made in the papers that many people complained about the drunkenness there, but there is not nearly so much now. There are missions there and quite a few people go to church. About four years ago, when we were over there, it was like a battlefield, with drunken bodies lying around everywhere. But now it has improved.

‘There is one group of stations stretching from the coast right into the desert, finishing at a desert camp near the old Canning Stock-route. That has been a hard place to reach with the Gospel, as they didn’t want Christians in there. But last October (1983) there was a breakthrough. A lot of the young people went into the crusade meetings that were held in Port Hedland and many of them became Christians. This brought down the indignation of the leaders. They didn’t like it. They took a lot of the women and girls back to the stations. While they realise the good that the Gospel is doing, they don’t want it in their community. The communist influence means they keep a tight rein on their people who go to town or anywhere else. They always shepherd them back to the stations, but this time the people got away, and went to the meetings. Christians have been praying for that group for years.

‘When the initial break came in the Warburton Ranges, many of the people decided to follow the Lord, but then last year, in 1983, many of them were drawn back to their old ways. This was due to the influence of two white men who were there, and also partly due to friction with tribal leaders. There is often confusion in tribal areas where leaders want to hold people to the tribal ways. Last August, when we had the Mt Margaret Convention, Warburton people had some boys that were being initiated.'
They blocked the road to everybody and wouldn’t let the Christians go to the convention. A few got through before the road was blocked, but a lot weren’t able to go to the convention until the boys had been taken through that area.

‘In the past things had been very bad. Even the police had been afraid to go there and nurses moved out, it was so dangerous. Now it has improved considerably. There has been a sorting out in Warburton, as with people everywhere else. A lot of people made decisions, and then, when testing times came, there was a sorting out and a settling down. Those who were genuine Christians stood firm. When Terry and his team went up to Fitzroy Crossing, there was not only a revival of the Christian work, but also a reaping, a conversion of many people to Christianity. Mission work had been going on there for years and they had a revival of their work, but there were others attracted by that team and they were converted.

‘Spiritual renewal had come to places like Ernabella and Yalata, and the goldfields, which have had a background of missionary work. Now they are seeing their faithful work rewarded. Everywhere the Warburton team went there was a great attraction to the meetings and a lot of decisions. Many people who made decisions were kept going with good follow-up work, but where there was no follow-up, the people soon fell away. We noticed this in a place called Morawa, east of Geraldton, where there was no mission and no follow-up teaching. The people fell away. But when an Aboriginal Christian went there, a little fellowship group began to grow.’

There are several reasons why the work of the Crusaders stopped. The financial support only kept coming in while the team was travelling and holding meetings. There was no support committee to raise funds for equipment and salaries. Missionaries had existed on very meagre support and had not trained Aboriginal Christians in the practice of giving to the support of an Aboriginal teacher or evangelist. In the first flush of enthusiasm, there was a period of generous and sacrificial giving. This dwindled to almost nothing when the Crusaders settled down and returned to Warburton. The team needed money for a new vehicle, and for travelling expenses, but this was not forthcoming.

While an evangelistic team is working, it needs to have a group of Christian people who will pray and give, as well as encouraging others to join in. Those who have received spiritual help should be encouraged to give financial assistance. But, as Pastor Jonathan Bates remarked, ‘They can run the services, but find trouble about the finance’. And, of course, if there is no finance, eventually the work comes to a halt.

The second reason why the evangelists failed to continue their crusades is the high level of expectation which is often unrealistic and against practical experience. With the enthusiasm and emotion connected with the meetings, many people responded, but only a limited number continued to live as Christians. Despite the reports that Warburton had been changed from a drunken, brawling community to a Christian settlement, there were still a
number of people who brought in alcohol and got drunk, despite the council regulations against it. There were still young people who were openly sniffing petrol, ruining their health and future, while their parents were unable to stop it. It is unrealistic to expect one hundred per cent conversion of all drunkards and petrol sniffers. People tended to blame the evangelists when some who made commitments returned to their old ways of drunkenness, fighting or petrol sniffing, rather than looking at those whose lives were changed as they continued in the Christian faith.

Another reason for discouragement was that the community was divided in its approach to the traditional culture. Some of the older people wanted their children to learn the rules for living as expounded in their law and mythology. Others believe that the old law is wicked and satanic, and not compatible with their Christian belief. This made it difficult for a young convert to know whether he should attend traditional ceremonies or not. With strong pressures from both sides he was confused. The evangelists tended to accept the teaching of the early missionaries, although when Terry was asked about the law he sidestepped the issue and said, ‘That is not my worry, that is up to the Lord’, and kept to his main aim of preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. However, when in daily contact with their own community, the Aboriginal council decides what course they want young people to follow. Unless there was strong Christian representation on the Council, the evangelists might find themselves fighting a losing battle with the elders.
September can be very hot in the Kimberleys. I remember it was 106 or 107°F when we were up there in 1972–73. ‘We had to hang damp towels over our baby’s cot to keep him cool’, Bill Edwards told me. As it turned out, the clear, dry heat was a welcome change from the wet, wintry weather in Adelaide. I enjoyed wearing summer shorts, travelling around the Fitzroy plains and seeing a corner of Australia that I’d long wanted to visit.

The Kimberleys brought to my mind pictures of those unique Aboriginal rock paintings, the Wandjina figures, found in the caves of the north Kimberley mountains. These figures were usually painted to show the head and shoulders of ancestor spirits, without mouths, as they no longer speak. Dr Ian Crawford of Perth has written about these paintings in *The Art of the Wandjinias*.¹

We went out to visit some of the Aboriginal people who had guarded these paintings, in their home at Mowunjum, near Derby. Their home country was Kunmanya, but they later moved to Wotjulum, then south to Mowunjum Mission, before it was relocated to a site near Derby. They have lost not only the employment they had, but also the sacred connection to their land and traditions. With their new proximity to the town and liquor outlets, there were serious problems with alcohol.

It was sad to see these people who had such hopeful prospects described in *The Road to Mowunjum*, by Masie McKenzie,\(^2\) now reduced to a community of fringe dwellers living on junk foods and alcohol. One family group had gone back to a cattle station near their own country.

In Derby, we visited the Numbala Nunga Nursing Home where about sixty aged and disabled Aborigines were given almost complete care. The home looked out onto spacious grounds and trees at the front, but rather drab tidal flats at the back. I wondered what tales these old people could have told of their earlier days in the Kimberleys, if their memories had been clearer.

A fascinating feature of the Kimberley country is the boab trees, with their swollen trunks and limbs reaching stark and bare into the sky. At Mowunjum, I watched a flock of white cockatoos whirling around, screeching, and finally settling on one of the boab trees, as though trying to cover it with the flowers and leaves it once enjoyed after the last rains. One huge tree with names carved over its massive trunk had an opening on one side large enough for a man to get through into the interior. The space inside was once used as a prison. It could certainly have held about twenty people, though they would not have enjoyed the experience.

David Hewitt drove us out in his Land Rover to Looma, a little community of about three hundred people living in a carefully planned village. The houses nestled below a rugged, terraced range whose rocks reflected the morning sun in colours of red, rust and chocolate, contrasting with the green foliage of the trees and lawns. There was a council office, a shop, a motor mechanic’s workshop, a church and both primary and secondary school buildings. The secondary school was due to begin its classes soon and was being equipped with a General Studies classroom, Home Science room, and a Craft workshop with some electrical machines and tools which would have been adequate for students in any city school.

**DICKIE SKINNER (COX) FROM NOONKANBAH—1985**

Dickie is connected with the United Aborigines Mission at Fitzroy Crossing which does not support political action for land rights. This mission also has concerns about ‘the old evil ways’ of traditional culture, and believes that Aboriginal Christians must have nothing to do with tribal corroborees and songs about totemic ancestors. Dickie described his experiences to me when we met at Looma in September 1985.

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‘I am a Walmatjarri man from Noonkanbah and I speak the Walmatjarri language. I used to go around and fight for land rights with a friend of mine. About five years ago we went to Canberra for a land rights meeting with the Government. After all that argument we had at Noonkanbah about the mining company drilling there, I thought it was really going to be helpful for us, but we didn’t realise it would come to nothing. Later on the Crusade came from Warburton and talked about the Word of God. The Lord sought me out and now I’ve decided to live for the Lord until He comes for me. Really, I felt that God had touched my heart, and I came to trust Him. I’ve been a Christian now for three and a half years. We have a community bus like this one at Looma, but it is in the garage at Fitzroy now. Sometimes the missionary takes the bus from UAM to Port Augusta Convention in January. It’s a long way to travel down there through Alice Springs, but a lot of people are hoping to go next year.’

SANDY SPINKS (Deceased) — 1985
CHURCH OF CHRIST MISSION, LOOMA

In contrast to Dickie’s changed views on land rights, which he now says will be fulfilled in heaven, we talked to Sandy Spinks who was very pleased to inform us that his people now controlled a cattle station. Sandy was sitting at home minding his small son while his wife was out. He found a chair for me and explained that he couldn’t take me around to see the church and the vegetable garden because he was looking after the baby. However, he directed me to the church building, and the garden which was just beyond it. There was no doubt about his pride in the garden, and also the cattle station owned by the Looma people. It seemed irrelevant to him that it was not permanently owned, but held on a ninety-nine year lease. He told me a little about himself.

‘I live here in Looma and I’ve been a leader in the council here, but now that’s finished. Another man has taken over that job. I still go to the council meetings, and when the government people come up here, I go with the council to meet them. Although I was born in Fitzroy Crossing, I’ve been here for many years. My wife’s name is Mary; we have one little boy. My wife comes from this country.

‘We asked the government for Mr Anderson’s cattle station, and for money to buy that station. The ADC came and bought it for us. It used to belong to a white fellow, but it is ours now. Aboriginal people are running it. We have many cattle on it and plenty of windmills. About eight of our
people are living on that station. Some of the cattle are used for meat, they
sometimes bring one up here, but they haven’t started selling any cattle yet, as
we only bought it last year. Most of the people here come from cattle stations
like Mayarta, Lulangai and Nerrima.

‘I’m a leader in the church here. I’ve been a Christian since I was young. We
have other leaders, too. Old Limerick, Old Tommy and Old Mick. They came
from Fitzroy, too. Then there are other leaders from this country. The
missionary pastor comes from Camballin to take services, but when he is away
we take our own services.

‘I’ve got a garden behind that church over there that we made for this
community. The vegetables that I grow, I sell in the store and people buy them.
I’m growing watermelons and pumpkins at present. At other times I grow
tomatoes, corn, rockmelons, beans and cabbage. We have plenty of water and a
sprinkler system.’

The prospects at Looma seemed favourable at the time. The council had
forbidden alcohol in the community—which was far enough from towns to
make this possible. There was no drug or petrol sniffing problem. White people,
such as the teachers and the missionary, lived in Camballin, fifteen kilometres
from Looma. But Looma was not the home country of those who had been
forced off the Camballin irrigation project. There was little employment in the
community, except for those few people who lived on the cattle station. The
policy of the owners was to divide the irrigation areas into sharefarming
sections, none of which were likely to be run by Aborigines. It was difficult to
see any viable future for the existence of a community like Looma, which was
supported almost completely by government social service payments. Will the
people of Looma and other communities be satisfied with life in the future,
without prospects of employment or opportunities to earn their own living?

LA GRANGE (PITJADANGA)—1985

At La Grange Mission (south of Broome) we met Rev. K. McKelson who had
been there for many years. He told us that the people there came from five
different language groups: Karratjarri, Nyangumarta, Yulparitja, Mangarla and
Juwulinyi. They had moved in from the cattle country and desert lands to the
coast, and the mission had been established in 1954. At first a variety of
projects had provided full employment for the people. These included a cattle
station, a poultry farm, pig breeding and a fruit and vegetable garden. While
these were maintained under the direction of the mission, these ventures were
successful and there was no one on
unemployment benefits. When the control of the community was taken over by the people themselves, these projects collapsed, all except the garden of bananas, mangoes and citrus fruits which was maintained by the mission.

The staff were very hospitable and made our overnight stay very comfortable. We were shown around the fruit garden and the beautiful church in which pearl shell was beautifully featured, and locally carved wooden strips made up the words ‘Christ Wankai’ (Christ Is Alive). The nursing sister had been woken up the night we were there to treat the wounded after some drunken fights, and as we went around the houses next morning it was obvious that many people were still suffering from the effects of their latest drinking bout. Community advisers, three in nine months, found it difficult to know what to do. The council seemed powerless to act effectively and the mission could only help those few who came to the services.

The mission was an example of the best kind of paternalistic effort. The missionary had learned not only the predominant language, but also some of the languages represented in the community. He had included some of the local culture in the building of the church. Full employment was maintained under the organisation of the mission control, and useful products of food for local consumption and for marketing were produced. The missionary was both the priest and the boss.

The difficulty was that all Aboriginal initiative was stifled. It was the mission policy that was adhered to, and the community had little share in the decision making. The not-unwilling members of the group were the recipients of a benevolent planning in which the mission decided the direction and the purpose of the enterprise. When self-management became the new government policy, then those imposed structures collapsed because true leaders had not been trained for self-management, and community advisers had insufficient knowledge of the people’s situation, language and customs to advise about the alternatives that faced them.

Even the position of community adviser is called into question. If there were enough Aboriginal people with sufficient literary skills to satisfy the government’s demands for paper work, and sufficient training to see the alternatives facing the people, there would be more possibility of success. As it is, white men are appointed who are very often ignorant of the Aboriginal culture and language, insensitive to the needs of the community and oblivious to the tradition of hurtful contacts with white society. Only a very exceptional white person could have all the knowledge and skill needed to fulfil the position of community adviser.
PASTOR DENZIL HUMPHRIES, DERBY—1995

Denzil and Shirley are establishing the Aboriginal Christian Leaders’ Resource and Training Centre. Seminars were held in August and September, and they are involved in many conventions and meetings in the Kimberley region. In 1993 Denzil and Shirley took leave to travel around Australia. They held meetings for Aborigines in various places. As a result of this tour they settled in the Kimberley area in the North-West of WA in 1994. They now live in Derby WA.

‘We’ve been up here for twelve months now. We’ve just settled in to things. We are living in part of the training centre here. There are four units given to the training centre for accommodation and teaching ministry and we are living in two of the units.

‘Our ministry at the moment is training leaders; we are setting up a training resource, not a Bible College, but it is a Christian, Aboriginal training and resource centre. It is to develop leaders within the framework of church leadership, as in: What’s a deacon? What’s an elder? What are secretaries supposed to be doing? So they can go back to their communities, set up a little fellowship, and know all their job descriptions and be able to fulfil them in some way. It is a preparation for making the church strong. We have a special course on Evangelism. I am one of the main speakers, but we have others, and if we get Christian leaders coming through and staying overnight, whether European or Aboriginal, we can use them to come and talk to the students.

‘Of course, there will be those who want to go on to Bible College, and so we can refer them to places like Bimbadeen or Perth Bible College, which are AEF Bible Colleges, or some other Bible College in one of the capital cities. The training centre is primarily for reaching the Kimberleys area, but if there are others who want to come from other states, I think they would be quite welcome.

‘Years ago, we actually started up the Kimberley Christian Fellowship when I was up here as a pastor in Derby, some eighteen or twenty years ago, and during our time away they carried on as Kimberley Christian Fellowship, which unites all Christian bodies and churches with Christian work through the Kimberleys with Christian folk. There is a fellowship in almost all the main towns, and also out in the communities there are little developments. You must understand that around the Fitzroy area there are about forty to fifty communities with little groups of Christians in each community. They are the church within the community.

‘There is not much happening at the moment in regards to women’s ministries, only that the AEF group of women came up from Perth and
went through the Kimberleys contacting Aboriginal women at different communities and churches, and having fellowship with them. This was quite a successful happening this year.

‘What I’d like to see is that there is encouragement of indigenous leaders and development of churches amongst indigenous people in Australia; that financial support and prayer support be given to work within the AEF; and that doors may be opened for Aboriginal speakers to come in and share with churches that may not have been associated with or met Aboriginal leaders, and hear, first hand, the tremendous things that are happening within the Aboriginal churches. The Aboriginal people are heading up work, and I think a lot of European Christians should be prepared to work alongside and under the leadership of Aboriginal Christians.

‘It was quite a privilege and opportunity to go to Haggai Institute in Singapore. I was over there from seventh of February to seventh of March. It was good to meet up with about seventy leaders from twenty-six different countries. It was a wonderful time, six days a week of study for a month and it was pretty hectic. We had some outings, too, and there were breaks which were helpful. The main goal of the teaching was leadership training based on Scripture. It was an encouragement for indigenous people to minister to their own people, and it was taken from the text of II Timothy 2, “Teaching others also”.

‘We have church conventions as well as one which takes in the whole area of the Kimberleys. This one we like to move around to different places as an annual event. More than five hundred people attended the convention at Fitzroy Crossing from the 14th to the 19th of July 1995; some coming from as far west as Broome and from as far east as Lake Nash in Queensland. [Denzil was the main speaker for the convention, taking as his message the Book of Nehemiah who led the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Denzil urged the people to work together as a team. Another convention will be held at Halls Creek in 1996.] The numbers vary from time to time depending on where it is held. It is a long way for people to travel across the Kimberleys. So I think the more central ones are better attended and that would be about two hundred and fifty to three hundred people.

‘The Kimberley Christian Fellowship Convention takes in all the Christian bodies in the Kimberleys. It is held once a year in the Kimberleys, and consists of Aboriginal programs from various areas. The leading of the convention is mainly done by Aboriginal folk, and different areas or venues for the convention have varied from Kununurra, Fitzroy and Derby.’
CHAPTER SEVEN

Joe Lannigan from
Halls Creek

I met Joe at the AEF Convention at Port Augusta in 1986. I noticed him because he was blind and had to depend on others to help him get around in the unfamiliar surroundings; but despite this disability he was outgoing and talked readily and forcibly to those with him. It seemed that he was trying to compensate for his blindness by the extra vigour in his speech. He was optimistic; he told me nothing about the limitations of his loss of sight, but saw the advantages he had gained by this, in training and education at the mission school, and later in Perth. He might have continued as an illiterate stockman on a cattle station if his sight had been normal. His gratitude to God and to the missionaries was evident right through his talk with me. He had no chip on his shoulder.

He was obviously a seasoned traveller. To travel the three thousand kilometres from Halls Creek to Perth, and then to adapt to the climate and difficulties of city life, was quite an achievement. To choose to come to Port Augusta Convention meant travelling over two thousand kilometres across rough roads by mission bus in summer. That certainly wouldn’t be a pleasant sightseeing tour for Joe!

He used the gifts he had: learning to play the guitar without being able to see and then singing to his own accompaniment without being able to read. This meant that everything had to be memorised—the words and the music. He did this well enough to make recordings. Obviously, he had ability to preach and teach in the church and to work in the station country around Halls Creek as an evangelist.

What surprised me was his confidence in telling me about his life. The first day I met him he came with me, sat in the car parked in the shade and told me his story, knowing that I was recording it on tape. It was just before lunch, but the prospect of being late for a meal and joining the end of the long queue
didn’t worry him. He finished his story, even though the lunch bell rang when he was only part way through.

There are many Aborigines who are blind. Joe did not elaborate on the cause of his loss of sight, but it could easily have been measles, which has had a devastating effect on many tribal communities, or perhaps trachoma, which can easily be cured in the early stages if recognised and treated. Whatever the cause, Joe recounts what happened after he became blind, and how he reacted to it.

‘I was born in Halls Creek just after the Second World War, and grew up on a station called Ruby Plains, about sixty kilometres out on the Tanami Track, which leads south-east to Alice Springs. Off that track comes the Canning Stock-route. I had been taught by missionaries to read a little and to learn about the Scriptures as I began to lose my sight in the early 1950s. As a young fellow, I could do a lot of things that normal children could do. I was interested in stock work. Whenever there was a muster on, or branding to be done, or fixing windmills, I was there to help in a small way.

‘When I became blind, the door was opened for me to be introduced to missionaries, and they helped by teaching me to memorise Scriptures and store them in my mind. That helps me today. They taught me how to speak English because out in that station area there was hardly any English spoken. When I finally went to Perth I learned to read and write Braille and other things. When I went to Perth, I didn’t know much English, but after three years there, it was quite the opposite—I could speak English, but I didn’t remember much of my own language. It was my aim to go back to share my knowledge, but one of my dreams was to become a missionary. But how could I be a missionary if my life wasn’t what it should be?

‘It was far from being Christ-like, until one day in 1963 I decided to take heed and take notice of what the missionaries had said, and try out the Christian life. Young people like to try out things and to see what happens. So I decided to ask Christ to come into my life and see what a difference it made. Well straight away there was a difference. I had a peace that I’d never had before, and I was greatly encouraged by Back to the Bible broadcasts which came over from Perth at that time. That was my only means of hearing the Bible in those days, because I did not know how to get Bibles, or where to get them from, until one day an old man, now with
the Lord, brought me the synoptic Gospels of the New Testament in Braille.

‘I read these until I couldn’t read any more, because I wanted to know more and more about Jesus. I couldn’t believe that those stories, which I’d heard in the past, I actually now had in my own hands to read for myself. I remember reading the Christmas story in 1965, and as a result of me becoming a Christian, my Dad and Mum also became Christians. When I had come back from school, I was asked to read the lesson. My father was just starting to read the Scriptures together with my mother and they were so happy to hear me read. They were later quite effective in the church at Halls Creek.

‘I was happy because it was my first introduction to doing something in church. It was a real challenge because it was under the ministry of Pastor Frank Johnson, a coloured man who came into our church, then mostly run by white missionaries. Not that we had any colour bar, or were against missionaries, but it was a great thrill to have a fellow Aboriginal like him for the few years he was there, and an encouragement for me to read in the church.

‘After a few years when I went down to the city, I became very lonely and decided to take on music. I bought myself an old guitar for ten pounds, but couldn’t do much with it because I couldn’t find anyone to teach me to play. But in 1969–70 I went into the College of Music in Perth and I got free lessons to teach me to play the guitar. This opened up many other opportunities, and still is opening up opportunities. After that I wanted to further my education in clerical typing. I had learned this in college, and found out that I couldn’t learn much more because I already knew what I had to know, but they helped me to learn it properly.

‘After that I went to the Gnowangerup Bible Training Institute which was then run by the UAM, but has now been taken over by the AEF, in Perth. I spent two years there. You may wonder how I got on in college. I did have a Braille machine to help with my notes, and I was able to type the answers on an ordinary typewriter. By this time I was given a lot of help by people who bought a full Bible in Braille for me. I was very happy about that because I had Scriptures that I have been reading, but the covers and the pages got worn out. I had taken it with me and enjoyed reading. It was wonderful that those people helped me replace it with a new Bible.

‘After I had been through college, I went into full-time service with the Church of Christ mission in Norseman, under the Federal Board in Perth. I am still connected with them today. I spent three years with Sonny Graham who is a foundation member of the AEF. He helped me in showing me
how to do things in church, and gave me confidence taking funerals and other services which I needed to know.

‘I went back then to the north and unfortunately got into problems with land rights and other things, instead of doing spiritual work. Besides this, Halls Creek Church was having its own problems. I talked with some people down south about this to see if they could help us. As a result, the local church is thriving these days because people prayed and God undertook for us and has brought His people back to hear His Word. I’m very pleased I’ve been at Halls Creek because they are interested and supporting me in what I’m doing.

‘To add to that, I’ve been bringing out Christian music cassette tapes. Also, though at times I’ve had falls, I’ve been able to get up and carry on in the strength of God, because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We can only do that if we allow Him to give strength to us.

‘AEF has the opportunity of reaching people throughout this nation, and I believe this is a turning point in the AEF, because people are getting right with one another, and with God. God has been able to speak to me at this convention, to help me to learn that there is opportunity to be able to equip ourselves as full-time evangelists. I’m working as an evangelist wherever people want me, not to tell them what to do, but to help them and do what they want me to do for a week or so. A couple of times I helped out at the Warburton Crusade.’

I mentioned to Joe that I had met Pastor Jonathan Bates in Warburton Ranges. He told me that Jonathan had married his niece. I was amazed that Joe would talk to me, a previously unknown white stranger, and tell me his story so readily and intimately, although he couldn’t see me or watch my face as he told his story. His confidence was not in my reactions, but in his Lord and Saviour.

The story told by his niece’s husband follows.

A PASTOR FROM WARBURTON

Jonathan was on holidays and helping in the Warburton community shop in September 1984. He recorded this account of his work at Halls Creek when he came up to the adviser’s house after work.

‘I have been involved in full-time Christian service with the UAM since 1979, after training for two years at Gnowangerup, under Don Milne and Phil Devenish, who were principals at that time. I originally came from the Warburton Ranges people, the Ngaanyatjarra, from the Western Desert group.
Last year, in January 1983, I was called by the Halls Creek People’s Church as a full-time pastor to minister in that church and around the nearby cattle stations. I have another friend working with me who is the superintendent and takes part in the meetings, and gives the Bible teaching.

‘We have seen a lot of changes in the Fitzroy–Halls Creek area. There have been many people recently who have trusted the Lord as their Saviour, and we have seen the church growing in the town and out in the cattle station communities. In the town they have started their own Aboriginal church and worked for it in fellowship. There are five or six cattle stations in which they have their own churches. At present I am not able to go out to these stations as I am tied up with full-time church work in the town community.

‘When I had just graduated from Gnowangerup, I went to the Port Augusta Convention which the AEF had just started in Stirling, near Port Augusta. At that time there were only a very few Christian Aborigines there. In the meetings held in the Town Hall, a lot of men responded to the preaching and became Christians, but generally things were very quiet with only about seventy in the camp. It was hard to get a response because of the heavy drinking. As the convention grew each year, we had a lot of fellowship and things began to improve.

‘I have a wife and four children. They all came to Port Augusta a couple of years ago. My wife Kathy helps me a lot as she reads English fluently and prays for me. When she was young, a missionary taught her to read the Bible and to memorise it. Her people come from the Kimberley and Halls Creek; her mother was a Tjaru woman who married a drover from Queensland, and they lived on a cattle station. So my wife was brought up to speak both English and Tjaru.

‘At Halls Creek I was working with the mission. We used to go out to the cattle stations taking meetings during the week and visiting the people there. We travelled around because in those days there were a lot of people in the stations before the communities were set up, and before the drinking became so heavy. One of the things that challenged me happened when we went on our second trip over the ranges. When we had our meeting in one place, two old men and five old women came. During the meeting four of them raised their hands as a sign they wanted to trust the Lord. Next morning one old lady had gone to sleep and had died in her sleep. But this old lady had trusted the Lord the night before. This had quite an effect on the older people, and made them think. There was no sadness and crying for her. It helped me to see that the visiting and preaching was worthwhile.

‘The pictures that Wilf Douglas drew taught me a lot, especially the one of the two ways. Many, many people were on the broad road, but on the
narrow road there were very few. I want to keep on that narrow one that leads to a better life. On the broad road there are too many people drinking and fighting as shown in the picture. The message brings it to our minds so that we continue to trust the Lord.

‘A lot of old people still believe in the Rainbow Serpent, the rain snake or the water snake. Wilf Douglas has drawn a picture showing that the snake first appeared in the beginning of the Old Testament, in Genesis, starting from Adam and Eve. Jesus was promised to overcome it and put His foot on the snake’s head. Cain got angry and killed his brother Abel, but Seth escaped. People tried to kill Moses, but he escaped. Jesus died on the Cross and defeated the old serpent. The story goes right through the Bible.

‘We had a really good time when the Crusader Aboriginal evangelists came to us. Folks from Wingelina and Blackstone joined Terry and Donny. We had a Bible teacher, Bruce Smoker, speaking to us also. Terry and Donny took the meetings, and a lot of others were sharing what had happened to them because of the drinking and fighting, and how God had changed them when they heard the message of Jesus. Fitzroy, Halls Creek, and folk came from all over, One Arm Point, Derby and Broome and other places, Wyndham and Kununurra, and Port Hedland. There were a lot of people there at Halls Creek. Bernard from Giles and Terry from Warburton went up for those special meetings. The people whose lives were changed are going on with the Lord. They have their meetings themselves in their different communities and they are moving out to other places to share their experiences.

‘They had some very good meetings at Fitzroy Crossing and Looma. A lot of people went from Marble Bar and Strelley to these meetings. At Fitzroy there is an old blind tribal man who is a keen Christian leader. He went down to visit the Strelley people. I took old blind Limerick when we went to Adelaide for the World Vision Aboriginal Leaders’ Conference at Flinders University in 1975. The Solomon Islanders came and spoke to us, and the late Bishop Festo Kivengere from Africa urged us to be strong Aboriginal Christians and not to lose our Aboriginal identity. Limerick had been down to Port Augusta on some occasions and likes to use his strong voice to sing in the choir. Although he is old and blind, he really loves the Lord.

‘The people here at Warburton need Bible study and teaching. They have a fellowship meeting every week night with good singing, and Gospel preaching on Sundays. Those who start in the Christian life need to go on with the Lord and to stand against drink. A few people read the Scriptures in their own language, but those who read in English find it difficult to
understand and need teaching about what it all means. They need to have the whole Bible. At present they have part of the New Testament in their language. There are some cassette tapes here, and these are good to listen to, but it is better to read and think over what has been read. It is like a dog with a good meaty bone, he can take some time to chew it over and get strength from it.

‘We need the New Testament and the Old Testament, page to page, reading from the Old to the New and from the New to the Old. Sometimes I think we have got things wrong, but then I see it clearly in the Old Testament. It is good to see ourselves in both. Sometimes I like to read a Psalm of praise, and then I go to the Acts to see the Holy Spirit working.

‘The Aboriginal people can learn to run their own churches, but the administration is difficult. They can run the services, but find trouble about the finance. When they are travelling on a crusade, they like to go as a group, but that takes a lot of money. There were many people giving money at first, but it needs to be organised. Now we need teaching as well as the crusades. There is one man in this area, Bernard, who is a good Bible teacher, but others are keener on evangelism. In the crusades they call people to God. In the story about the crippled man, Jesus said to him, “Get up and walk”. He got up and he walked. The crusades call people to get up, but when many people respond and get up, they need to learn not only to stand up, but also to walk. Some people come into trouble that they need to face and go through, not to give in and sit down again.’

UAM Worker and Elder, Halls Creek

Pastor Bates has just completed a year’s study at the Presbyterian College in Melbourne in 1995, and is continuing in 1996.

‘I’m finding my studies a bit hard, but I’m really enjoying them and learning with good fellowship and good teachers. Our ministry is among the Aboriginal people and the local church at Halls Creek. We have a mixed congregation of white and Aboriginal people. Our pastor who is a white bloke, and I’m an Elder of the church. We have a team of folk in the church that do outreach and singing. I also have an itinerant ministry into the cattle stations and the Aboriginal communities to encourage and share in service, Scripture reading and prayer with those who are unable to come in. We take some picture books. Counselling is another part of our ministry. We also take Scripture classes and Bible Studies in town, and we are in the KCF [Kimberley Christian Fellowship] here in the Kimberleys, where Christian people from different churches combine once a year to have a convention, so that people can come together to meet and train the pastors.
Sometimes we have out-station people come in as speakers. Sometimes Melbourne people take part.

‘Sometimes the community council help. There are five or six out-stations and about two or three hundred people on them, but the number of people we have contact with varies from five to one hundred, because the people come and go. But we have small groups in the communities, and we try to encourage them by sitting with them and sharing.

‘We live by faith, and people support us, like prayer groups, and we trust the Lord for our needs. Our four kids have all grown up now, and we don’t have any little kids at home.

‘I was there when the revival took place and it has left a big impact. We saw a real work of the Holy Spirit but, because we had no teaching and no encouragement, leaders like Terry and Donny Robinson and Jacky McLean struggled because they had no teaching or counselling. But there are a few other Christians still going on like Old Limmerick, he is a real Father of Faith in the Kimberleys, a faithful old man. Livingston West is still very keen. He is the Chairman of the Community and the church leader at Warburton Ranges.

‘In regards to the corroborees, we can be there to encourage the people, but we can’t take part.

‘I’ve been with the UAM for twenty-six years now, and the aim of our ministry is to train Christian leaders. One of the things I would like is for Aboriginal leaders and white people to work together and learn from one another. So they will be one people across the cultures and learn from both sides how to work together. The Dreamtime and anything else that can be used in the culture and the ways people think about God and His work. To break the idea that Aboriginal people have to become white to be Christian.’
CHAPTER EIGHT

Fires on the Beach

At Numbulwar, I stood near the loading wharf and watched little family groups sitting around fires on the beach, cooking fish and warming themselves in the drizzling rain. The community is situated on the western shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, isolated from road traffic during the wet season and dependent for supplies on boats and planes. However, there are plenty of fish, and occasionally dugong in the gulf waters, and barramundi can be caught in the Rose River which flows into the gulf just south of the settlement. There are modern three-bedroom houses with electricity and hot and cold water, as well as smaller huts and shelters. The school receives satellite-beamed television, and the hospital has radio contact with the Darwin medical service. There is a council office, a small supermarket, an outdoor picture screen, an all-weather airfield and an Anglican church with an Aboriginal pastor and a team of lay workers.

It is easy to look at the school activities, the supermarket sales, the picture shows, and consider this is a well-organised community, successfully adopting the white man’s culture. Only by getting down to the camp fires on the beach, talking with the people in those family groups, or meeting with the Christian fellowship group out under the stars, can one begin to understand some of the forces that shape Numbulwar.

The community was settled by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) after the ‘Peace Expedition’ of 1933. Just to the north of Numbulwar five Japanese fishermen had been killed at Caledon Bay, in reprisal for interference with Aboriginal women. A police constable sent to investigate was also speared to death after holding an Aboriginal woman prisoner for questioning. There was a public outcry about these killings and a demand for the usual police punitive party of those days ‘to teach the Aborigines a lesson’.
The CMS proposed a peace expedition instead of indiscriminate slaughter by police, and sent three unarmed missionaries, Rev. H. E. Warren, Rev. A. Dyer and D. Fowler, to establish peaceful relations with the Caledon Bay people, and to find out the cause of the killing. This offer was accepted by the government and no doubt saved the lives of Aborigines living around that area. Eventually two men were taken to Darwin for trial, and CMS was encouraged to set up a mission in the vicinity. This was established in 1952 when Alf Mercer and a group of Nunggubuyu people from Roper River (Ngukurr) arrived to settle in their home country. Their ceremonial corroboree ground was on a sandhill near where the settlement was established. Keith Cole gives a more detailed account of the early days of Numbulwar in his book, *A History of the Church Missionary Society of Australia*.¹

Rev. Earl Hughes began a study of the Nunggubuyu language and anthropology of the area in 1956, and this has formed a useful basis for the spiritual work of the mission since that time. One important visitor, whose messages were very well received, was the late Festo Kivengere, a black African from Uganda who visited Arnhem Land in 1959, and who met several Aboriginal Christian leaders from that area at a leadership training conference in Adelaide sixteen years later. Bishop Festo urged them to be proud of being Aborigines and to value their heritage and culture. He said they could be better Aborigines because they were Christians.

One of the many characteristics that Aborigines can be proud of is sharing. There are many stories told to their children around the camp fire that help to teach this attribute. A significant story is that of the greedy boy. The story comes from the country just north of Numbulwar and has been recorded by Allen.² Told to Aboriginal children, it encourages them to share what they have.

### THE GREEDY ONE

‘A man of the sea hawk totem had a family of six children, three boys and three girls. Five of his children were generous in sharing the food they collected or caught. But the oldest one was greedy and refused to share whatever he got. He was like the sea hawk, his totemic ancestor, who took fish from other birds. One day the father took his sons out fishing in a

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dugout canoe. Their only catch was a large barramundi caught by the greedy son. When they came back to shore at dusk, this boy grabbed the fish and ran off into the mangrove swamp with it, refusing to share it with his family.

‘Some time later, the father took his sons fishing again and they brought back a boatload of fish, but only cooked one large barramundi which he shared with the two youngest sons, but refused to give the older, greedy one anything. He was told that this was in punishment for his selfishness on the previous occasion. The greedy one wandered off down the beach watching the sea hawk soar above. He imitated the movements of the bird and changed into the form of his totemic spirit.’

YULKI TELLS HOW THEY SHARE THE MESSAGE IN 1982

Yulki Nunggumajbarr has gained a Certificate of Theology from Nungalinya College in Darwin, and helps her brother Rupert and others in the Christian work at Numbulwar. She told me how their fellowship group had received help from Elcho Island people, and how they shared this message with other communities. This is one of the few opportunities I had to talk with an Aboriginal woman.

‘When we first had a visit from the group of Elcho people, there were many from our community who came to give their lives to the Lord. We were crying and praising the Lord, especially when we saw people of our own family, my sister and my cousin, coming out. The people are still going on, although some have gone back to gambling, and some go out to other places to get drunk. The community doesn’t like drinking here. The wives and old men don’t like it.

‘We always have a fellowship meeting every night where different people speak, read the Bible and lead the choruses. We have two groups because we have a lot of people. If we are invited to go to another community, the first group goes and number two group stays home. Then next time they change over. People usually send us a telegram to say that they want us to come to their community and we like to go to share our faith.

‘We’ve been to Ramingining, Maningrida, Bamyili, Beswick, Umbakumba and Angurugu. We use our own money to pay expenses of fares and clothes. We take time to practise the choir songs, some in our own language and some in English. There are people at Borroloola, Bamyili and Roper River [Ngukurr] who know our language, so we sing sometimes in Nunggubuyu. Some here understand their language so we
find ways of singing which they can understand when we go there. I’ve been to Maningrida and to Ramingining.

‘We’ve had a little group of Christians here for a long time but it is growing bigger. Even before Elcho Island people came, we had Christian meetings here together. The Elcho people were invited to come. They paid their own fare, but we organised everything here for them. Some stayed at my brother Rupert’s house. He organised everything for us.

‘When we go out to share God’s message, Rupert arranges the journey on a charter plane or he books tickets on the mail plane. He organises everything. People are selected to go, and they give him their money. He is the leader and Galiliwa is the second leader. The telegrams come to Rupert about the trip, and he sends a reply for us.

‘When we went to Bamyili, we had a lot of those people coming to the meetings. All the people at Bamyili wanted to come. The meetings were in the church, but many people couldn’t get in there. We travelled by road from here on Friday night and came back on Sunday night at midnight. Some went by plane to Roper River and then all travelled by road to Beswick. At Bamyili, we had a service on Sunday night at seven o’clock and then we travelled back after that by two buses to Roper. Gumbuli, the minister from Roper, went with us. We also had a Toyota Landcruiser to help with the transport. It was a happy time of sharing deep fellowship with a lot of people, many gave their lives to the Lord.

‘We have had healing services here when some people have come to tell us they want these services. They send someone to tell the leader to come with the fellowship. Some of our old people have passed away, after really living for the Lord, having given their whole lives to Him.

‘The missionaries gave the message to us, and this message was brought into our hearts by the Lord. We have been baptised here. I was baptised in the little creek just near here. Perhaps you will see it when you go past it. When I was young I was baptised and then, when I grew older, I taught the children. Now I’m a grandmother and have been a Christian for many years.’

**WUMADJBARR BIBLE CAMP**

While I was at Numbulwar, a sacred ceremony was being held in the sandhills not far from the community houses. The ceremonies were an important part of life and were continued despite the introduction of the white-fellow electricity, food and transport.
Modelled, to some extent, on the corroboree, was the annual camp at Wumadjbarr, where over a hundred people camped out in the bush for a week, just a few miles from the township. The site at Wumadjbarr was a beautiful area. Just after the wet season there were thousands of waterlilies covering the billabong which was a prolific breeding place for fish and ducks. Paperbark trees lined the banks, providing shade and firewood.

While people at Numbulwar have not attended Sunday services in great numbers, they found these camps very attractive. They drove out in their own vehicles, or rode in the community bus, and camped out in tents, under awnings, or in bush shelters. They brought their own food, although some could be bought from the shop lorry which drove out each afternoon. The nursing sister went out regularly to treat anyone needing medical attention.

Each morning there was a meeting by the banks of the billabong to listen to a message from the Bible and to discuss questions in different groups. This was a meeting place for people from different areas and different language groups to come together, to listen to talks, to enjoy the singing and to get to know everybody. In the afternoons people were free to talk, to go fishing and to cook food. Some just talked or slept, and others wandered off into the bush to explore. Although it is a very attractive area, care has to be taken not to infringe on the rights of the owner of the land or to leave the camping area untidy and littered.

In the evenings, the meetings were conducted by Aboriginal leaders, with singing and opportunity to tell others about their experiences in the new spiritual life. Again the atmosphere was like that of a social corroboree which had the function of teaching the right way to the younger generation. The significant difference was that the teaching at Wumadjbarr was from the Bible. Similar Bible camps have been held on Groote Eylandt and in other places.

**OUT-STATIONS**

We travelled by Toyota Landcruiser to the out-station at Walker River in 1982, about ninety kilometres from Numbulwar. The first section of the road had been graded, so it was in first-class condition, until we came to a large washout about two metres deep and five metres wide. A double set of petrol drums had been cut and welded together to form a culvert but the water had just washed them, and the gravel filling, clean out. We managed to drive around this. However, there was worse to come. The ironstone rocks jutted up in the roadway in some places, in others the road was a sandy creek bed. The worst places were the watercourses, where the banks
were steep and slippery, and the marshes, where the rains had thoroughly soaked the black soil. In the end, the road deteriorated into the tracks of other vehicles across the grass, dodging around the paperbark trees and bumping over the stones.

The beginning of the dry season was marked with a show of wild flowers and flowering trees and shrubs: the creamy blossom of the acacias, the orange banksia flowers and the different types of grevillea. The pandanus and Livingstone palms spread graceful foliage over the bush. In the morning we saw only one buffalo, a dead one, but in the evening there were numbers of these animals charging across the plain. One huge bull stood and looked at us with menacing horns, so we drove on before he decided to charge. A couple of black and white ducks had a very young family of yellow and black fluffy ducklings. It was amazing how quickly these tiny ducklings could swim to shelter under the branches of an overhanging tree.

We camped by the Harris River for lunch, where we could watch the purple and white waterlilies and throw scraps to the myriads of little fish. Occasionally a larger fish, a barramundi or a catfish, would plop above the surface and send rings of small wavelets to disturb the reflection of the paperbark trees.

The out-station had a radio mast and solar energy equipment for charging the twelve-volt battery. This radio equipment could provide communication between a number of different out-stations and Numbulwar. Instead of waiting for one conversation to finish, there could be five or six people speaking at once without jamming each other out.

The school was an open tent with some of the children’s paintings decorating the sloping canvas walls. It is under the direct control of the local community so that parents are able to impart their own values and ideas rather than having a group of white teachers teaching their children. This became especially desirable when they saw that many white teachers were not really there to serve the community and left as soon as possible. One year, seven out of nine teachers left the school either during or at the end of the school year. Although the school was supervised from Numbulwar, the Aboriginal teacher operated mostly on her own. There was one large corrugated iron house, half-a-dozen bush timber and iron huts, a few shelters and six or eight tents.

The garden grows coconuts, paw paws, bananas, mangoes, sweet potatoes and cassava to supplement the bush foods, which include waterlily stems and seeds. The people go fishing in both the river and sea for barramundi, catfish, turtle and dugong, and hunt in the surrounding bush for buffalo, scrub cattle, emus, kangaroos and wallabies.
While we boiled the billy by the riverside, the people prepared for a service. One man, who wanted to appear really respectable, shaved his face and put on a brightly coloured shirt. The children donned T-shirts with most inappropriate inscriptions, such as ‘I’m a little stinker’, and the women put on clean frocks. We sat on jerry cans, logs or blankets set out in the shade.

There were about a dozen out-stations, some bigger than others, from Walker River in the north to Wiyacabar, 125 km to the south. Some were only occupied during the dry season because of the difficulties of transport in the wet, though Walker River people lived there right throughout the year. The materials for housing were provided from government funds, but the erection of the houses was the responsibility of the people living there. Separate funds were provided for road-making, supplies and transport for out-stations, so that these out-stations didn’t have to compete with Numbulwar council for their funds. The people enjoy living out in their own country rather than on someone else’s homeland. It is quiet and free from the quarrels and upsets of the mixed Aboriginal community as well as the non-Aboriginal people at Numbulwar, where sometimes clashes in personalities result in trouble between staff members and workers so that families may leave at short notice. This can result in inconvenience to the community, as when the bank agency was closed and the council were unable to have access to money to pay wages because the keys were sent to Darwin. This meant a plane had to be chartered to bring cash across from Groote Eylandt.

REV. RUPERT NUNGGUMADJBARR

Rupert studied at Nungalinya College in Darwin and has now been ordained to conduct services in the Church of the Holy Spirit, Numbulwar. At the time I spoke to him he was in charge of the out-station resources—roads, supplies and money for the small communities where people had chosen to live in their home country. He and his wife, Barbara Bara, had been in the fellowship for a long time before the Elcho team came to minister with the Renewal Movement.

‘When the Elcho Island people started to preach the Gospel here at Numbulwar, the Holy Spirit touched people here in this settlement and they gave their lives to Christ. This really changed people in our community and brought peace to us all. We certainly needed that change because there was real trouble in this place.'
‘We had trouble with the boats that brought liquor to our people. Men would fight with each other and with their wives because of this drink. Other people would go off to Borroloola, Darwin or Katherine and bring back bottles of drink, and fights would start again. Nowadays, those who want to drink, go off to these towns and come back when they are sober. They can’t bring grog here.

‘We had trouble, too, with children breaking into the store. People would spend all their money on drink and neglect their children. When the children were starving they would break into the store to get food. Now there have been only a couple of cases of that recently because children are better cared for and everyone is happier. People nowadays use their money to go to Katherine Christian Convention or with a team to visit another community. They pay their own fares to these places. Some went to the Katherine Convention for the first time and, when they came back, there was a real change in their lives. If people want us to visit their settlement, we get a letter from them or they use the radio to talk to us. They contact us first and then we tell them just when we are able to go. We begin to make arrangements and find about ten people who want to go and can pay for their share in the two charter planes.

‘We have been to Ramingining, Borroloola, Maningrida, Beswick and Bamyili settlements, and people from Ramingining arranged to visit our community. They arranged to visit Gove and then visit here. Because these visits take a lot of money, we don’t plan to go out often to other places. Warrabri people sent us a letter asking us to go there, but it is a long way and we’ve had all these other trips to other settlements, so we are still thinking about it.

‘I’ll tell you how we organise our visits, like the one down to Bamyili. We have to pay for our fares to go by plane down to Roper or to Katherine. Then we pay for a bus to go from there to Bamyili. I talk to the pilot of the charter plane, and he gives me an estimation of the price from Numbulwar to Katherine, about five hundred and sixty-nine dollars. Then we tell each person their share. Preparation for the trip includes the choir practising the singing of special songs and invitation hymns which we use before we ask people to give their lives to Christ. We have prayer meetings, and also prepare the messages before we go. That means we have to organise who is going to be the preacher, who is going to lead the singing, who will open in prayer, who will close the meetings in prayer and who is going to give testimonies. All that has to be done before we leave here.

‘When Elcho people came over here they had a pattern of running their meetings. It was all carefully arranged. We have a little different pattern. First we have singing, then we have a time of prayer. On weekends we
have time for testimonies and singing before the preaching of the Bible story. Everything has to be organised properly before we go and we have to arrange for some people to get back for work here too.

‘Our fellowship has been small recently because the main ceremonies have been going on at the same time. Some of the leaders attend the fellowship for a while and then go off for the ceremonies afterwards. After these ceremonies finish, the fellowship will have more people again.’

Responsible Aboriginal leaders are the basis on which good community relationships can develop.

**SELF-MANAGEMENT**

A new situation has developed in Aboriginal communities. Instead of control by Government agencies or missions, the control rests in the community council which is elected by the people themselves. The council can apply to the government for finance to run the necessary works in the area, and to employ an adviser, an accountant, an electrician, a plumber, a mechanic, a builder, a shop manager, and so on. Instead of missionaries doing these jobs, these employees are directly responsible to the council and work with, and alongside, Aboriginal people. It is not always easy for white employees to accept the reversal of authority. Once the mission was in charge and dictated the policy, and how it should be carried out. Now, in some cases, the same people are employed by the Aboriginal council and have to work for the people they once directed.

However, the builder, the shop manager, the mechanic and others, each have their own limited area of responsibility, and work with Aborigines whom they influence in different ways. The wrong person can be very disruptive in a community, and do a lot of damage. The crucial stage is the selection of these staff members—the advertising and the interviewing. This responsibility has sometimes been given to whites, but ideally it is carried out by the councils themselves who can then specify certain requirements of character and practices. The council has direct responsibility to decide whether alcohol should be outlawed, and employees come understanding these restrictions. Because most have had no cross-cultural training or experience, they can often offend Aboriginal people because of their ignorance of the local customs, or in some cases, by their deliberate flouting of accepted behaviour.

The government is financially responsible for education and health, so there are teachers and medical staff living on these settlements, sometimes
in a little enclave of their own. The mission, if it still operates, does the translation work and the preparation of tapes and other Christian teaching materials.

Because of its isolation from Darwin, Katherine and other towns and mining complexes, Numbulwar has a reasonable chance to pursue the policy of self-management granted by the Labor Government in 1973. The difficulties of having several different tribal groups, with their recognisable land rights and accepted leaders, can be overcome with Christian cooperation.

Rupert’s ordination as church leader, and the strong Christian lead given by the fellowship, has helped the community council to iron out some of the difficulties. At least the leaders of the council and of the church are Nunggubuyu people, and understand what is being thought and said by the family groups gathered around those little camp fires on the beach.

GALILIWA NUNGGARRGALU—ASSISTANT MINISTER AT NUMBULWAR

‘All the ladies and men help us. Our minister’s name is Rupert Nunggumajbarr. He is the leader of the church. He is the Reverend, also he works in his own time and he works in his own home. Every morning we have the church and Holy Communion, and every night we have fellowship in my home, my place; some people come and some don’t come to the fellowship and the church.

‘We do translation in our own language, work for the Bible Society in our own language, choruses and hymns. Sometimes we go out for the funerals to take the services and singing. The church at Numbulwar is going very well. Sometimes we do not have meetings because our minister is sick, and I take his place for a while and sometimes the minister from Roper [Ngukurr], Rev. Gumbuli Warramara, helps us here. He tells us which way to do this or that. He has been ordained for many years now. He originally came from Groote Eylandt but when he was young he grew up at Ngukurr. I used to do singing in Elcho Church— singing and didgeridoo and all that. Sometimes the people go to church and sometimes they just have a sing. Some work in the Numbulwar council store, in the office and school, they work in the hospital and the fast food shop. We’ve got our own sister, community nurse. Some boys play football, very active people. Some people get pensions. When they have fellowship groups there are different tribal people. About twelve different tribes.
‘I am a leader in the church and I share the Word when the minister is very sick and not walking much. The church council and some Christian people chose me to be a second minister who helps with the sacraments. There are non-Aboriginals who attend; Peter Palmer, and his wife is the church worker, and the MAF pilot Dale Chesson.

‘We have Sunday School in the church Tuesday and Wednesday, because the children don’t come much on Sunday. There is Religious Instruction at school. It is good and we help it together.

‘We need more people, more people to fellowship and talk with us and to the minister, but at the moment we are not doing that at all because people are going separately. So only a few people are going to the fellowship, and the boys they play instruments and some they sing too. They are happy in singing, but not many men come to the convention; I don’t know why they don’t come.’
‘A long time ago, in the Dreamtime, there was fire in Arnhem Land, and fire in Queensland. An old man was sitting with his wives, on the beach at Caledon Bay on the west coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria. They were looking towards the east. As he sat there, ashes from another fire were carried on the wind and settled on his nose. He grabbed the ash from his nose, smelled it and said, “This is not from our fires, it comes from the east, a long, long way off across the sea. I don’t know if there is land over there somewhere”.

‘His wives said, “You must be mistaken because we have some fires here”. “But I can smell that it is different”, he said, “I will go towards the east and try to discover where it comes from”.

‘So they worked hard and made a big canoe and a big rope for the anchor. They collected all the food and filled baler and trumpet shells with water. Next day the man set out on the ocean. He navigated by a small bright star, not the morning star, but a smaller one. He travelled for many days and eventually landed at Grave Island, near Thursday Island. From there he went on to a high mountain that he could see on the mainland with fire coming out of it. He wondered what was causing that fire.

‘He climbed up to the top of that mountain and found the fire-spirit man sitting there by a big fire. As he came up he asked the spirit man, “What are you doing here? You are from Arnhem Land aren’t you?” The spirit man answered, “Yes, but I’ve married someone here and I’ll be staying forever in this place”.

CHAPTER NINE

Different Fires—Stories Told by Murrabuda

Wurramarrba
‘After that they talked together and went down to the group of people on the beach where the Lockhart River flows down. They found all different kinds of handicrafts and spears and fighting gear. He was able to get one of each of those things to take back to show his people the different woomeras and spears. Then he went back to his people at Caledon Bay and showed all those things.

‘In Arnhem Land people had a different woomera, a skinny one. When they saw the Queensland woomera the people all said, “That is a very interesting woomera”. It has a nose on the side to hook into the end of the spear. That won’t make any noise to frighten the animals. Here we have a hook on the flat side of the woomera.

‘The Lockhart River people had a different way of making fire. They used a string to twirl the stick, whereas here in Arnhem Land we used our two hands. They used a different kind of tinder to start the fire. We put some dry grass in our hands and blow the spark in it until it lights. They didn’t have a didgeridoo, but used only boomerangs and tapping sticks in their dances. That old man was able to join them and show them his didgeridoo. So those from Arnhem Land had different ways from those in Queensland, and they were able to share with those other people, their dances, their weapons and their fire-making. The old man called all the tribes round about and showed them the dances and songs of those people in Queensland. They used their own didgeridoo and the music sticks to help them learn the new things.’

**HIS LOCATION**

Murrabuda, who told this story, lives on Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria. He worked on the mission supply boat from Roper River Mission (Ngukurr) to Groote for three years. Later, when the Groote Eylandt Manganese Company (GEMCO) started mining, he worked for them for seven years until he was asked to become the president of the Aboriginal council at Angurugu. He was one of the Christian leaders who came to Adelaide in 1975 for the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Leaders’ Conference sponsored by World Vision. An African bishop, the late Festo Kivengere, was the main speaker there, so Murrabuda would have learned of that different fire from the East African revival, as well as sharing experiences with other leaders from different parts of Australia.

While warming themselves at these different fires, the leaders on Groote have their own fires to build up where change has come very rapidly to the previously isolated people living there. Murrabuda lives in a climate of change.
He came to manhood before the education program had started for his people at Angurugu. He learned by working on boats, in the fruit and vegetable garden and later in the mining town where he was a security officer. By contrast, his son is studying computer technology and has worked in a bank for five years, and two of his daughters work in the local supermarket.

RELATIONS WITH GEMCO IN 1982

‘Some Aboriginal people from other communities visit our island and ask how we have such a good agreement with the mining company. We say that we started with the idea that we would work together, both blacks and whites. We don’t have much problem in that area. We just live together normally and enjoy a good life because of the mining. They are happy to get the manganese. We get employment as well as royalties. There are good relations between GEMCO, the government and our people. The company continues to pay royalties to the Aboriginal community as well as to the government.

‘We invest the money in the bank in Darwin and use the interest from that money to help us in the community. We have built a community hall, a
good supermarket and a fast food store at Angurugu and these are run for our own people. In other parts of the Northern Territory relations between mining companies and Aborigines have not been so good.’

When manganese ore was discovered on Groote Eylandt, the Church Missionary Society\(^1\) took out mining rights on behalf of the Aboriginal community. They were then able to help the Aborigines to negotiate conditions under which the mining company could work on the island. Employment of Aboriginal people on the same conditions as whites and the payment of royalties to the local people were two of these conditions in the eighties.

‘Some men are working for the mining company, GEMCO. Their fathers used to depend on food from the sea—fish, turtles and dugong, or meat from wallabies or stray buffaloes and cattle on the mainland. Now they can get food from the shops and supermarkets.

‘The company works different shifts—day shift, evening shift or night shift. Some of the Aboriginal men are not used to working at night, so after working for a while and getting a lot of money, a few of them get mixed up with drinking problems and lose their jobs. The shift work sometimes takes too much of the Aboriginal man’s time and spoils his social and family life.

‘There have been problems over the last few years with the children of some of these families. It is surprising just how they learn, but some of these boys have been taken into Darwin gaol. They mix there with boys from other areas and learn many things from them. It happens when the father goes off drinking and not caring for his children. The young lads then go off with other young people sniffing petrol. This creates a big problem because it affects their minds and I don’t know how we are going to stop them.

‘We had a missionary from Darwin working in the social security area, who went to talk to these lads. He has planned to come back to talk to the parents later. Not many young lads are involved in this, only a few, but especially those who have drinking fathers have been getting worse and worse. Those who have sober parents can be helped.’

**MEN’S FELLOWSHIP**

‘The Christian fellowship started in 1985 among the men. Before then, men were poorly represented amongst the Christians. The Spirit of God

helped them to start back again, to confess their sin and return to God. The leader was Aringari, our late minister, but we take it in turns reading and giving studies and testimonies. This is working well and growing gradually. Fifteen or twenty men have come back to be Christ’s followers. We had a group of men who met every fortnight down at the seashore where they had a meeting to praise and sing, with a guitar, around a big camp fire, or with wives, brothers and sisters together in a house. So Christian Aborigines have come back to new life again.

‘We had a meeting of a group of men from the church to talk about making up a music group, with an electric guitar, an ordinary guitar, a ukulele, a didgeridoo and tapping sticks. We made a beautiful sound with these instruments, singing Scripture choruses. We used a big didgeridoo for the low notes and a small didgeridoo for the high notes, and two sets of tapping sticks— heavy and light ones also. These give a beautiful sound for Christian songs and choruses. We use Scripture choruses and this beautiful harmony. This is a harmony mixing the old culture and the new.’

NEW SONGS

‘One of the Christian old ladies, a leader of the fellowship group at Umbakumba, died suddenly. Her brother, a heavy drinker who didn’t believe in God, used to mock God and ask, “Where are you God? If you are God come down and show me!” He used to say these things to annoy his sister. One day his sister died, and that night the brother dreamed that he saw his sister standing near the Cross. Jesus was there, and all the sky around the Cross everywhere was red like the blood of Jesus Christ. His sister said to him, “Here I am in God’s hands. You down there, what are you going to do? Are you going to fall into God’s fire of punishment that is burning away?” All that the sister sang in their language about the Cross and deliverance from hell he remembered. He was one of the worst of the young fellows there. He thought about it next morning and copied down what he dreamed that his sister had sung. But he couldn’t tell anyone yet because his own sister had died. So later he went to his younger sister and told her, “I had a dream when our older sister died, and this is her song”. He taught her the song and they sang it with guitar accompaniment. It was a beautiful song. But the two of them felt so sad about their sister they couldn’t sing the song to the people for a while. The sister had told them about the Christian life, that God is everywhere and that He sent Jesus to die on the Cross to save by His blood those people who believe in Him. So later on they sang the new song to the people. They still have that beautiful
song today about the lady who died and appeared in a dream to her brother.’

**ADrift in the Gulf**

‘In October of 1981 we went with a few men who were not Christians, across to Numbulwar on the mainland to pick up a girl and her mother. Our boat had a one hundred and fifteen horsepower motor which needed less than three drums of petrol to get across, because it was a calm sea. We thought we should use about the same coming back. But we ran into problems. We had a heavier load, as well as the tide and wind against us. The fuel ran out just as we sighted the island on Friday night. We were too far off to get to shore, so we fired our two flares, but our old uncle who saw them didn’t realise we needed help. We just drifted away from home with the wind and tide. We had no food on the boat, only two small tins of food for the girl and a can of water.

‘Saturday we drifted all day in the sun and wind without sighting land. It got hotter and hotter. We used the water very carefully. Saturday all day I prayed and prayed and then at sunset, about six o’clock, I said to the men, “All of you come up into the middle of the boat to pray”. Some of them were scratching their heads because we had now been floating for two days. I prayed to God, “God, our Father, this people here don’t know you. They have gone away from you and don’t know that you are the Lord of heaven and earth. Truly and sincerely I ask you to help us to arrive on land by eight o’clock tomorrow morning”. Darkness came and we drifted and drifted. Early next morning when we woke up we could see that the land was close so we paddled by hand to get to the shore. We arrived exactly as I had prayed, exactly at eight o’clock. One man looked at his watch and said, “You are a magician”. “No, I am not a magician, but God has done this. Let us thank Him”, I replied. One man said, “He has saved our lives at exactly the time you asked”. “Yes”, I said, “this has happened that you may believe God is up there and He is the true God”.

‘We enjoyed big mud crabs for breakfast and got back home safely.’

**Plans for a Convention on Groote**

‘Some people from our communities have been going to Katherine Convention in May each year, and finding it very helpful. But it is very expensive for our people to charter a plane from Groote Eylandt to Katherine for those two days, and many have not been able to go.'
‘After we had the inter-tribal dancing and singing on Groote in 1985, we thought, why don’t we use the facilities prepared for these dancing groups to have a Christian convention here? Instead of people paying money to fly to Katherine, we could arrange everything here. People from nearby communities would be able to get here more easily and now, with ordained Aboriginal clergy in each of these communities, we have good leaders and speakers.

‘The preparation for the convention which took place in August 1986 provided employment for our people. The guest speakers were Bishop Arthur Malcolm and Mr Barry Goode. The council built a large square shelter, and spread white sand around. The electricity was connected so that we could have meetings at night as well. We had three unused school buildings that were left when the school children moved into their new air-conditioned classrooms. We used the older buildings for sleeping quarters when it rained. A lot of work was done to provide sloping roof shelters for the campers from other communities. We also made shower blocks and toilets. A man who used to work at the mining town came as caterer to sell lunch boxes in a takeaway food shop. People had only to think about their evening meal. We also had stacks of blankets for the cold nights.

‘People came from Oenpelli, Maningrida, Ngukurr [Roper River], Numbulwar and from Umbakumba in the north of Groote Eylandt. About five hundred people gathered from these places.

‘Special speakers came from each of those places, and different groups took part in reading, speaking and singing. There were four different languages used by the choirs and speakers.

‘Instead of travelling long distances, we had our own convention on our own island; instead of a few of our people attending, there was an oppor-tunity for everyone to be there and take part. It was organised by our own people to help our own people. It used our own languages that the people really understand.

‘We wanted those who took part in the choirs to be true Christian people, not as sometimes happens when there are those who get drunk and those who are playing about with their marriages. We don’t like to look at those people singing, who are leading rubbish lives.

‘We are very concerned about the different changes that are taking place, and for our people, especially the younger ones, who have great oppor–tunities at present. That is why we had the convention, to bring the message of Jesus Christ right into our own community. We learnt about how others started, then we had our own.’

This convention was a great success. From the point of view of organisation, it was carefully arranged by the late Rev. Aringari Warramara, who
saw that everything ran smoothly. There was quite a group of whites, from the mining town of Alyangula on the island, who were challenged by the speakers. Some of them also made commitments to Christ, though some caused a disturbance on the final night. The response to the convention was a great encouragement to the Aboriginal team who organised it, and a strong answer to those who stated that because it was run by the Aboriginal people it would fail!

**REV. ARINGARI WARRAMARA**

The following is an interview given by the Rev. Aringari: ‘I’m the Anglican minister here at Angurugu on Groote Eylandt. I look after the services here, which includes meetings at other places. We also have fellowship once a month with singing, praying and preaching, we four or five leaders—Bible study leaders. We have two conventions, one at Angurugu and one at Ngurkurr. Ron Bundey [the Anglican Minister at Palmerston] preached at one of the conventions. I have a problem with diabetes so I ask Peter, my brother, or Murrabuda to assist me. We sing songs from our own culture and translated ones. The Ladies’ Ministry includes leading singing and reading Bible studies. The church does a food run in the community which includes eight out-stations as well as Bickerton Island.

All Christians should be one and work together. White people should go to Aboriginal communities and learn the culture.
PETER FISHER—DIRECTOR OF ANGLICARE IN DARWIN

‘Anglicare is carrying on the work of CMS started earlier this century. Anglicare itself has only been in existence for five or six years. It has grown rapidly over that time, and I guess from a budget of nothing, to over one and a half million dollars, it is a fairly significant work. We house, on a temporary basis, people who come from remote areas to stay in Darwin, and that is mainly for medical reasons. That is something CMS started. We work in the areas of disability. We now have family mediation and counselling.

‘We work in Aboriginal communities in the area of substance abuse and alcohol abuse, respite care and aged care. The respite care program on Groote Eylandt is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health. No white person could structure the program. It is very much based on, and controlled by, the family groupings and identifying the right person to provide that help. We have two senior women who represent two moieties under the leadership of Murrabuda, and then those who together with Murrabuda decide who will receive what care and from whom. Brian and Kath Massey have a video about Groote Eylandt that teaches about family structure and how it all works. CMS have Lance and Gwen Tremlett at Ngukurr who have been there for quite some time together with Rev. Gumbuli Warramara.

‘The Masseys in the last couple of years have moved over from CMS to work for Anglicare. It is very important that people working for Anglicare are members of the church. Anglicare is also starting work on Oenpelli, Numbulwar and Ngukurr in conjunction with the Anglican people there.

‘Anglicare works as a spiritual adjunct to the church, and our work can be seen in two streams; we provide professional services where we need trained people and, secondly, we work in partnership with churches developing their ability to care for people. As Director of Anglicare, I feel it is important to employ Christian people who hold two things together in balance: one is the gospel and the need to share the content of the gospel in the hope that people will respond to Christ and accept Him as Lord and Saviour. They are also people who take up the command of Christ to care for people and to deal with justice issues. Now those are not two separate issues. I see them as intertwined in a very special way. I am interested in employing Christian people who can take those two things, as difficult as it is, and work them hand in hand. In the case of Groote Eylandt, most, if not all, of the Aboriginal people who work in this caring ministry are, in fact, members of the church.
We will respond to anyone, I will also connect with other parishes as well. In the case of Oenpelli, I have had a lot of contact with Rev. Peterson. We have talked over the years about his idea of developing a program of feeding those Aboriginal people in the community who are starving. I believe that a program has started on Groote Eylandt and I have spoken to Peterson about it, and he is going sometime to have a look at what’s happening.

In the case of Numbulwar, we have done some work with the Christian people there, and they are interested in getting into the “respite care” area. They have written a submission which includes Anglicare in a training capacity. They didn’t really talk to us much about that before putting in a submission to the committee. We are looking forward to the development of relations there.

In the case of Ngukurr, we have a worker who was there over the last few days talking with Gumbuli about the provision of an “Aged Care” unit.

Anglicare has ninety paid staff on its books; about twenty-five of those are part-time. Some of those workers are based in Darwin, but work outside the Darwin area as well: to Palmerston and Howard Springs. Outside there are about seven full-time staff located in Groote Eylandt and about six part-time, thirteen total, all bar three are Aboriginal.

‘Murrabuda Wurramarrba is the head person, and his wife Dilamara, and the wife of the Anglican priest there, her name is Gayangwa; they are the leaders. The first priority is to have a staff worker who can work with Anglican congregations, supporting and encouraging them in their care for people.

The people of Groote Eylandt have recognised ownership of their land, and their relationship with GEMCO is one of ownership, so that the Aboriginals get the royalties for the minerals.

The important thing is education, understanding, control, and ability to control. I, as Director of Anglicare, would put all my energy into something that the Aboriginal people want and can see a way to get for themselves, rather than seeing a great need and coming along trying to badger Aboriginal people by saying, “This is a tremendous need and I want you to do this, and I will help you to do this”. If you are not careful you will end up carrying the baby on your own, and the thing will die. Our experience on Groote Eylandt is that we have a series of ventures, and Aboriginal people have seen that this is what they want to do and this is the way they want to do it.

Anglicare has a role with government departments in educating them about that process. At the present time the government is being pressured by the media about Aboriginal health, and if we are not careful we will see
a lot of money being thrown at Aboriginal health, and it will be wasted. The government has to step back and say we do have some money but we have to go with the Aboriginal people’s concerns, and their participation, in spending that money, and to walk slowly at their pace, otherwise we will lose the show.’
CHAPTER TEN

The Story of Hope Vale—
The Need for Training

Hope Vale is a small Lutheran Mission situated in the far north of Queensland on Cape York Peninsula. It is about seventy kilometres north of Cooktown in a reserve of mainly sandhill country. Pastoralists took up land north of Cooktown as early as 1861 and the country was overstocked by 1880. Gold was discovered at Palmer River near Cooktown about 1873, with unnecessary violence and massacres between miners and Aborigines. Only the useless land along the shore north of Cooktown was left for a reserve for Aborigines. It consisted of swamps and sandhills; country unfit for grazing or agriculture.

A mission was established on this reserve in 1885, by Rev. John Fliert, who, after six months, went on to New Guinea. It was a German mission that sent out George Schwartz to the Cape Bedford people, and he stayed with them for over fifty years. His story is told in The Heart of Man by Gordon Rose. He searched for a suitable site, moving the settlement five times in search of a suitable area for agriculture. The present site of Hope Vale is a beautiful area on the northern branch of the Endeavour River, surrounded by pasture land and forest. In 1982, I went down to see the original site near South Cape Bedford and was astounded that the mission had been able to exist and partly support itself in that swampy, sandhill coast.

With government pensions, there is less done in agriculture and vegetable growing, but artefacts were made in the large settlement workshop.

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1 G. Rose, The Heart of Man, printed booklet, n.d.
and some homes had very good fruit and vegetable gardens. As the early missionaries adopted an enlightened policy of studying the culture of the people, learning their language—Guuguyimithirr—and teaching reading and writing in it, the educational standards of the mission school were high and, despite the isolation, the level of English spoken was good.

Disruption of the mission activities did not only come from the moves to seek better land. During the war with Japan, the whole population was evacuated (in 1942) to a much colder climate at Woorabinda. Missionary George Schwartz was imprisoned as an enemy alien, despite his residence for over fifty years in the country. The effect on the people moved to Woorabinda was tragic. They could not adjust to the colder climate, intensely homesick for their own country and leaderless in a strange country for seven years. Over sixty of them died during that time, especially during the cold winters. The Hope Vale people were not the only ones who suffered at the hands of graziers, miners and government policies. Roger Hart, now a resident in Hope Vale, told me of some of the experiences of his people at Barrow Point, further to the north. His account emphasises the inhumanity of government attitudes of that time in shifting helpless people about like pawns on a chessboard, regardless of the terrible effect of this disruption on the life of the people, individually and on the tribal group.

The present task is to give these people training in managing their own community, and in church leadership. As the story of Moon illustrates (see p. 102), the chance of training for leadership has been missed because of the lethargy of the mission leaders. But first Roger tells the story of his life at Barrow Point.

‘When I was at Barrow Point there used to be a lot of black people staying around there. Some Hope Vale people had a settlement there, but they used to roam around and the government couldn’t keep them in one place. The young fellows used to go off and work on the luggers for trochea shell and sea slugs. However, they only worked for a time and then came back at the end of the year. Further north they used to have tribal fights with spears when land quarrels broke out. They used to start up quite a war. I’ve seen a few spears thrown, and serious fights, too, when I was up there. They used to keep out of the policeman’s way, too. Police used to come around every time a serious fight broke out, but everyone used to scatter into the bush and never stayed to answer questions. Police would round up any disturbers and send them off to Palm Island, to Cherbourg or somewhere else.

‘Mr Anderson was the superintendent at Barrow Point. The department used to send him blankets, fishing lines and tomahawks for our people,
but, instead of giving these out free, he used to give them a job first and make them earn whatever they got. They had to work for him and for the settlement. They liked to move about, not to stay on the settlement, so they would camp in one place for a night or two, then move on to another place for a couple of nights. They used to go north hunting wild pigs. The wild pigs were spreading out at that time.

‘Barrow Point was a good place for fishing. It had a good shelter, something like Port Douglas. We caught a lot of fish, as well as turtle and dugong. We hunted for emus and bush turkeys. It was really a beautiful country! When the police came to hunt us out, we would hide under the big rocks and usually we could escape. They got me at last and took me away to Cape Edward Mission and left me up there. Some of the others were taken to Coen, some were sent to Lockhart Mission and others to other places. We never got together again. That was about 1927. The department boat came along the coast and took them off. We never had any peace in our new settlements. I met a few young fellows who got away from their captors and they were telling me the story. They hated the new places. It wasn’t their country. Most of the people died and never came back. If they had been left alone, I think they would still have been living today. There was nothing left after they had gone, and where they were taken they didn’t know any of their relations or anything about their families. I was looking for my aunty’s sons and daughters and for my father’s brother’s sons and daughters. If we hadn’t been shifted down there later and met a few people, we wouldn’t have known anything about any of them. They were scattered north and south, all over the state, from Coen down to Cherbourg.’

What sad memories, and what injustices were suffered! Many have been described in *The Cry for the Dead*.2

**TWO DIFFERENT FIRES**

**Mulluen Darkan**

It is not surprising that, under the threat of police brutality and banishment from their land, many Aboriginal men turned to drink to solve their problems and sorrows. Mulluen told me how this happened to him and how he found a better fire than alcohol in his blood.

‘I went down to the New South Wales border and was working on a farm. I got into strife there when I was single, trying to save money for the

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future, but finding I got into trouble spending it all on drink and girls. Although I knew the way of Christ from the mission, I went my own way. After that job, I went down to work on another farm in New South Wales, but I couldn’t stand the climate as it was very cold there after North Queensland, so I asked the boss to transfer me back to the north. I came back to Brisbane where I worked on another farm near Redland Bay. From there I moved back to Cooktown to work with the Department of Works. My job was to drive a truck carting gravel for the building of the airport. This was built on the old mission site. But I wasn’t accepted at Hope Vale, not just because I was working at the airport, but because I loved the grog, and every Saturday night I was drunk.

‘One day Pastor George Rosendale, Field Superintendent, approached me and said that the kind of life that I was leading was no good. I was really hostile and went to bang him over the head because of what he was trying to tell me. I don’t know what happened then, but when they brought me back to the mission I thought over what I had been doing. Then Pastor Pohlner and Pastor George came to me and asked me to live in Hope Vale and to become an evangelist. I said to them that I wanted time to think it over. I thought about it for three days with my wife and others in the family. Then I decided to go ahead and did some studies with Pastor Pohlner. I don’t remember the exact time I studied; and was then accepted as an evangelist, because in those three days I was thinking it over, I made a tough decision to give up the drink and accepted Jesus Christ into my life. This changed me from that time until what I am today.

‘Now I find much joy in my life serving the Lord and helping my brothers and sisters here at Hope Vale. The work in the church means taking part in the worship service on Sundays; and also taking lessons for eighteen people in confirmation classes; as well as teaching Religious Instruction and helping in the Sunday School. When Pastor George moved away from Coen, there was no one there to bring the message to the people, and the church here made arrangements that some of the evangelists should go up there for a month or two, so I went there for two months with another elder. When I came back and was replaced for a while, I then had to return and also did some work for the church at Laura and later at Mossman down near Cairns. Now I am back at Hope Vale and continue to work here.

‘At that time, I was working on a sugarcane farm during the week and conducting services on Sundays. There were about fifty people in the church, some of them from Hope Vale, who used to come together each Sunday in Mossman. After that I came back home and continued to work here. I was a tractor driver for many years when we had our mission farm going here, growing peanuts, corn and cotton. Then I got a job in the
butcher shop to support my family. Since then, on account of my leg trouble, the doctor has put me on a social security pension. No matter what the work was, I always thought that I should try to earn a living for my wife and children, but I continued to work as an evangelist in my spare time. I don’t know how old I am now, though in the team of evangelists and elders that I work with, all are older than me.

‘Since alcohol has reduced the number of my people here I have to find a way of talking to them about the drink. They hold up alcohol under my nose, tempting me and mocking me when they are drunk, trying to get me drunk too. But I go back to them when they are sober to encourage them, and persuade them to give up the drink. I tell each one that I don’t hate them but I hate what they are doing. I tell them that we are not here to enforce rules but to encourage them to believe in Jesus Christ.’

When I was at Hope Vale I saw something of the results of Mulluen’s work, as about twenty young Aboriginal people were confirmed. Mulluen had seen the fire of the Spirit of God working in these lives as he had been taking the two confirmation classes. Who better to help this Aboriginal community than a man who has experienced the two fires, the one of alcohol that was destroying him and the fire from the Lord, who had changed his life.

**Tullo Gordon**

When I was at Hope Vale I also met Tullo Gordon, whose ‘Aboriginal Tales from Queensland Endeavour River’ are published in a book called *Milbi*. Tullo explained that most of these stories are about the sun, moon and stars, the night owl, frill-necked lizard and the crocodile, just to name a few. He told me a story from Barrow Point, belonging to a people speaking a different dialect from his own.

‘The old Aboriginal people believe that at first there were no animals in this world, only human beings. There were some very clever spirits who could change from their human shape into other forms. A man could become a goanna, or a crocodile, or a snake. This story I’m telling you is about how one human being became a moon.

‘That Moon was walking about on the earth and he had two wives. They were living quite happily together, but they only had one little boy. Both the wives loved the little boy very much and did all they could to make him happy. He was very dear to them both. One day the two wives came along to Moon and said, “We’re going out hunting for food. We are going a long

way into the bush to dig up some yam roots. Look after the little boy until we come home”.

‘After they had gone, old Moon went to look for a patch of shade. It was really hot, and he lay down in the shade to have a sleep. The little boy came and lay down beside him. Moon went off to sleep, but the little boy began singing a song as he ran his fingers over Moon’s head. “This is my father’s head to think with”. Moon turned over drowsily and said, “Be quiet”.

‘After a little while the little boy touched Moon’s closed eyes and sang, “These are my father’s eyes to see with”. Moon brushed the little boy’s hand away and said, “Go to sleep”. But the little boy wasn’t sleepy. A bit later the boy’s fingers touched Moon’s nose. He sang, “This is my father’s nose to smell with”. Moon slapped at the boy’s hand and said, “Stop that!” The little boy stopped for a while and then he touched Moon’s lips and sang, “This is my father’s mouth to eat with”. Moon pushed his hand away and grunted angrily.

‘Then the little boy’s fingers ran down the inside of Moon’s arms. “This is my father’s arm to lift me up”, he sang. Moon only wanted to go off to sleep and growled, “Leave me alone!” But the little boy kept on with his song, touching Moon’s leg and singing, “This is my father’s leg to walk with”. Moon was getting very angry and shouted, “Go away from me!” Still the little boy went on, and started running his fingers over Moon’s stomach, singing, “This is my father’s—”, when Moon, thoroughly angry with the little boy, jumped up and grabbed him by the throat and shook him until he choked and died.

‘He looked at the little body lying there, and realised that he had strangled him. He didn’t know what to do next. He dug a hole in the ground for an oven and put a lot of coals of fire in it. When it got hot he put the body of the little boy in it. He built the fire up on top and left it for a while. When he had eaten the boy up, he left some of the fat, hanging it on a tree to have later, but he forgot it.

‘When the two wives came home they looked around for the little boy and asked Moon, “Where’s that little boy?” Moon said, “I don’t know, I thought he went with you.” Really he had cooked the boy, had taken him out of the oven and eaten him and left the kidney fat on the tree to cool and forgotten it. He had covered the ground up and put leaves and grass over it as if nothing had happened, and he was lying on it.

‘They said, “No, we left him home with you”, but they didn’t ask him any more. They walked around looking for the little boy and then one of them said, “Ah! Look at that fat!” Both looked carefully but didn’t say anything. They all went to lie down and Moon slept.
‘Next morning they said to Moon, “Eh, we’d better go out for green ants”. “Right”, Moon said, “I like green ants. I could eat some”. These green ants were used for food, and medicine, too, and Moon needed medicine. The two wives went out. They were looking for a dry hollow tree and they found one. They climbed up and took a lot of bark, grass and dry leaves to put into the fork of the tree, making it look exactly like a bird’s nest. They climbed down again, and looking up, said, “It looks like a nest all right”. Then they got some large green ants and went home to the camp. They told Moon, “Oh, we found a nest out there, a cockatoo nest”. “Good”, said Moon, “you take me back there. I’d like to get some eggs”. “All right”, they said, and took him. They showed him the nest and, as the tree wasn’t very high, he started to climb up there. The two wives were chanting softly, “Shoo, shoo, tree grow tall, get tall. Shoo, shoo, tree get tall”. The tree began growing from the butt below him, not up near the nest, so he didn’t notice it at first because it happened down below him. Then he saw a cloud going past him. “What is that? How am I going to get down? Just a little bit further to the nest and then I’m going to come down.”

‘The two wives worked very quickly and got a lot of branches to put around the tree; set fire to it; and the tree burned very quickly. But Moon didn’t burn. He climbed up above the clouds and stayed there in the sky. The two wives said, “We’ve got him!” and they went home. The next morning they came back to the place with a long stick and raked all through the charcoal and ash to see whether they had burned up Moon. But he said from his place in the sky up there, “Are you looking for me? I’m up here. I know that you want to kill me, but I will stay up here forever”. He said he would never come down and he is still up there.’

Imagine an Aboriginal grandmother sitting beside the camp fire telling this horrifying cautionary tale to a group of children, with adults listening in. The children learn that they should respect the right of older men to relax and sleep in the shade, but that fathers have a great responsibility for the children at times when mothers are away. No doubt this exaggerated consequence has a dual purpose of entertaining and teaching, and could have been told after some minor neglect of responsibilities.

The Christian teaching, that fathers should bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord, follows on from these traditional values. Horrifying as this traditional story may be, it is absolutely nothing compared with the treatment that Aborigines received in the early days of contact with white, so-called Christians. In her book *The Cry for the Dead*, Judith Wright tells vividly how men, women and children were slaughtered.

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so that squatters could take over Queensland and enjoy the country that Aborigines once owned. Even pastoralists who wanted to keep Aborigines working on their stations were forced to relinquish their services. It is not surprising that Aborigines did not respond to the message of the early missionaries until they could see that these Christian whites were of a different character. If men like George Schwartz at Hope Vale had not shown these qualities of fatherhood, then there would be little there today.

Aboriginal Christianity is flourishing in many parts of Australia today. There are Aboriginal evangelists, pastors, choir leaders and evangelistic teams taking the message of Christ to their own people and, in some cases, to white Australians. Training colleges like Nungalinya in the Northern Territory and Bimbadeen in New South Wales, for instance, are specialising in training Aboriginal Christian leaders. This is the hope for the future. But training is expensive and needs sponsors. Perhaps Tullo’s story is telling us not to aim at sleeping comfortably in the shade and getting annoyed when we are disturbed, but to fulfil our responsibilities of providing finance, encouragement and prayer support for Aboriginal communities who need trained Christian leaders from among their own people.

St Paul told Timothy, in II Timothy 2:2 (KJV), to entrust the Gospel to ‘faithful men who shall be able to teach others’. One of the men who wanted to receive further training was Roy McIvor. He had the enthusiasm to help in Christian work, but lacked the formal training to be able to teach the Christian message as effectively as he might. Roy told about his work as an artist: ‘My father was a builder. He built this two-bedroomed house where we are living in Hope Vale. Besides building houses he showed an interest in making artefacts to supplement his income. He found that he could sell them in Cooktown or to the tourists that came out to the mission in those days.

‘Most of the spears, boomerangs, shields and nulla nullas [clubs] that I make were learned from my father or from other older people. They, in turn, learned these skills from their fathers. Some of the special arrangements of miniature spears and boomerangs were devised by my father for the tourist trade. There are a few things that I have made up from my own ideas. I don’t want to do away with the old traditions and crafts as I value what they taught me to do, and I want to pass it on to my children. But besides that, I like to introduce new ideas which I get from seeing other artists at work, and learning to use modern electric machinery. Other new things I have just worked out on my own after watching others, and being influenced by them. I never just copy them, but I like to work things out in my own way.
'The white cockatoo belongs to my father’s moiety, and the black cockatoo is my mother’s. I have never painted them or seen anyone else that has, but I hope that I can have a go at that one day. Perhaps I could paint a scene of dancers at a corroboree of the cockatoos, or perhaps work out a scene of cockatoos on the branch of a dead tree.

‘Ramona, my little girl, shows quite an interest in painting. Also, my little boy likes to pick up a paint brush. He usually likes to paint fish or kangaroos. I don’t have to push them, or even say that they shouldn’t do it. There are some women artists here at Hope Vale. Some of them are really good, and nobody says anything against them painting and selling their pictures.

‘Up this way we are very lucky that there are a lot of messmate trees where we can get bark for bark painting. We are also fortunate there are five or six different kinds of wattle that we can use for making clap sticks, returning boomerangs or fighting boomerangs. There are other different kinds of timber, plenty of soft pine for making ornamental or fighting shields. Also we have heavier timber for making nulla nullas, and again, some beautifully grained timbers for making shields. In that way, we can just go to the rainforest to get what we need. People are always looking for genuine artefacts.

‘When I started off, we were selling didgeridoos for ten dollars, but today we can sell the same things of a metre long for twenty two dollars. The price varies according to the length; those of one and half metres sell for thirty dollars.

‘I used to work in the mission workshop as the person in charge of the crafts, but I had an ambition to own my own place and run my own business. Men in the artefact shop get a weekly wage, but I prefer private enterprise and freedom to work when I want to. Any spare time I get, I use for making artefacts. I can choose whether to do painting or make other things as an alternative. For many years I have been working on artefacts and now I can’t stop. I feel bored sitting around. These artefacts are all connected with stories from our ancestors. I see nothing wrong in them. They do not conflict with my Christian belief, but are part of our Aboriginal heritage.’

I watched Roy in his well-equipped workshop making a small boomerang. First he cut a strip of acacia timber on the circular saw, then he used the band saw to cut it to shape and finished it off on the electric sanding belt; first with the rough sandpaper, then a change to the smooth. Later on, when he had finished to his own satisfaction, he coated it with a clear lacquer to bring out the natural woodgrain.

One afternoon we drove out to the rainforest where he showed me some of the different kinds of timber that he used. It would be a difficult job to
felled the trees that he had picked out because most of them were entangled with a long rope-like creeper and vines. He discussed, with his wife Thelma, the trees he thought were the best for his purposes. Years of experience, as well as tradition, have proved which timbers are the most useful for shields, boomerangs, *nulla nullas* and spears.

His painting area was an open verandah separate from the workshop, so that the wood dust does not spoil the gloss finish of the lacquers. There was also a separate display room with a protective shutter for the curio shop. Here, every kind of artefact that he makes could be seen in a display for the tourists who occasionally come to the area. The workshop, painting area and curio shop are all under one roof of the building, put up by their own labour. In this small community there seemed little need to lock them up.

Mail orders were despatched during the off-season, but Roy has found this can be a risky business, especially when some clients forget, or even refuse, to pay. He lost about two hundred dollars on one order, and this could be an expensive way to learn who can be trusted. He has since moved north to Coen to help in Christian work up there.

**THE WAY AHEAD**

When the Lutheran missionary was about to leave in 1982, a group of Bama Christians from the Hope Vale St John’s Church conducted a survey amongst the people of their congregation to discover what their people wanted to see happening in the future. There had been discussions held previously in church meetings about the training of Bama people as pastors in the near future. In a direct question on whether one or more Bama people should be ordained, there was a general agreement as one hundred and seventy-one people voted ‘yes’ and only twelve voted ‘no’.

When Peter Costello was named for ordination, there was a big majority supporting this: one hundred and thirty-four in favour with forty-seven against; with no doubt that some of those against wanted some further training for him. When the names of Mulluen Darkan and Roy McIvor were suggested for further training as pastors, there was strong support, with one hundred and sixty-one voting for this and only twenty against. Despite this strong expression of support for Aboriginal pastors, it was eventually decided by the Lutheran Church to send another missionary rather than have Aboriginal pastors!

The challenge to move forward in faith with a team of Bama Christian leaders was no doubt rejected on the grounds that there was not a person...
sufficiently trained, whereas in Aboriginal traditional life there was a different form of leadership. In tribal society there are two moieties, each with a leader, and also a leader in each totemic group. Responsibility is thus delegated to the head of each group, instead of making one religious leader for the whole tribe. The Lutheran pattern of having a pastor and evangelists would be a reasonable approximation, provided they were not all from the one tribal group.

However, the pattern of training followed by Wontulp Bi Buya—a branch of Nungalinya College, Darwin, operating in Townsville—might have been followed here. There, trainees are given theological education by extension. They can train on the job, with supervision and some regular seminars. This pattern has worked very successfully in other countries, such as East Africa, as well as in North Queensland. It avoids the extremes of training on the job without instruction, and training in an institution without experience of day-to-day problems.

Nungalinya and Wontulp Bi Buya train students for the Uniting and Anglican churches. Lutherans have their own seminaries, but these are generally for white students, and Aboriginal pastors and evangelists need special consideration because of their culture and language. Some Lutheran students have been accepted by Nungalinya, and this avenue of training could be explored further.

**Wayne Rosendale**

‘I’m a Lutheran schoolteacher at Peace College, Cairns. My early education was at Hope Vale, then I went to Adelaide Teachers College, and I taught for three years at Loxton in the Riverland of South Australia. I got married, having been away from home for three years since 1972, except for school holidays. I started to realise that I was forgetting my language, so in 1986 I spent half a year at the Summer Institute of Linguistics run by Wycliffe Bible Translators.

‘I went back to Hope Vale and translated our language. There was a linguist at Hope Vale in the seventies who did all the groundwork and prepared a dictionary.

‘The language is Guuguyimithirr. John Haviland worked on the language for a number of years then went back to Canberra. No other linguistic or anthropological work has been done.

‘I was really interested in translation at Hope Vale, but the Lutheran Church had done some sort of feasibility study and they thought that our English was of a very good standard and we didn’t need our own language. They also had some others from Wycliffe who did the same thing.
They wanted to send me somewhere else, to New Guinea or some other Aboriginal Mission in the Northern Territory, so I just did some translation readings in my own time. I didn’t do any books, though I got quite a few Bible verses from the gospels. Pastor Rosendale, my father, is the only Aboriginal Lutheran pastor in Queensland. He used to check through our work to make sure it was theologically sound. Dad spent a year at Yalata in South Australia, then twelve years in Coen. He worked at Cairns, was called up to Hope Vale and was there for three years. He started working with Nungalinya external students as a pastor without a congregation.

‘Although there was a lot of language translation work done, people were discouraged from learning it. Now there is a problem with the language and with English. While there are people who could lead the church, they have ministry skills, but because they don’t have sufficient knowledge of English they are unable to be recognised by the Lutheran Church for their pastoral ministry. That causes difficulty for the church because they are not able to change the standard to provide for Aboriginal leadership.

‘Roy McIvor [who among others is mentioned earlier in this chapter] has had health problems, but is still involved with the church at Hope Vale, even though he has had open-heart surgery. Tullo Gordon has passed away. Mulluen Darkan is no longer an evangelist. He is on the community council and is just a respected member of the community. The present non-Aboriginal pastor there, Rev. Peter Gove, was working under Pastor Rosendale in Cairns. An unordained pastor cannot take official services of the church. He cannot record births and deaths. The problem is a lot of people are not going to church who used to go. On Sundays there are a few old faithful people, but the others, who have gone away from the church, are too ashamed to come back.

‘I think we need to forget about the church building. We need to re-establish our relationship with the people by having home visits, informal devotions and singalongs, not necessarily in the church, but in people’s homes, under the mango trees or down by the beach. When I was on the church council we did a lot of that. The church was running out of money and the only way we could make money was to get bottoms on seats in the church. That’s what we did, and it was really good for the community. That was one of the problems at Wujal-Wujal, too. We need to go through the whole missionary process again and get people interested. We need to use our language more in church and in proclaiming the gospel. The Lutheran Church needs to use music more and put a little more life into our services to make it more attractive to the younger generation.

‘We tried to get the church more active in the community, not necessarily for church work. We used to organise games on Thursday nights just
in the park. We had pig hunts. The first time we had it, the publican in Cooktown was wondering why his place was so empty. The guys in the TAB were wondering where the guys from Hope Vale were. They were out chasing pigs. We used to charge two dollars to enter. Then we organised “meals-on-wheels”. We used to get different people in the congregation to cook up stews, and charge a couple of dollars a plate. All it needs is a fairly energetic bloke with organisational skills, someone with drive and English to do the book work.

‘We need a pastor to understand our culture; to understand and use our stories; to bring the gospel to us in a more meaningful way; to use our relationship structure to minister to us in a tribally-correct way. We have the Elders, we have the senior uncle, Mkuyi, the head of the family. All our ministry should be at those sort of people, getting them to minister to their own families. These people have a lot of say over the people, their nephews and nieces, their brothers and sisters; I don’t think we are using them enough.

‘We have a lot of quality things in our tribal structure, and stories that could be used as analogies with the Christian Church; it only takes someone with a little more understanding of the culture to use that. I think more subjects on Aboriginal Studies should be compulsory at seminaries.

‘An important role of Nungalinya is to point out to people the things about their own culture that they can use to teach their own people. In the Guuguyimithirr language there is a word for God. I don’t see why we can’t use that word for Creator-God. We have stories about Creation and the Flood. Those sort of analogies need to be pointed out to Aboriginal people. They can take this back to their own tribes, and point this out to their own people.’
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Anglican Christians in Cairns—1995

BISHOP ARTHUR MALCOLM

The Church of St Luke’s is situated ten metres from the main train line, ten metres from the front door is one of the main arterial roads, and the church is under the flight path of the international and domestic air terminal, so several times during each service there was traffic noise from those sources. After the service Bishop Arthur Malcolm gave this interview.

‘I was brought up in the mission at Yarrabah; I was about eighteen or nineteen. Then I left Yarrabah in 1952 and went to Church Army in Newcastle. I am still a Church Army officer, I became a priest and a bishop. The Church Army still holds me as one of its blokes. I spent about twenty years down south doing mission work. We had a big mission at Port Augusta, trying to get Aboriginal and white people to share the Gospel with each other. We shared with them and brought unity.

‘I am in charge of St Luke’s here and also Yarrabah; I am the Assistant Aboriginal Bishop of North Queensland. I work around the diocese in both black and white churches, with particular responsibility for Aboriginal people in our diocese; and beyond our diocese by invitation in other parts of Australia. We have been ministering here at St Luke’s for a long while. We started off with a small group at St Peter’s and now it has grown into a large congregation, mainly of Islander people. I started it and then one of our priests, Canon Jim Leftwitch was ordained in Cairns as an Aboriginal
priest married to an Islander person. They both are very proud of their ministry here. Jim is away today; he and his wife, Lala, have gone with some friends of theirs to Mosman Gorge to have fellowship with them up there.

‘The ministry up here in North Queensland has grown tremendously. At Yarrabah we have a large congregation of Aboriginal people; Palm Island and Townsville are also part of the Aboriginal ministry. We are looking at a wider area of ministry among our people, not only in the church, but in social work too. In Townsville, we are concerned for mothers and fathers and young people who are not walking the right road. I am in a committee trying to help them through their problems. They are looking for guidance in all sorts of areas, and need people to take part in the services, to sit down and worship and give thanks to God with them. We have a youth group at Yarrabah. St Luke’s has a youth group as well. Our kids go off to the youth camp with the other youth in the diocese. I am in full control of the whole of the Aboriginal and Islander ministry in the diocese.

‘This year is the Year of Reconciliation, and we must treat one another as children of God, and each one is then a brother or a sister. I believe, that if we can be reconciled in that way, if people really commit themselves to God, then things can really happen.’
St Luke’s Congregation, Cairns
‘I see a great future in that more and more recognition is forthcoming to the Aboriginal people. I do believe that there is going to be a really big revival in this indigenous church. I believe that with all my heart. It has already started to happen. I believe that this big revival is really going to take off within the indigenous church in Australia.

‘There are a lot of things I see now in the pipeline. I see it more because I am on the clergy staff. I believe that the Aboriginal people, and Islander people too, have a wonderful contribution to make to the church’s spirituality. Although in traditional terms our people weren’t Christian, we believe that the creator spirit was the God of the Bible as we know Him. Aboriginal teaching that I’ve listened to shows that our old Aboriginal people were closer to God than we are today, in that they totally relied on God to provide for them in their very existence. It is quite intriguing when you look at it like that. In relating a lot of their Aboriginal stories to Scripture, we find stories of creation and the flood. We recently worked on Aboriginal Theology, the draft copy is out. We worked on it last year as an ecumenical group, Uniting Church, Lutheran Church, Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church. We looked at it in relationship to the land and nature, the birds and the animals. It was an eye-opener, even for me. Dr Norm Habel of Adelaide College of Divinity is putting a lot of effort into Aboriginal Theology and believes quite strongly that Aboriginal people have a lot to contribute. Rev. George Rosendale’s teaching came to the fore. He spoke to us about “kookaburra theology”. The kookaburra was a messenger of joyful good news.

‘The challenging thing with Aboriginal people today is some unspoken and very radical feelings in terms of race relations and the church. They have been hurt because of separation. A lot of this separation was caused by the missionaries who did some wrong things. Nobody is perfect. They were only doing what they thought was in the best interest of the people at that time.

‘Also we must never forget that the general policy of the government in those days was extermination of Aboriginal people. It was the missionaries who took our children from their mothers. Whilst we blame them for a lot of things, it was their work that prevented the extermination of our people. Praise God when we see this situation. My grandmother as a child was facing extermination in the bush. There was only her and her little sister. Their mother had died, and they were on the run from the trackers and the white police. The local farmers found them. They were taken down to
Yarrabah where they heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are both home in glory now. Praise God for that. I stand before you as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ through their teaching.’

‘In those early days the whites didn’t regard Aboriginals as human beings. They were just animals as far as some settlers were concerned. They called them “myalls and heathens”. Had they taken the time to look into the culture of Aboriginal people and understand them in their own terms, they would have seen them as very spiritual. They knew a creator-spirit. Most of our people have now accepted Christianity. The missionaries brought us their way and we think of the church in the western system of Christian culture.

‘The Bible was first written in Hebrew, so it wasn’t white man’s culture anyway. We need to work on Aboriginal Theology because the Bible shows the whole cultural experience of a people who went through the situation that we go through spiritually. We are all trying to achieve in our different ways, but those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ believe it is the only way. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life, there is no other way”.'
If you call yourself an Aboriginal Christian you need to look up your spirituality, and that spirituality is Jesus Christ. They see people like myself, who have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ and are standing on the promises of God. God has always been there with us right from the beginning, some people call Him the Creator-Spirit.

‘When we look at the Ten Commandments we see Aboriginal culture in that. The Aboriginal law was so strong that if you did something wrong you got a spear in your leg. Even before the coming of Christ, Aboriginal people had the Law of God. There are some stories about the Rainbow Serpent who made the lagoons and the large river systems and streams. In the beginning of the Bible we hear about the Serpent and we look upon him as evil. Later on we hear that God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and everyone who looked at it would be cured of their snakebite.

‘A lot of Aboriginal people say we own the land. Nobody owns the land except God. He made it and He owns it.’
CHAPTER TWELVE

The Spirit Moving in Our Hearts

BIMBADEEN

The story of Bimbadeen, the AEF Christian Training College, is a story of young Aboriginal men and women. In 1982, I visited the college to meet the principal and the students. It was a pleasant surprise, after travelling down from Sydney by train, through drought-stricken areas, to find that the Cootamundra district, and particularly Bimbadeen, had some wheat crops which would be able to be harvested. The whole setting surprised me. This was no little tin shed in a back alley of Cootamundra, but a dignified brick building on a hill overlooking the town. It was not an overcrowded area full of buildings and concrete, but a spacious farm with open fields and tree-covered bushland. Instead of the noise of traffic and machinery, we heard the songs of magpies and kookaburras.

After driving through the ornate gateway with the name ‘BIMBADEEN’ over it, the road led up past the principal’s home to the main residence. The foundation stone recorded that it was built for a district hospital in 1887. When the hospital ceased to be needed, in 1911, the buildings were used as a children’s home until 1974. During that time, Aboriginal girls were trained for domestic service. Margaret Tucker described this period at Cootamundra Domestic Training Home in her book *If Everyone Cared*. When it had been vacant for three years, the Aboriginal Lands Trust of New South Wales offered it to the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF). It fitted their need, with some modifications, for a Bible college,
and Pastor David Kirk was sent to prepare it for that purpose. He was able to negotiate with the local council to use not only the fourteen hectares of the home paddock, but another one hundred and eighty-two hectares of common land and one hundred and eighty-two hectares of grazing land. This made it possible to conduct an agricultural course for students who wanted to learn farming skills. The commencement plaque states that:

Bimbadeen AEF College was declared open by Rev. Cedric Jacobs on 10th February, 1979
Principal Pastor David F. Kirk.
Eph. 4 v 11 and 12.

The spring which had supplied water for the hospital buildings was used to provide water for an overhead sprinkler system to water a large vegetable patch. This supplied food for the students and a surplus for the local markets.

It took two years to prepare the buildings and grounds for students. The 1979 intake of seven students, who were the pioneers of this course, all graduated after two years of study. Their success rate speaks very highly for the inspiration and care given by the staff, especially by the principal and his wife. In 1980, Bimbadeen had thirteen students, and in the following year the number rose to twenty-one. The next year there were twenty students on campus. Not all of these were undertaking theological studies. The college provided a more technical course in its agricultural programs. Some of the students did not have the educational background to go straight into the theological course. AEF has widened the scope for the students to include agricultural skills, such as animal husbandry, farm machinery, motor mechanics and market gardening.

**Finance**

The students were asked to pay fees of one thousand dollars each year. This nominally covered their tuition, their board and their travelling to various weekend practical assignments. Obviously this has to be heavily subsidised by AEF through various interested friends, churches and organisations. World Vision has supported the water reticulation scheme for the vegetable garden, contributing ten thousand dollars towards the cost of an overhead sprinkler system installed by the staff and students. The same organisation underwrote the first wheat crop which fortunately returned a bumper harvest. The Baptist World Relief also gave a similar amount for a tractor to work on the farm. A farmer in Victoria gave equipment worth over seven thousand dollars to the college, provided they could arrange its
shipment. Bimbadeen rose to the challenge and moved the assorted equipment including a tractor and fencing of various kinds. The Bush Church Aid Society (BCA) provided a salary for the dean who had previously been supported by personal gifts.

Gifts of equipment and finance were most helpful in getting the courses started and in making the necessary improvements to the buildings and farm. Apart from the water reticulation for the market garden, a large vehicle shed was built and equipped as a workshop, with power lines connected. Planned improvements for the next few years were listed in order of priority.

The harvest of 1981 was a bumper crop which boosted the college funds and enabled work to begin on the deep drainage to connect the college with the Cootamundra sewerage system. This made possible the expansion of student numbers to forty.

Financial Limitations

Because the income of the college had not been sufficient to pay all the salaries of the staff, which included the farm mechanics instructor, agricultural manager and housekeeper, as well as the principal and the dean of the college, David and Dawn Kirk reported that they had taken themselves off the payroll. Bush Church Aid saw the opportunity to help and provided their salary. These financial difficulties apparently arose from the lack of support for students from their parents and their home churches, themselves struggling financially. There were very few students who could find a sponsor to guarantee one thousand dollars a year for two or three years. Even if all students paid the full amount of fees, this would not cover the salaries of the staff as well as their boarding expenses. This meant that support had to be found outside the Aboriginal communities. Support from the government for a Bible college was unlikely, though it was possible that some support could be asked for the agricultural program.

The obvious section to ask for help was not the Aboriginal Christian community who were themselves struggling to establish new churches in many areas of growth. The white community who first brought the Christian message to Aborigines could find ways of continuing their help for this new development in self-management by helping to back this training of Aboriginal Christian leaders. Surprisingly, this special training of Aboriginals for pastoral work was not seen as a priority, mainly because white Christians in Australia had not progressed from their traditional paternalistic missionary outlook. We did not really include Aboriginal pastors as an essential part of the missionary team.
This was partly due to lack of communication. Many white Christians had never met an Aboriginal Christian and subscribed to the common stereotype that all Aborigines were lazy, dirty, drunken no-hopers. It was also part of our ethnocentric propaganda, which glorified any achievements of the white missionary and had nothing published of the Aboriginal achievement or of their opinion of the work, especially when it might be different, and not always palatable.

Student Viewpoints

It is easier to assess the nature of Bimbadeen courses from the experiences of a few of the students who recorded their stories on tape. These accounts are from theological students, students in the agricultural program and a young woman student, and include a description of a practical outreach program.

One of them recounted in 1982 how he came to study there: ‘Before I came here I was doing nothing with my life, just running around drinking. The year before I came here I was going to the Technical and Further Education College at Murray Bridge. I had a chance to go to teachers’ college the next year, but the Lord brought me here. I did try to put it off, but I found that things didn’t turn out right for me. I was going to get a good job, but I went back to drinking again, just going back to where I was in the first place. Life was just falling apart because I wasn’t obedient to God’s call.

‘When I and my mates were involved in a car accident in a stolen car in Adelaide, we were sent out to Murray Bridge on probation. We used to go to my uncle’s place and sit out in the shed with some other blokes. We used to talk about how the world was and how people were always treating each other badly. We used to talk about this all the time. I had a grudge against white people and didn’t like them. We didn’t think we were getting a fair share and when we walked down the street white people looked at us and turned their noses up.

‘We were in the shed one night talking about these things when my cousin wanted to know the time so we turned the wireless on. It happened that a Back to the Bible broadcast was on and this bloke was talking there. He answered all the questions we had been talking about. He said that Jesus is the answer. That really spoke to us. That night that room was filled with the love of the Lord. We could feel the Spirit moving in our hearts. A few days after that most of us in the shed asked Jesus into our lives. My friends made a stand, but afterwards they went back.

‘When I got to Bimbadeen I had only ten cents on me. I had nothing for the fees, but the Lord supplied my fees for that year. The money came from
The Spirit Moving in Our Hearts

the Baptist Church who were supporting me for that year, but I trusted and worked for the thousand needed dollars for the next year’s fees. I believe that God helped me because He had chosen me to come here.

‘I am doing the Biblical course and I hope to go out to work with a pastor to get experience for a year or two. The course here teaches us about the Bible and the doctrines in it. There is a lot of discipline here. We learn to discipline ourselves because when we go out there are many things to fight against. Study doesn’t stop when we leave because we keep on learning all the time. We enjoy living with our own people who are Christians. Where I come from I was the only young person within the church and I found it really lonely at times because my mates were going on the same way as I was before. I knew I couldn’t hang around with them, but here there are young people my own age, even though we do have our difficulties at times.’

A Young Woman Talks about the Fellowship

‘Back in 1979, when the college was first opened, they had a pin-up board at the Port Augusta Convention. A few of the students from Western Australia challenged me about the Bible college they were going to. I had thought about it then, but I was interested only as a passing idea. It wasn’t until 1980 that I thought the Lord was really speaking to me. It was then that I thought of writing to the principal of the college for an application form.

‘My dad was really excited when I got the application form. He went to pick up the mail at the Post Office. If we get any letters he usually gives them to us when we come home at lunch time. But he didn’t wait for that. He nearly broke the speed limit getting around to the office to give it to me. I was working for the Department of Agriculture, but I felt that I needed to study God’s Word. I wasn’t looking at colour. It was because it was an Aboriginal college that I came to it. I suppose that if there were no Aboriginal colleges and the Lord led me to a non-Aboriginal college I would go into it. But here we are all on the same level and we all know each other. We find it easy to mix in with one another and we have representatives from all states except the Northern Territory. One of our students is from a tribal community.

‘Studying God’s Word was the best thing I’ve ever done. The two years I have spent in the Bible college have been the best two years of my life, even though I hope to go on to bigger and better things. The fellowship here is beautiful. The students here are all a tremendous bunch of Christians. I’ve never met anyone like them. When I think back to the times when I was trying to secure friends that would last in the world, it was
nothing to what I now enjoy because these are going to be my sisters and brothers for life.

‘I think I get a real thrill from being able to share my faith with white people because not many know about the change the Lord has made in Aboriginal people’s lives. They look at drunken Aborigines and think that we are all like that.’

A Student Talks about Outreach

‘We have been on outreach to Cowra several times and to Tumut once. We hope to go again this year. There is no established Aboriginal church at Cowra so we use a kindergarten hall. There are not many Aboriginal Christians there. At Tumut there is no church. We just have meetings and do visitations around the Aboriginal communities.

‘Starting at Cowra was very difficult. We could feel the tension at first, but now they are getting used to us and we can feel more at ease. There was an Aboriginal woman who committed her life to Christ at Cowra.

‘At Easter we went to Dubbo for a four-day rally in the Aboriginal Inland Mission church with some really good meetings. There were some people who came from as far north as Cherbourg and Gilgandra. These were some of the best meetings I have been to. We go to other rallies where we sing as a group, but older, more experienced men do the preaching. At Dubbo the students led all the meetings and preached.

‘We have an outreach committee of students who elect one of the students to do the preaching. We do homiletics at the college and that helps us in our preaching. Speakers prepare their talks themselves from the Scriptures. We don’t use Aboriginal stories much in our preaching though I heard Cynthia use them in the Sunday School. The finance for these trips is provided from the outreach fund. Bigger churches pay their bit for us to travel to their meetings and this helps with our funds.’

‘How I Came Here’

‘I never really knew my family. When I was taken away from home, I was still young and I can’t remember what home was like. I had foster parents and lived in their homes, but when I got out I thought that I was old enough to have a go at life on my own. The Welfare used to put me in one place and then, when I got used to that family, they would shift me and move me on to the next. When that wasn’t good enough, they put me into children’s homes. I got sick of it and said, “This isn’t for me. I’ll try it out in my way”.

‘I got mixed up with drink. Even though I met my own family, I didn’t relate to them very well at the time. Halfway through 1981, I got sick of things,
sick of drink, and I couldn’t understand why I got myself into the same old rut, working and drinking, drinking and working, never seeming to get anywhere. When I was young I had made a commitment to God to serve Him, but I didn’t quite understand it. Later on the Lord drew me back.

‘One day when I was really fed up I walked into a church. I didn’t care what kind it was. I knew that I wanted to have a go at being a Christian. Maybe it would give me peace and satisfaction. So I went along to this church and told God I wanted to follow Him. But it was rather hard in a big city being the only Aboriginal Christian in that church. My Christian life went up and down because, as I see it now, I needed fellowship. When I was down I tried to run away from the Lord, but actually He knew, even when I thought I was running away down to Griffith. All the time He wanted me to go there to meet someone who would help me and sponsor me to go to Bimbadeen College. The idea of college came up when I had only just become a Christian. Mr Kirk came along two weeks after I’d become a Christian and he said I was eligible for college, and I thought that would be great.

‘Then I ran away to Griffith and that is where the Lord met me. There was good fellowship in Griffith and people encouraged me. I met up with a bloke who said he would sponsor me if I would go to college. I said I would think about it and pray about it, and now I am here.

‘It is hard work here but nothing is hard compared with the life I lived before I became a Christian. I’d rather take the difficulties of studying here instead of the troubles I had before with drink. I just want to keep on going in the right way, and I pray that I will.’

An Agricultural Student

‘I come from Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. Now I am at Bimbadeen doing a two-year agricultural course. I praise God for this and for the change in my life. Before I became a Christian I used to be on drugs and on drink. As there seemed to be nothing else, I was ready to wipe my life off when the Lord spoke to me through a car accident.

‘At Port Lincoln church in South Australia I found the Lord, and accepted Him as my Saviour and Lord, and I have never looked back since then. I thank Him for this. I came to Port Lincoln by car from the West to visit my two sisters and my niece. When I was fourteen years old, my mother died and when I was seventeen my father died. I just kept running here and there. That is why I came across to Port Lincoln and stayed with my sisters. I worked at the abattoirs there for a while.

‘My sister was going to the Aboriginal church. She kept telling me about the Lord but I wouldn’t listen. Then I believe that God dealt with me
through the car accident that I had. My sister kept on telling me about the Lord, but I kept on ignoring her. I had heard a lot about God but I wanted to do my own thing. My sister warned me that God could take my life away if I didn’t wake up to myself. When I was a child of nine, I made a decision at a beach mission at Esperance, but I thought it was just a game and I didn’t really understand or take it in. At Port Lincoln I understood it better. Later on I was in Sydney when they had an AEF Conference in Canberra. I went down there with Pastor Michael McGuinness and heard them talking about Bimbadeen. I wondered how I could get into college because I wasn’t very well educated. I had left school after just one week in high school so I was a bit scared to apply. They might say I didn’t have enough brains. Still I asked the Lord to open the way for me to enter college to learn about the Word, and I believe He answered by allowing me to enter the agricultural course. At Canberra I asked for the application form. There was an opening for an agricultural student so I wrote a letter saying why I wanted to do this. Pastor Kirk sent the form to me in Sydney. I filled it out, was accepted, and came in by faith that God would supply all my needs, and I praise the Lord that He has supplied everything for this year.

‘In the course we learn about the farm, the soil and animal husbandry. It is wonderful as we dig the ground and do soil testing. We can thank the Lord for all the interesting things that are put there for us. We did the seeding this year. We are doing a farm mechanics course every Friday down at the Cootamundra Technical College. We learn to drive the tractor to put the wheat in, though I had learned a lot of this back in WA as my uncle has an Aboriginal farm over there in Esperance. We learn to do sheep drenching and other work with animals. We learn to look after fowls and about the feed that they need. We also have some cattle and we have a market garden where we grow vegetables for ourselves and for sale to others.

‘Before I became a Christian I didn’t read. I would look at a few comics, just for the pictures, then I would throw the comics away. But I thank God that after I came to know Him I was taught how to read the Bible and understand it. I am still learning to understand His Word. We do general Bible knowledge and doctrine. Those are our main two subjects which we share with all students here. The doctrine has helped me a lot. If it is the Lord’s will I will stay on and do another two years at Bible college.’

**BIMBADEEN IS WORTH SUPPORTING**

Bimbadeen looks to the Christians, regardless of colour, to support a program that will have an overall benefit to the whole nation. Just as the
missionary institution, Singleton Bible College, trained many of the present generation of Christian leaders, and Gnawangerup trained a number of evangelists and teachers, the present Bible colleges will meet the present and future needs. These needs will increase as Aboriginal communities look to their own people for self-management. Pastors trained in these courses worked to build up Aboriginal Christian groups and helped improve race relations and the confidence of Aboriginal people to work together with non-Aboriginals.

The prestige of Bimbadeen was enhanced by the contribution its principals made to AEF and to churches in the Cootamundra area and the wider outreach in the state. Pastor David Kirk and his successor, Rev. Ron Williams, were chosen to attend the International Conference for Itinerant Evangelists in Amsterdam, in July 1983, organised by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and attended by over three thousand evangelists from all over the world. The fares and expenses were paid by donors to the Billy Graham organisation, but they needed to find their own spending money for the trip. As the conference dates coincided with college mid-semester break the students were not disadvantaged. There was an opportunity there to discuss the college with Christian consultants and to listen to Christians from situations similar to their own.

Because the administrators of Bimbadeen are Aboriginal themselves, they are sensitive to the college’s needs and Bimbadeen is strategically placed to serve God as a training resource centre.

**Pastor Mark Naden: A Bimbadeen Ex-student**

‘I’m Mark Naden, I’m the pastor at La Perouse. We’ve been going here for three years now in ministry here at “La’pa”; the Lord is really blessing. In 1974, I came to know the Lord as my own personal Saviour and God has looked after me in a wonderful way. In 1983 I got married to Alexandra Oching from Queensland. In 1991 we attended Bimbadeen Bible College as students there. My wife and I have four children: Amy Sarah, Jenise and Emily. I’m a qualified bricklayer. We went into Bible college just expecting to do a bit of study and then get back into bricklaying, but, at the end of it, God had other ideas; He moved us this way. We often said we will go where the Lord sends us and God showed us that He wants us at La Perouse. We said we are not looking for any wages, if the Lord takes us He will look after us. All we required of the Lord is a house and the Lord provided. We don’t get a wage here, but, as you see, He hasn’t let us down. He has fed me, and the same with the rest of my family.’
‘I came to know the Lord under the preaching of Bert Clarke or Wes Caddy, I’m not sure which, AIM ministers from Queensland. Back in 1974 Wes passed on. He is at home with the Lord. Bert Clarke suffered a stroke, but he is back in ministry now. He is doing Scripture in schools and is an excellent speaker. My wife has done two years at Tahlee Bible College in Newcastle. I am finishing now some studies at Bimbadeen.

‘We were approached about going to do some Presbyterian work at Warren in central NSW. So we went out that way and spoke to the Presbyterian minister, and stayed the night. We went around and did some visitation and had a talk about the ministry there. Everything was there, house and wages. We had no responsibility in the area except to live for the Lord because there were no Aboriginal Christians in the area, so they wanted someone there just to live in the town and be a witness to the other Aboriginal people around here, and then maybe down the track to do a bit of teaching if it is required. We prayed about it and decided against it. We went back to college and we got offered this position down here. We were asked to come down and speak at the service here, to get a feel for the place and have a look around. So we came down and knew the Lord was in it. We agreed to come and here we are, two and a half years down the track. The church was initially a UAM church and has been here in this spot since the 1930’s. Before that they used to sit down on the beach. The dedication stone is still at the front door. Initially it was the MPA (Mission Publications of Australia). The MPA used to do a lot of printing in the basement. The UAM and AIM combined to form the MPA. In November last year we had the UAM centenary year. One hundred years since UAM commenced. We are now AEF. They are praying for us and we are under the banner of AEF. We are independent and have a pastoral responsibility to the people.

‘When we started off in 1992, there was myself, my wife, our four children, Auntie Sara Cruse and Melinda Cruse. We have up to twenty adults at the morning service and ten children. Michael Duckette is the assistant preacher here.

‘We have three prayer meetings on weekdays; Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings; I look after those. Tuesday night we have a Bible study; I do that. Wednesday we have Kids’ Club, my wife and some other ladies look after that. There are sometimes up to ten kids. On Tuesday afternoon we have young people’s Bible study. Six young ones aged nine to twelve years who were coming to Bible study made a commitment to the Lord. On Thursday we have our Scripture in schools. My wife and some other ladies do that. On Friday afternoon we have Youth Group; Michael takes that and some others help out. We have up to forty come to that, they are upper primary and lower high school age. Saturday afternoon we have young
adults aged eighteen to thirty-five, we get six to twelve come along to that. We have a bit of variety in our Sunday services. Morning service is worship service, and on Sunday nights we have a singalong, and maybe a devotion; sometimes a video. And other nights we have fellowship with another church. There is a lot of visitation to be done, they reckon there are about one thousand Aboriginals in the area. People are very receptive. All we can do is present the Gospel, whether they accept the Lord or not, that’s up to them.

‘Then we have visitation in the jails, there are opportunities there to go in and speak to the inmates and the wardens. There is Prince Henry Hospital just up the road. There is the Prince of Wales Hospital just over at Lensbrook. Prince Alfred, King George, St Vincent Hospitals. There is enough work to do in hospital visitation alone without jail visitation, if you want to concentrate on that. But I’ve had phone calls from interstate, phone calls from out in the country asking us about visitation, whether it be in jail or hospital. I’ve spoken to the chaplaincy services at Long Bay Jail and they have asked me to go in there on a regular basis. They have allowed me in there to walk around, but I really haven’t got the time for regular visits there, I have to do my study for Tuesday night Bible study and prepare my messages for the Sunday.

‘We are mainly interested in visiting Kooris. You can’t just rush in and say, “What’s wrong, see you later”. You have to have a cup of tea with them and listen to their problems. I might spend the whole day with just a couple of people, because with Kooris you have to show them the proper respect they deserve, especially the older ones. Another minister told me, “Make friends and then introduce them to your best friend”. I’ve never come across anything better than that.

‘There are plenty of things to do in the ministry here. Parents are very receptive for their children. We have a home from home here, you need to put some restriction on it but the young ones get in here and have a drink. They have requested Scripture in High Schools. The parents are Christians and they have spoken to the principal for us so we didn’t have to do anything. They want their kids to hear the Gospel, and we have shown the concern for the young ones, but they have taken this step too, that’s why it has grown.

‘Last year we had an “open air” down on the flat here at the back of the church. We had families coming from everywhere, coming along, grabbing a blanket and chucking it on the ground. We had a bit of a barbeque, we had seventy or eighty people, families that wouldn’t ever come to church, we had our barbeque then we had our singalong and shared the Word. The people who don’t come to church said, “This should happen more often,
this is what we need.” We have people saying, “Could you go and visit the hospital over there, they need the Lord? Could you go and visit the jail?” These are not Christians saying this.

‘In our church we have a Maori family, we have white people coming along. I’ve been able to get to tell them the Gospel. We have Chinese people coming and sitting in the back row. We have been over to the Korean Church, all our church went over to visit the Korean Church and take their service. We have an Indian Chief from Canada come to stay with us. A lady from Bahrain, near Saudi Arabia, an American from Detroit, New Zealanders; then we have people from Dubbo, Gove, Derby, Adelaide, Melbourne, Tasmania; these are people who love the Lord. When we went to college and studied doctrine; the theology we were taught was really no different from what we were taught in church, and to us it confirmed the belief that we already had. We had some good teachers over the years, and the college enhanced what we had.

‘People talk about racism, but where I was brought up, where I went to school, I had a lot of white friends; American, Koori, Greeks, it didn’t matter. We went into their homes, they shared what they had with us, we shared with them. The same with ministry when I was growing in the Lord, I can remember going to various churches. There is freedom in Christ, our style of worship is not curtailed by a lot of guidelines. When a person gets up to make a testimony for the Lord, he does it straight out. What the Lord has done for him over the years, how the Lord has blessed him.

‘Some churches write a testimony out, read it out and see if it is suitable for people to hear. With the Koori style of worship, if the Lord has given you something to say, you say it.

‘At the moment the church is growing. As I said before, when I came here there was only me and my wife and family and a couple of ladies. But we have slowly grown without any structural deacons and elders in the work. We have some older Christians in the group, Harold Stewart is one. AEF is a body. They don’t stand over us, but they are there if we need them. They send us prayer letters and the dates of various conventions. We’ve been to the AEF Port Augusta conventions. Just at the moment we are thinking about holding something here in October, it will happen. If it is not the Lord’s will then we pray that He will put a stop to it.’
La Perouse Church, 1995
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Fire at Griffith

In January 1985 there were two groups who made quite an impact on the Port Augusta Convention. One was from Ceduna in South Australia, and the other from Griffith in New South Wales. Although both groups had stories to tell, the main evidence of the power of God was in the lives of the people who came onto the platform, who sang, or gave testimonies in the meetings. Many just showed by their lives and conversation that they were people on fire for the Lord.

Griffith is the area where the Goolagong family lives, at Barellan, sixty-five kilometres away. Gail Goolagong, sister of the famous tennis player, was with the group that came to the 1985 convention at Port Augusta. Her mother and brother had both been previously.

I asked the leader of the Griffith contingent to tell me how the revival came about, and recorded his account on tape. It is obvious from this that he is an evangelist who sees the need of every person to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord. It was obvious, too, when he was on the platform at the convention, that he had a real gift in leading singing and in leading a meeting, as well as leading people to Christ.

For a person who was illiterate as an adult, he speaks very fluently and expressively, showing that fluency is not always linked with literacy, and that God’s gifts to the church are for the needs of the particular church where a person is ministering.

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GRiffith Christian Fellowship

Pastor Rodney Minniecon

‘We associate ourselves with the AEF because it was an AEF branch from which we started. This work has been going on now for close on five years and is growing very strongly. One thing about the Griffith Fellowship, it is not just Aboriginal people who are coming along. It is combined with white people and a few ethnic people, like the Chinese. We have a Chinese dentist who has associated himself with us and has become one of our teaching ministers in the church. We have a doctor from the hospital who has just joined our fellowship. He brings patients from the hospital to our church whenever he is off duty. It was only last week that we baptised him in the Murrumbidgee River with a few others of the congregation.

‘Our church has a great loving spirit within it which, I believe, all churches have to develop because so much friction can be caused in so many places because of different beliefs and different attitudes, but we have learned to cope with different personal attitudes. If Jesus can put up with different people’s attitudes and their different ways of believing, we need to learn to do the same thing because that’s how Christ wants us to live. He died for the whole world, and I believe that we have to show an example if we want to be people who are following in Christ’s steps.’

An Interdenominational Church

‘We have Catholic people coming to our church; Anglicans, Uniting Church people, and I’ve told them not to join our church if they don’t feel free. We just believe in presenting Jesus Christ to them, and they can go home or back to their own churches, and sometimes they come over and enjoy the Sunday night fellowship with us and they share the Good News. We have different ministers coming along from the Baptist and the Uniting Churches and they minister to us too. We leave the service open for teaching and to help us grow too. We all have things to share and to learn from one another. Even in my personal experience I like sharing in different churches.

‘I was invited to speak in the Seventh Day Adventist Church which was really a blessing to us and to our church because people asked how we could have fellowship in the SDA Church? But I said that every day is a Sabbath to me. I believe we should worship God every day. So we went there and had so much blessing; and to the other white churches. I believe the people of Griffith are unique because of the way white people treat us,'
especially in the church. They help us, they support us, they encourage us. Whenever anything goes on in town, we are the first to be notified and to take part in it. Our ladies sing at different functions, our youth have their times of sharing too. We have a little group we call SALT, which means “share a lot of truth”. That is organised by all the churches in Griffith with those who preach the Word of God, including Catholics, Anglicans, SDAs, Baptists, Uniting, AEF and a few others involved.

‘All the youth get together once a month at two o’clock on a Sunday afternoon, and all they do is talk about Jesus. I believe that is really great and it should be emphasised in other places where youth could come together, get to know each other and share with one another the truth about Jesus Christ; not doctrines, just the truth of Jesus, because He is the One who died and set us free.’

No Building Yet

‘We can praise God for what He has been doing in Griffith, but just at present we don’t have a church building that we can fellowship in. The council has promised us some land and we are waiting patiently for them to give it to us. We started off in Griffith in the SDA Church. It was a great time. For three years they gave us their hall, and even permission to use their new church. They don’t use it on Sundays you see! We used to use it every night of the week and on Saturdays we let them have a loan of their own church! They were really good to us, and even sometimes they had to go and hire a hall during the week so we could keep on using the church. Then they came and asked us nicely if we could get anything nearby for our own church. We said that nothing had come up yet, but we knew it was going to happen soon. They were starting a Youth Group so they wanted their hall on Sundays.

‘We decided to move away from there and find somewhere else. We moved down to the Save the Children Fund hall where we used that place every Wednesday night too, as well as Sunday morning and Sunday evening for our Gospel meetings.

‘The Save the Children Fund gave us the hall free at first for three weeks, but we’ve been using it for about a year now and we haven’t been asked to pay anything for the hire. That has helped us considerably in our finances because we are struggling, although I’m not being paid as a pastor since I now work for Youth and Community as a District Officer. The Lord has taken me into places where the problems really are in our society and town, and I’ve been able to witness there for Jesus Christ and to tell people, “You know our doors are always open”, if they want to get their spiritual needs met. We know the Lord is going to bless us with a church
building soon, but just at present we are spending our money on outreach work.’

**Outreach**

‘We go out to Condobolin, Narrandera and a few other places around there. We went up to Callemondah, in Queensland, twice. There were close to two hundred people who got saved in the two weeks when we were up there. We praise God for that. Our church is an outreach church. We all do things together. We thank God for the people in Griffith. They bought us a bus that cost about five thousand dollars (we have it in Port Augusta with us). The bus has been a great blessing and an asset to us because it helps us to all get together on a Saturday and go on outreach to other towns to share the Word of God. Sometimes we get back in the early hours of the morning, at two o’clock, and we have to go to church at eleven o’clock, but we praise God because we really have seen His blessings, and people have come to know Jesus Christ, which is the greatest thing of all.’

**Finance**

‘Among the people who support us in a lot of our finance is a doctor in town. When I wasn’t working, before I was doing fruit picking, he used to come out and give me one hundred dollars a week just to be at home. Then I got a job fruit picking, but he still came out and said, “Brother, I want to give you this money because I’m in a good job and this is my way of sharing our ministry. Your ministry is to the people, we can see.” This white doctor is a lovely man. He’s a part of our church. One day he came up with three and half thousand dollars to purchase a bus. So we looked around and found a bus for five thousand, and then when it was known in the town that we needed more money, the Uniting Church came into it, the Businessmen’s Fellowship also, with five hundred dollars and we were able to go to Sydney to buy the bus for cash with all the money people had given us. I believe that God is really moving people in Griffith to help in that way. I had to stop the doctor from giving the money because I was working. I’m in a job now. I don’t want to be a rich pastor. I love to give, too.’

**Personal Background**

‘My dad was an evangelist. He started off in Bundaberg in Queensland as an itinerant evangelist who used to go up and down the coast preaching the Word of God. We never got much schooling because my dad was one of those men who used to go out and start a work, and then he would stop
and go out to find work. Sometimes he would work on the railway and we, the family of eight children, would come up after him. He’d get a house and he would start a church right away. It left us with very little education. I could never read or write when I did leave school because my schooling was interrupted so often. My dad is still a missionary out near Mt Isa, at a place call Dijara, and he is getting quite old now.

‘Just because I was brought up in a Christian background didn’t make me a very good guy. I went away from the Lord in my teens and went around to do my own thing as young people do. Then I got married and things got really rough. Our marriage almost fell apart. I knew there must be something better. I turned to Jesus, went and got a minister to help me and my wife. As we sat down together, I got on my knees before Him on the floor and gave my heart to Jesus. That was fifteen years ago and everything has turned around from that day to this. I just preach on my own and we travel around ministering the Word of God. He has healed our marriage. God has healed every part of our life. Then I got into youth work at Gladstone in Queensland, where God saw fit for me to work with up to a thousand young people. That’s where I got my training as a youth worker and minister. God gave me the gift of preaching, and helped me to be able to read the Bible. He has blessed so much.’

Starting at Griffith

‘We started with this church in Griffith four years ago, and I grew with the church. They taught me as I taught them and I tell you, we are just a big loving family. All my people in Griffith are closer to me than my blood relations back in Queensland because we are bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

‘I needed to learn to read and write in the job I have. It was a miracle of God. I believe my God can do anything, but for me to read and understand seemed impossible. I got on my knees in church and prayed and prayed until I felt this great anointing of the Holy Spirit come on me so that I cried and wept. It was such a great blessing that, when I went home, I wanted to read my Bible, and I prayed to the Lord about it. He showed me how to read, and then everything started to come to life in the Bible, and I began to understand things.

‘When I read about the Children of Israel coming out of Egypt, I asked God, “How does that relate to me—all their people, the children, the Egyptians and Pharaoh?” God showed me Pharaoh is your will, the Egyptians are your flesh, and the Israelites are your spirit, caught down there in bondage. “After I have dealt with your will and your flesh, your spirit can come out and worship me.” God showed me how the Children of
Israel going across the Red Sea is the walk of faith that we have to walk. Jesus Christ showed me so many great things from the Word of God. I have learned to read and meditate. I don’t study very much.

‘The Holy Spirit comes and fills me with all these new things from the Word and this Word flows through my mind and through my spirit and I can build up messages from there. Even when I listen to people talking, sitting down together, I sometimes get a message from that. God illustrates to me, like the parables He taught to the disciples. I visualise what He is telling me to say to the people. I am still learning from God, and I love listening to other people telling me about Jesus Christ.’

**From the Solomon Islands**

‘I’m a Solomon Islander, though I don’t know that I’m fully Solomon Islander because my grandparents were brought out here as slaves to Bundaberg to cut sugar cane. They called them Kanakas. My grandparents used to work in Queensland cutting cane and digging potatoes and things like that. How we came to know about Jesus Christ was amazing.

‘When freedom came to the Kanakas, and Aborigines working with them, they all went to different places, and my grandparents bought some land up between Bundaberg and Gladstone, at a little place called Lomi. My father is up there now, and we take little Aboriginal children there for holidays. When they got their freedom and bought this land, there was an old missionary named Pastor Antigmat who used to ride around up to one hundred and thirty kilometers on his push bike on dirt roads. He’d go to all these farms preaching the Gospel and telling people about Jesus. He came along and gave my people a Bible, and started teaching the Word. My grandfather on my mother’s side became a Baptist minister. He used to do a lot of evil things through spirits, but he would never talk to us about that. I know my grandfather. He used to say to me, “All those things back there were evil. Now I have found the truth. I have found the real way. I have found Jesus Christ and there is no way in the world that I would tell my children about the evil that we knew about, because we have found the right spirit. We used to worship evil spirits all the time.” I was only a little child when my grandfather and my grandmother on my father’s side passed away, but father was taught the Word of God. My father used to be a buckjumper at rodeos. He was a champion in Queensland. At Townsville and Rockhampton he heard more about the Lord, and he gave his heart to the Lord. He has been an evangelist ever since. Now I thank God for my parents because they taught me about this wonderful Jesus. I don’t hold any enmity against those who
brought my people out as slaves. I look at it this way. I look at what we’ve found. We found the real truth of Jesus Christ. All those hurts are forgotten. They are in the past. We are looking for a new future in Jesus Christ now.’

The Link with AEF

‘It is a very strange story how I became linked with AEF. My wife and I had our own home in Gladstone in Queensland and I was in the Assemblies of God Church. I was youth leader there at the time. When I came to Griffith, the Lord gave me a vision one day and said, “I want you to go out into the ministry”. I told my wife about it and she said, “Wherever you go, I’ll be there”. I thank God for my wife. She is a great help to me, and doesn’t worry about what I do. She prays for me when I go around the countryside teaching the Word of God.

‘When I got down to Griffith, still as a youth worker with the Assemblies of God, I saw a lot of dark people there. They were in town, but we couldn’t get them to come to church. They didn’t mix with the white people, but seemed to be scared of them. There was a barrier there. I saw my brother who was in the AEF. My brother went through the Assemblies of God training college in Sydney. I found that the AEF was a little different in their teaching from the Assemblies of God. I talked to my pastor and told him I was going to join the AEF as it was the only way I could minister to my people.

‘He talked about different doctrines, but I said, “I’m not worried about doctrines; I’m worried about Jesus Christ, and my people going to a lost eternity”. He asked who was going to help me, so I pointed upward and said that it was He who helps us all. He had to agree with me there. I didn’t need help from man, but from God, who will guide me as He is my Shepherd. When I joined the AEF, it was a different atmosphere altogether, a different kind of teaching from what I’d been used to. When I went to see the council of the AEF, they talked to me. They knew I was Pentecostal, and had that kind of background. But I said, “What I’ve experienced I can’t deny, but I’m not interested very much. My interest is in saving people for Jesus Christ. I would like to work if you will let me work with you. You can try me out for a time if you like, and if you don’t like me, you can throw me out if it is proved that that is not where I ought to be”.

‘I took up the position as pastor with AEF and I’ve really been enjoying myself. I’ve really been studying the Bible to have a look at certain doctrines, and I’ve changed my attitudes a lot because I believe that God is in every church and where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty.’
Learning to Mix

‘When the dark people saw a black minister, one of their kind, it made a big difference. I didn’t just separate them, but I had to learn to go to, and learn to mix with, the other churches in Griffith so I could teach these people who don’t trust whites, that there are white people who love Jesus Christ and love them, too. I used to take them out, and we used to go the Baptist Church or the Uniting Church. We would just go around sharing and trying to mix them in. It was a hard job trying to mix them up with the white people, and I praise God that it worked so well in Griffith. It’s a miracle that God has done. They go into any church now, and they feel they are one in Christ. That was my first step into the unknown, but it was done by faith. I praise God that He has taught me a lot through it all.

‘When we first started getting the dark people to mix, I believe that God was in it. When we first started ministering at Griffith everything seemed to develop well. People were coming to church, eight souls at first; then sixteen, for about four months. Then the pastors around the town came over and asked what was going on, so I told them it is not us but God above. So after that they started to ask us to go to minister in their churches. There were a few times when we packed up our whole church group and took them to the Baptist Church. We went there twice and took the whole service for the Baptists.

‘We did the same at the Uniting Church and even in the SDA we did the same, mixing the black people with the white people. It was like a mini-rally just done with the Griffith people. God started to minister. When we had a good service the people would stand around afterwards. Everybody was happy because the Spirit of God came down and blessed, and the people began to mingle with one another and share with one another. They said, “This is great! Why can’t we have another one?” So it happened again.’

Black Sharing with White

‘The first time it was so beautiful. From the pulpit I could see tears coming out of white people’s eyes. They were crying. When they saw the dark people getting up to give items and share testimonies of what Jesus had done, how He saved them from alcohol and how young people were saved and brought out from drugs, the power of God was so evident that the people were just crying. So they invited us back and after that things started to happen in all the churches. We went to the Baptist Church and tears started to flow in people’s eyes. The Spirit of God came so powerfully that there was an anointing on the meeting
and afterwards people just had to mix together. They just had to love one another.

‘It is something maybe you’ve never seen in your life, and yet it is happening all over Australia where black people and white people just love and kiss one another and hug one another and shake each other’s hands. They are just praising the Lord. It has happened in Griffith and I know it is happening in other places too.’

**In the Schools**

‘In the high school we have our own religious instruction group. The principal wanted us to have our own group because all the children were getting saved in the high school. Then we had the primary school where we take just singing down there with all the children together. All the little Aborigines get up together and sing to everybody. We have this once a year with about seven hundred children, in the school that I minister to. God has been blessing and blessing. When I walk through the school grounds now, people are saying, “How are you Mr Minniecon?” It is beautiful to have a lot of white children running up and putting their arms around you and even the teachers can’t get over it. They say, “What you have got, we’d like to know too!”’

**Talking to the District Council**

‘I was invited to a Griffith council meeting because the council wanted to know what was going on in town. They saw that the dark people weren’t walking round drunk any more. There are a lot of new people in Griffith now, but this was when we first started. Nobody was fighting in the streets. Everybody was going to church. The council saw it and they invited me up to speak to them. When I went there they asked me a few questions. They asked who supported me and I said, “Nobody”, so they asked me who paid me for doing what I was doing and I told them again, “Nobody”. They asked what I got out of that. I told them that when I saw a family come to know Jesus Christ and their new happiness, when father and mother turn from alcohol and new joy and peace comes to their family, that is the best reward that I could ever receive.

‘When I looked at those people in the council with tears in their eyes, because the Spirit of God was witnessing there too, I told them what happens when Jesus comes in. I heard one council lady talking to another council lady, “You know, we tried everything in this town for the Aboriginal people. We tried all the welfare schemes, everything we could think of. Look, this guy comes along and everything is just changed in
such a short time. What he has got is what everybody needs.” That was only Jesus.

‘Another question they asked was what they could do to help me. I told them we needed some land to help build a church. So we are just waiting now because they have promised some land and we are going to build a church.’

**Evangelism**

‘We are an evangelistic church. We go out to other places to evangelise. We fit as many as we can in the bus. We went to Deniliquin about four months ago. Fifty-five of our congregation came. There were about eight cars because we couldn’t fit everyone in the bus. We’ve been to Condobolin, taking the bus over there. We had a response of about twenty-five who came to the Lord over there. In another place called Murrum Bridge we saw thirty-one respond one night. Things have been really happening everywhere on these visits.

‘I took a bus load of young people up to Queensland last Christmas because some of these Aboriginal children, and white children too, had never seen the sea. It was a fantastic experience for them. We took them down to Fingal near Tweed Heads and we started on an evangelistic tour from there right up to Gladstone and back down along the coast again.

‘The young people sang as a choir and we ministered to every church where we could fit ourselves in. It was a faith venture. All the churches were giving us donations along the way. One incident happened near Brisbane when our brakes failed. One of the girls wanted to go to the toilet but I was travelling a bit too fast to take the turn into the rest area. A big sign marking the rest area came right through the windscreen of the bus and was sitting beside me. We had to drive from there to Brisbane without any windscreen. I thought we would be up for a lot of money for a new windscreen. It was quite a big one. When we got to Brisbane we went to a Fijian church. We ministered there and shared the Word. They gave us a love offering of one hundred and ten dollars. When the windscreen was put in I asked the garage man how much we owed him. He said, “A hundred and ten dollars will do”. Isn’t God a worker of miracles? That was exactly the amount we had been given in the offering.

‘Then we came back all the way over the range. We ministered all the way back and the young people really enjoyed it. God supplied all our needs all the way down and all the way back. He looked after us for the whole three weeks of the holiday.’
The Trip to Port Augusta

‘This year we brought a bus load of ladies; twenty-three of us came over to the Port Augusta Convention. The ladies are really enjoying it and don’t want to go home now. But we left all their husbands home so I’ll have to get them home soon or they might shoot me when I get back. There were many more wanted to come, but we couldn’t fit them into the bus. Next year we hope to bring more if we get a bigger bus. Two of my older boys stayed home looking after themselves because they wanted some of the other younger people to enjoy this trip. I really appreciated their sacrifice to the Lord in that because they were thinking about others and not themselves. I’m just a little worried about how they are managing at home because they are only teenagers, but I know God will bless them for it. I brought my wife and the rest of my family along here. We have eight children of our own and my eldest son is eighteen. He writes songs for the Lord now, as I do.’

Difficulties and Problems

‘Not everything has been going as we would like it in smooth sailing. We had our hard times and our battles, with storms and winds trying to blow us off course, but we thank God we are able to stand. I have one Scripture that has always helped me, “We will reap in due time if we faint not”. I also have a favourite saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going”. A lot of ministers get discouraged and want to chuck it in. There have been times in my ministry too when it has been really hard going. One of the hardest things for me has been to be a full-time pastor who ministers every night of the week and on Sundays preparing myself and the messages for the services.

‘Then, being a worker during the weekdays as a district officer, I had to go away from my church for three months to Sydney to train as a district officer. That was a big problem in the church for that time because they missed me as the pastor, not that I am God, but there is a kind of respect for me as leader. It is amazing that one of my Christian brothers, the assistant pastor, his name is George Mann, had the same vision that I had up in Queensland. He had also only been a Christian for five months when he had a vision to go out at the same time as I did. He sold everything and set out just as I did. We met in that great paddock in Griffith and we both worked together like brothers for four years. There has never been any squabble between us. I have been training him in the ministry right up until now and he is looking after the church.

‘When I went away for the three months it got rather heavy for him, being so young. I was a little concerned for him as he had to go away to
Queensland for a couple of months, four days before I got home. When I came home I rang up and told him to have a good rest and when he was ready he could come back. I praise God for that young man; he is really someone special. God brought us together and we worked together, so it was really a big problem for me and for the church when he was sick.’

**Members Overseas**

‘At times we do have people falling away instead of building each other up, but a lot of the young people have really caught on fire although they are only four years old in the Lord. Some have come off drugs and alcohol and their parents and families are still not saved; some have been ministering in their families and helping them to know the Lord.

‘We had one young white girl in the church whose parents used to get into her about going to our church. Her parents weren’t Christians and they said, “Why can’t you go and find fellowship in a white church?” She answered, “No, Mum, I’m getting more blessings from this church here and I don’t want to be a hypocrite”. Anyway, they got really nasty with her and sent her away to Switzerland so she wouldn’t be with us any more. But we’ve been getting letters back from her telling us that God is using her in a mighty way. She has been testifying and witnessing. When she was in the street telling people about Jesus someone ripped her Bible up in front of her. “That won’t stop me”, she said, “I just love my Jesus!”

‘There is another white lady from our church now in Hawaii. Altogether we have about five people who have gone out into different ministries from our church which has been developed for five years. We have had three or four go through Bimbadeen Bible College in Cootamundra. Some are in the ministry, one has gone back to Queensland, and we hope to see more go through soon. It hasn’t always been easy but we trust God that we can keep on serving Him until Jesus comes.’

**Tape Ministry**

‘Another thing we have established in Griffith is a tape ministry. It is just group singing and testimonies shared on it. Every Bible study and sometimes the morning message is taped. We put all these on tapes. One of the elders of our church gives his money to send these tapes out to people in isolated areas where they can’t get to church for fellowship or they just want to hear from us. Some are sent overseas, others go to different places right around Australia. We send tapes out every month but we don’t ask people to pay for them.

‘Some people are very isolated. I remember when we were up in Culamurra. We ministered to some people up there. They came nearly
four hundred and twenty kilometres from their station to hear the Word of the Lord and they gave their hearts to the Lord that night. These two families only come to town about once every four months so we send tapes to support them in their Christian lives. This is a gift from God and we believe it is really blessing them too.’

**Present Day Situation**

Pastor Rodney Minniecon was ministering at Griffith in the eighties as pastor of the ‘One in Christ Fellowship’. He found their leaders were dispersing. ‘Some went back to Queensland; some, like Peter Compton, went to WA. George Mann and a whole group of the fellowship went to Bourke with the Apostolic Church. George’s brother went back to Rockhampton and started another work there. The only people left in the Griffith fellowship were the old people. I felt in my heart that my time was up there. So I left Griffith in charge of an Italian man, Mario Rezzetti. The church is a family of black and white.

‘We were all on outreach ministry. I went to Kempsey and started another “One in Christ Fellowship” and stayed there for five and a half years. We even got involved with the Seventh Day Adventists because they have a lot of ministry with Aboriginals. Through all that we also did a lot of overseas travelling. I went to New Guinea, then South Africa and twice to South Korea and twice to the Philippines and to Indonesia. I went to Malaysia and five times to Singapore and have just come back last week from Noumea in New Caledonia. This was the tenth nation I had been to. Just before that I was five weeks in India, in the Muslim country, and I preached there. People pay my expenses, and every trip I have taken has been paid for. The Island people of Noumea paid for my trip there.

‘I go under the umbrella of the AEF. I don’t use their pulpits, but I’m registered through them for marriages, but I work in all the churches, Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal. The AEF is wonderful, because, as their name says, it is a fellowship, they kind of integrate you with other churches. They have accepted me for who I am.

‘I’ve got a lot of ministry going to Thursday Island, Mornington Island and other places at the top of Australia like Arnhem Land, to the Uniting Church at Nhulunbuy, to the Atherton Tablelands, and then all the way over to see Larry Goolagong in Wentworth. That is a ministry God gave me after Griffith. Griffith was my training ground, the opening of many, many doors. They came through the TV after I was interviewed in 1985 and I got an achievement award from the Australia Day Council for my work amongst the alcoholics. I later became a member of the local council.
I’ve been to international prayer conventions like Intercessors of Australia in South Africa and more recently I’ve been doing a bit of teaching on Cleansing of the Land, my brother Ray and Rev. John Blacket are involved in that ministry.

I’m now involved in mobile outreach ministry. I use a big bus and travel around the outback working with all the churches, although at the moment I’m involved with the Pentecostal church in Townsville. Every June or July, for the last twelve years, I’ve had a lot of ministry in the Adelaide area with the Church of Christ and the Uniting. I used to do the youth work for them from way back, but I stopped about two years ago.

During my trip to South Africa I met Nelson Mandela and flew in his jet. I had the opportunity of being escorted by the military for two days and then they flew me down and toured the place and I met all the top officials. That was an amazing experience. Meeting Nelson Mandela and discovering that he is a Christian was a highlight in my life.

The trip to Noumea last week was amazing because I met all the big chiefs of the tribes and a lot of folk came to the Lord, a lot of deliverance. Deliverance ministry is a significant part of what I do.

I went to Palm Island just before the trip to Noumea, and a lot of souls came to the Lord.

My impression of the Aboriginal Church of today is that it needs to get out of a rut. It seems that a lot of the Aboriginal people are caught in some kind of a religious structure and I don’t think that the Spirit of God can really move through their life until they break free, even though you have to be under a covering like the AEF. We can get locked into a doctrine and not see our brothers and sisters who Jesus died for. We stay in our own little circles. That is where our Aboriginal people are caught in a snare. We have to be free from that. We shouldn’t look at doctrine, or the name of a church, but people.

I believe that God is going to do a new thing, a great new move from the islands, so we are setting up “South Pacific for Christ” in Townsville now. In June 1996, we are having a conference here with people coming from Noumea, Solomon Islands, New Guinea. We don’t have to be oppressed and depressed and manipulated, we are individuals and we can do things for God. He is going to raise up a lot of black people, He’s done it before and He is going to do it again. Black and white have to work together in unity. I feel very strongly that we should love one another.’
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The AEF in Victoria—The Burning Question of Identity

In Victoria there are no tribal Aborigines. As Pastor Lilley explains, ‘In this state there is a higher degree of integration, both in the housing situation and with intermarriage’. Surprisingly, then, Victorian Aborigines still find the need for an identity as a separate people and, particularly with AEF, to have their own Christian congregations and churches. They feel the need to meet together to encourage each other as Christian Aborigines and see that their work can only progress as they find this identity as an Aboriginal group and as Aboriginal men and women.

In the work place, those Aborigines who are able to find employment are usually identified by their workmates by their skin colour. Some, who because of lighter skin pigmentation are able to escape the name-calling and taunting at work or school, decide not to identify at all with their Aboriginal heritage, even though brothers and cousins may be known as Aborigines.

Those who daily encounter the racist attitudes of other Australians at work, in the streets and in the shops, need to have some situations where their identity can be an asset and an advantage. This can happen in an Aboriginal community and in an Aboriginal church where they are known and their abilities are recognised. Not only are they significant as individuals, but their families are usually known, relationships with distant cousins and connections by marriage are sorted out, so a person begins to feel part of the larger community and has a valuable place in the group.

This feeling of belonging is further increased as the church preaches the message of the Gospel, that all become children of God through the death of Christ for all sinners in the whole world, black and white, privileged and
underprivileged, rich and poor, but especially the lost. When they become believers, they have a new identity as children of God, an important member of the Aboriginal church and a part of the whole living body of believers. There are others in the church who understand them, their way of life with its difficulties and struggles, but who are prepared to help by befriending them rather than merely watching as interested but callous spectators.

For these reasons, churches for Aboriginal people are growing in Victoria. They value this identity as members of their extended family and people, but more especially as identifying with their own people in a form of Christian worship that is meaningful and helpful to them. Pastor Neville Lilley and his wife have been able to help organise these centres of worship and helped to raise part of the support for them. Neville has many roles in AEF. He was a member of the interstate committee organising the convention and, as he mentions in the following interview, a member of the planning committee for the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Leaders’ Conference. In 1983 he spoke of his work as deputationist for the AEF churches in Victoria. It was very evident that the good relationships between Pastor Neville and missionary bodies created a climate of cooperation in which both white churches and AEF benefited. It was also evident that Neville and his fellow pastors identify as Aboriginal people and can understand and help their people grow as Christians.

**PASTOR NEVILLE LILLEY**

‘There are sixteen thousand Aboriginal people in the state of Victoria. The latest statistics from the government say that there are twenty thousand, but four thousand of these do not want to identify as Aboriginal. There are nine thousand Aboriginal people within the city of Melbourne itself. They are scattered right throughout the city, in the Doveton, Dandenong, Fitzroy, Northcote, Collingwood, Heidelberg and Preston areas. They are scattered right throughout the city, not located in one particular area. There are also many people in places like Warrnambool and Framlingham; quite a lot of people live at Lake Tyers, a lot live in Bairnsdale itself; quite a lot in Latrobe Valley, that is in the Morwell area; quite a lot in the Shepparton–Echuca area; so really we are scattered right throughout the state of Victoria; the sixteen thousand that want to identify as Aboriginal people.

‘The AEF work here started later than in some other states. The interstate constitution was drawn up in 1970, and it was Pastor Jack Braeside, then the Federal Secretary of the National Council, who came to Victoria and felt that we ought to commence a state council or committee in this state.
He got quite a few men together—David Dawson, Kevin Norman, Gordon Blowers, David Lewin and others. It was 1972 when the AEF State Council was formed in Victoria.

‘The AEF had no work at all going on in the state. The only work that was done, to my memory, was the Anglican Centre at Lake Tyers. The Churches of Christ at Mooroopna, and also the Uniting Church, were seeking to reach out to people in the Robinvale area. They did have a work in the north-west of Victoria, at Balranald. They have a little church up there even to this day, but I don’t think much was going on, as far as the work was concerned, in that area. The UAM did not have any work going on in this state, nor was there any denominational work seeking to direct ministry to Aboriginal people. So therefore we felt a tremendous need to try to reach our people within the state because no one else seemed to be doing anything constructive in reaching them for Christ.

‘In 1972 the State Council was formed. I was in Tahlee Bible College in 1975–76 and graduated in November. Lorraine and I felt called into this work as deputationists for the AEF of Australia in the eastern states. Then the Eastern Council was in operation so we commenced our work at the end of November 1976. We feel that the Lord will allow us to continue here for some time yet because of the very important ministry of just sharing what God is doing among our people in general, as many are ignorant of what God is doing in Australia.’ (They are still there after twenty years, in 1996.)

‘We have a work at Swan Hill. David Lewin is our worker there. We have a work in the Latrobe Valley and East Gippsland. Pastor Ron Logan is visiting the people in Drouin; Mr Alwyn Jensen at Warragul; Mr John Van Driesum at Moe; Mr Robert Cooper at Morwell; Mr Sam Edwards at Traralgon and at the Lionel Rose Centre. Pastor Rick and Kayleen Manton and Wes and Ruth O’Brien share the work at Dandenong. We have been able to purchase a bus for the work in the Doveton–Dandenong–Healesville area.

‘We try to get our churches to be self-supporting. It will take us a while. To give an example: in the city of Melbourne here, our church has been going now for thirteen years and our average weekly offering would be about one hundred and fifty dollars. Coming from an Aboriginal church that is very, very good. In five to seven years we may have self-supporting churches in these different areas. But at the moment we really need financial support and most of this comes from the major denominations—Baptist, Churches of Christ, Anglican and the Uniting Church—and, of course, quite a lot of support comes from individuals who want to be involved in this nationwide ministry.'
‘Eddie Champion has left for Ceduna. I’ve been working very closely with him for the four years he has been here. He and his wife, Denise, had a wonderful ministry with the young people. I am really thrilled with the development of their work. Pastor Jim and Maxine Lawrence have taken over.

‘Aboriginal people from different communities meet here in Melbourne. People from Lake Tyers, Commeragunja, Shepparton, Echuca, Framlingham and Warrnambool areas. I was speaking to a lady one night at our Bible study who came from Shepparton. People from all over the state come here to Melbourne seeking jobs, better housing or whatever their need might be.’

**Support from Missionary Bodies**

‘We have tremendous cooperation from the missionary bodies. For example the UAM. Neville Mellor and I are very close and communicate well. We seek to help and support each other whenever we can. I think we have more contact with the UAM because their headquarters are right here in Melbourne. We are also encouraged by other missionary and denominational bodies like the AIM which has state council members here in Melbourne. Personnel have made themselves available from Synod level, from the Baptist Union of Victoria. We praise God for these bodies because without them we could not have done in Victoria what we have in the last few years.

‘We have people coming into our fellowship at times in Fitzroy whom we know are charismatic because of their actions, but that doesn’t worry us at all. The charismatic movement in Melbourne is very real and that’s their way of worshipping the Lord.

‘There is no problem for me about identifying as an Aboriginal and serving the Lord. When I was in the work force in the world, working for a boss, I identified as an Aboriginal and that has helped me identify with the people in my ministry now. Christ has fulfilled everything in my life.

‘The people in the Northern Territory, living in tribal areas, hold Christian corroborees, where they are now communicating the Gospel of Christ with Aboriginal music and painting. We are going through a completely new era. That, to me, is very, very exciting. This started in Warlpiri country and has gone right across the north of Western Australia. Also this communicating has been very effective. I was speaking to a fellow Christian in Esperance last year and he showed me some Aboriginal art that was painted to communicate the Trinity. The tribal elders and the church put it together.'
‘We pastors are Aborigines; we know what our people are going through because we have been in their situation. We know the problems they face, because we have been there. We can identify with them and their problems. It doesn’t matter what it is—housing, drinking or fighting. They cannot hide anything from us.

‘In this day and age it is very important that we, as Aboriginal people, get up and face our responsibilities to reach our own people for Christ, but I also say in the same breath that we cannot do it alone. We need the rest of the body of Christ—there is only one body—and we need each other, to pray for one another and to support one another in any way we possibly can.

‘In the Canberra Conference held in 1983, we found a lot of real issues that we as the AEF of Australia must face up to because we are growing in this country and there is a tremendous demand for Christian leadership. We discussed things like land rights. Our land rights policy is now being drawn up by the AEF. We discussed vandalism in Australia and vandalism internationally. Incorporation was also discussed. Mr Alan Moore is our solicitor in Box Hill North. We flew him from Melbourne to Canberra to be with us for the day and to explain incorporation to the conference. There were many important issues we had to discuss. There were about forty delegates at that conference. To me personally it was a very enriching time.

‘The AEF is growing and we must be big enough and mature enough in the Lord, otherwise it will grow away from us. In Victoria we are not experiencing the very dramatic work that is going on elsewhere. We have a very vital State Council. I have been on that council with eleven other men and women, black and white, some are in the ministry and some are businessmen. I think that group has given us stability as far as God’s work in Victoria is concerned. The work is definitely growing and people are coming to Christ. There has never been, to my knowledge, any great movement in our churches or in our crusades or elsewhere. It has always been through personal evangelism; it has always been through our Sunday School; it has always been through our evening Gospel services. There has never been a revival as has happened in the Northern Territory or Western Australia; a great mass movement of people coming to Christ. It has been very steady growth but it is solid growth. What excites me, is to see people growing in the Lord.

‘We are training leaders. For example, we have some tremendous men like Tom, who came to the Lord under Pastor Ben Mason’s ministry in Doveton, earlier in 1982. Other men also are involved in taking up leadership responsibility within the life of the church. The ladies want to be involved in Sunday School teaching and ladies’ meetings. There is real
growth within certain areas in the state. We don’t have any Victorian students at Bimbadeen Bible College. The only Victorian student there does not identify with AEF work in Victoria, but comes from one of the denominational churches. It is very interesting that we don’t have many trainee pastors from Victoria.

‘Laurie Lewin is a Victorian, I believe. Eddie and Denise Champion are from Port Lincoln and Port Augusta in South Australia. Michael and Karen are from Kalgoorlie and Bimbadeen. My wife and I are from Newcastle. Maxine Lilley is from Newcastle. Ron and Lena Femy also are from Newcastle. Jim Lawrence is from Tamworth. Maxine Hill, working in the city, is from Tamworth. Ninety per cent of us working in Victoria come from other states.

There is going to come a time when we will have Victorian students through Bimbadeen and then we will move off to service in other areas and leave the Victorians to carry on in their own state. The AEF is only a brand new work in Victoria. It hasn’t been going very long at all here.

‘In January 1983 we had a Christian Leaders’ Conference in Adelaide. I was asked to help on the committee. To help organise this we did a lot of ground work. We had three international speakers at this conference. A black American, Rev. John Perkins, was on the team; Rev. Dr Sam Kamaleson from India; and a very good speaker from Africa, Bishop David Gitari. We looked forward to this leadership training conference. There were about ninety of us there, men and women, and it was by invitation only. We felt it should be only for Aboriginal people themselves so that we could listen to what the Lord is saying to us with these international speakers, as Aboriginal pastors and leaders.

The planning committee changed its policy later and invited a few non-Aboriginal leaders from missions and denominational churches. There were people from all the major denominations invited to the Aboriginal Christian Leaders’ Conference—Baptist, Churches of Christ, Anglican, Uniting Church, Catholic, Lutheran and charismatic churches. There were Aboriginal people from all these denominations. This was not an AEF conference, but an Aboriginal and Islander Christian Leaders’ Conference. It was financed partly by World Vision, but we looked to the major denominations also to play a role in this financial support by sending their delegates. We approached the heads of the denominations of this country and there had been a lot of hard work. It took a lot of time.’

Since this interview Neville has continued his work as deputationist with some changes in the team assisting him. The youth work around Melbourne has developed under Pastor Jim Lawrence and with the support of the team.
In Melbourne at the Aboriginal Church called ‘Minajalku’, Pastor Neville Lilley, Pastor Jim Lawrence and Pastor Rick Manton work together.

**PASTOR JACK BRAESIDE**

‘I was in Redfern working with the Aboriginal Church for almost five years. We were working amongst Aboriginal people, drug addicts and alcoholics. These were the people squatting in empty houses close by. They used to come to my place so we decided to set up a drop-in centre for meals. We also had a fellowship on Sunday afternoons.

‘We came to Mildura in December 1989; the day the earthquake struck Newcastle. After our experience at Adelaide, Meekatharra and Sydney we prayed about how the ministry would develop here in Mildura. We used to get a few people, we had to pick them up to take them to church. The need here is to get into the homes. I prayed about the ministry here, so I’ve been visiting people at home and just sitting down witnessing, because there is another Aboriginal fellowship. There has not been an Aboriginal fellowship at Mildura but one has just been started by Mic Bowan at Wentworth concentrating on children and we cooperate with it. The white church has been here for years but only one has a couple of Aboriginal families.

‘I went to Perth Bible College and then strayed into evangelism after I came into contact with the evangelist, John Ridley at the Australian Institute of Evangelism. I went from Perth Bible College to Wollongong. Then I had my own ministry which we called Aborigines Mobile Mission. It was based around Sydney and we worked a lot around Taree. We came back to Western Australia and worked in the Narrogin–Brookton area in 1969 after the Billy Graham Crusade. I was working on a farm east of Narrogin, down to York. The farmer I worked for let me go on weekends. I’ve been in ministry since about 1957.

‘In the early days, the missions missed the chance because they missed the high part by not using the culture like marriages and dance. They majored on old people but their means of communication was mainly through corroborees with singing and drama. A lot of people now are trying to identify with the Aboriginal culture, especially young people. In Redfern we found a lot of backsliders and a lot of them are older people who come from the AIM and UAM influence. They are dying out, but the young people are growing up and are more interested in culture, and some don’t care and are just going their own way. More and more people are assimilating in towns, whereas in early days these people lived on reserves.'
In NSW, they had this resettlement program where they would ship families to Wodonga and Albury, Wagga Wagga, Sydney and Newcastle and big towns like Dubbo. A lot of our leadership was broken down from the reserves and families were displaced. Children were going to the big cities and the towns, and the parents wouldn’t know where they were. That happened in Western Australia with the children going to towns when the government changed the policy. Even in Western Australia, where the government gave the people higher wages, they were forced out of the cattle stations where they had been born, to places like Fitzroy Crossing. There they got on the drink and that made it worse; they couldn’t control their children. A lot of places like here at Dareton, which was under the AIM, and in Western Australia under the UAM, the properties were sold without an established leadership to continue the work. Men like the missionary who should have taught the people to contribute to the upkeep of the pastor and should have appointed elders but instead he did everything, and that sort of policy is still going on. When this happens people get discouraged and drift away.

‘We went to Wentworth fellowship last night and talked to the pastor about forming an Aboriginal Christian Fellowship, an interdenominational one similar to AEF. So far the people I’ve talked to, like the pastor last night, seemed to be thrilled with the idea. We explained that everybody would still be members of their own fellowship.

‘I fellowship with the Anglican Church at Redcliffe, about nine miles south of Mildura. Sometimes I help with the church service when the minister is away and sometimes I’ve ministered the Word.’
I had read brief accounts in the AEF newsletter of the continuing growth of Christian work among Lower Murray River Aborigines. It was quite difficult to catch Pastor Keith Mildon at home. After several attempts in 1983, I rang him about breakfast time and, although I kept him from his meal, he was very welcoming and offered to introduce me to the Christian Aboriginal people at Murray Bridge and Meningie at their Sunday services.

At Murray Bridge, their morning service was held in an old wartime hut provided by the Uniting Church. It was adequate, but not very beautiful. Once the service started, I forgot the temporary building and was caught up in the singing and the testimonies of the people. There was little of the formality I have been used to. One family group of about eight people sang a hymn which, although quite unrehearsed, was very moving and beautiful. After the sermon which was a simple Bible message rather than a high-powered evangelistic address, a young lady came out to commit her life to Christ. Her mother came out the front, too, to pray for her, rejoice with her and dry her tears. Pastor Keith counselled her and then concluded the service. I could scarcely believe that almost two hours had gone since we started.

We went to lunch with a lady known as ‘the Queen of the River’, because for many years she had gone out on the river by boat each day at Tailem Bend to catch fish. Now, because of a heart condition and her age (about ninety-three), her family had persuaded her not to do that. She played old-time hymns, which she had memorised, on her pushbutton
accordion for us, and told us stories of her past life. She mentioned the Aboriginal myth about the Murray Cod who first hollowed out the river.

At Meningie, the Uniting Church building was used for an evening service at 5 p.m., and again a very friendly and relaxed service was held. There is obviously a very good working relationship between the white congregation who meet in the morning and the Aboriginal group that meets in the same building in the evening. Later on, Pastor Keith told me of the generous support he gets from the Uniting Church members.

The important feature of that evening service was the part played by the children in singing their choruses as a choir out in front of the older people. Even small children of three or four take part. One child, obviously mentally handicapped, took part with all the others and, even though she was unable to sing the words, she enjoyed the music and was accepted by all the others. After the children had been given the opportunity to tell us what they thanked God for in the past week, the adults had an opportunity to witness and to pray for each other, especially for those who were sick or were travelling.

Pastor Keith showed me the block of two and a quarter hectares of land given by the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association (AFA) and also the almost completed house provided for him by that organisation. He reminded me that the AFA had begun the mission in Raukkan over one hundred and twenty years ago. I will let him tell his own story about his work with AEF in South Australia, and particularly in the Riverland.

‘In 1978 I was up in the Riverland and, after much prayer, I felt the call of God to come to Murray Bridge. I felt directed to come here and start a work amongst the children. There were about thirty-five to forty children in the Sunday School, and this became the nucleus of the work. Then gradually we started to have morning worship meetings, too. At first only five or six adults turned up, mostly people I had known earlier. I worked in Adelaide in 1971 to help to get the AEF group going there. It was at Challa Gardens, then it went to the YMCA, then to Willard Hall in Wakefield Street. I was the first [AEF] pastor in Adelaide. Pastor Bob Brown was the second pastor, and Pastor Jack Braeside was the third. Pastor Frank Johnson, Pastor Ben Mason, Pastor Tom Coe and Rev. Wali Fejo came later. I went home to New Zealand for a while, then I came up to the Riverland.

‘I worked up at Gerard, and we had an Aboriginal Christian Fellowship at Glossop. That had been going for a few years, but, when some of the older people died, the work closed. I used to visit Murray Bridge and Raukkan. I used to do the whole horseshoe circuit from Adelaide, so I had made contact with people at Murray Bridge years ago. Adelaide was the
mother church for AEF, and Murray Bridge was a branch from there. From Murray Bridge I made an outreach here to Meningie. From Meningie we branched out to Raukkan. Also we visited Mannum from Murray Bridge. I am at Meningie now because of the work growing so much that they wanted their own pastor.

‘The Aboriginal people were praying for a church and a house. We had nowhere to meet so we prayed earnestly and went round looking at some old buildings, such as an old hall or factory. We little knew that the Lord had a place for us just up the road. I had a phone call one day to say that these people were interested to buy us a two hectare section above the lake at Meningie. I could have jumped for joy, and was really rejoicing at this answer to prayer. This group, the AFA, also informed me that they had enough money to build a house for the pastor. The home is now in the process of being built. We praised the Lord that the land and the house were paid for. This association took upon themselves to do this. I am sure that they were directed by God. The AFA commenced the mission at Raukkan in 1859, but that community has now become an independent council with their own chairman. I go there once a week for a cottage meeting, or a church meeting. The meetings there are very encouraging because the young people are so keen. We have some fine young people coming to these Christian meetings.’

*House provided by the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association*
THE CHURCH AT MENINGIE

‘Meningie has about sixty Nunga [Aboriginal] people living there, including children, and about fifty of them are Christians. Their witness is so effective that other people in the town are wondering what is going on. Some say, “Oh, it won’t last. It is another one of those things”, but it has been lasting for three years now. People come from the Raukkan Mission to the services here and we go down there on Tuesday nights.

‘There is a fairly stable population in Meningie and in Murray Bridge, with only a few drifters, whereas in Adelaide people tend to move about all the time. They move about to find employment. Some find it hard to settle into city life; some find it hard to get on with other people. Often there are difficulties in their own families. Those who become Christian don’t find so much difficulty in settling into society. But at Meningie this is their home, and there are some very stable families here.

‘My job is to encourage the leaders, and then they can help others as the Holy Spirit directs them. We are encouraging the young people to take part. The young people of today make the leaders of tomorrow. There have been two young men who have gone to Bimbadeen Bible College from Murray Bridge; one has completed his course and married a girl from New South Wales. They are wondering what work they can do now. The other young man will graduate this year. I am praying that they will stay here and work in Murray Bridge.

‘Most of our meetings here are cottage meetings. We do get together on Sunday and have combined worship meetings, but during the week we have several cottage meetings. I am going out every night because at present I am covering two areas. The pastor from Murray Bridge resigned, so I have to try to cover that area as well as this. On Wednesday night I have two meetings at Meningie, the young people’s and then a cottage meeting. People say to me, “Slow down! You can’t do everything”. But it is amazing that God gives me the strength—“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. People say, “You’ll drop dead one day. You’ve had one heart attack!” Well what a way to go, serving the Lord!

‘This is a great training ground for ministry. It is thrilling to see men really coming out and showing leadership under the hand of God. Because I know that I won’t always be here, the next man they get may not be quite so tolerant or understanding. He may be someone from outside the area who doesn’t really understand or have patience with these people. I believe the potential leaders are in this area, in this country.

‘I had gone back to New Zealand after a heart attack, thinking I had to finish active work because of my health, but after six months in
New Zealand, in 1982, I couldn’t settle over there and I had to come back.’

Robert Day wrote a poem expressing the love of the Aboriginal people for their Maori Pastor:

**The Pastor** by Robert Day

_We’d like to thank you Brother Keith_
_for the work you’ve done for us,
you taught us how to love the Lord and live life without a fuss._
_We’ve sung the hymns and choruses,_
you’ve taught us who we are,
_and that our Lord and Saviour is coming from afar._
_You said, ‘If we have Jesus we’ll never be alone,_
we will meet together soon around God’s golden throne’._
_To some people you are Uncle Keith and Pastor to another,_
but down here in Meningie, you are our brother._
_As we walk into the church and step into the pew_ and Pastor Jeff says, ‘Prayer requests?’_
_We will remember you._
_Our hearts are grieved to know that you have gone so far,_
’cause we won’t hear your voice saying, ‘Robbie! where’s Min-Ma?’*_
_You’ve worked away from home so long the Lord will understand,_
but Brother now he’s saying, its home to Kiwi land._
_We’ve given you this poem to read_ when from night’s rest you wake
_you’ll know our prayers are with you_ from your church here by the Lake._

_*Min-Ma—Keith’s constant canine companion._

‘After praying about it, the Lord directed me back here. It must have been His will because when I got back last June in 1982 things began happening.’

**Cottage Meetings**

‘These cottage meetings have an informal, relaxed atmosphere, and people of all ages feel free to take part. We even have a three-year-old girl who sings and has given her testimony. Then we have people like Grannie Smith who is over ninety. We don’t have the problem of finding baby sitters because the whole family can come. It is a relaxed family atmosphere in which everybody can take part. It is quite good training.”
‘We usually start with favourite songs and choruses. People choose the ones they want. Some then give a testimony of what the Lord has been doing in their lives; others lead the group in prayer as the Holy Spirit moves them. We don’t have a series of Bible studies, but someone gives a ministry of the Word. Most of the people have their own Bible studies in their homes in their family worship. If they get stuck with anything they want to know, then they come and ask me or ask an older Christian and we counsel them. Jesus never just informed people about things. He pushed them into action, and in these days I believe we have to do the same and get them doing things, not just listening all the time. That is why in all our meetings nearly every person takes part in some way. The children often prepare a chorus or a hymn as part of the worship. Our meetings can go on for a couple of hours, sometimes three hours. We don’t set a time limit. God is not controlled by time. Heaven doesn’t go by the clock, so we are practising a bit of that now.

‘Although we have had conversions at some meetings, we aim at strengthening the Christians and helping them to grow in the grace of God as they are being involved. We don’t want Bible study for the sake of knowledge. We want people working with the Spirit of God, and this is how growth comes. This is what is happening in this river area. The other people in this area notice what is happening. Other Nunga people call Murray Bridge the “holy city”.

‘Some time ago we had a baptism in the river here at lunchtime. When I went down there was quite a crowd. The police force who had a water skiing club nearby were looking on astounded at some of their former clients, who used to keep them busy, going into the water for baptism. These changed lives were a good witness. I’ve had many reports from the people of Meningie who are amazed at the change in the Nunga people here.

‘Baptisms at Meningie have been held either in the lake or in the Coorong in the part where everyone else can see. Sometimes they drop out for a while, especially the young people, then they come back to the Lord again. Some teenagers move away to Adelaide, and they find it very hard. We don’t bully them to come back but we pray for them and talk kindly to them. But the more mature married people don’t have such a problem going on. They face their troubles together as a family. There are a number of married couples with their children who really grow together in the Lord.

‘Alcohol and drugs are the biggest problems, but we just have to pray and trust God to arrest them in this and bring them back, and He does. Otherwise we’ll worry ourselves sick about them. So we try to counsel them and trust God to bring them back. Some of these people have good
jobs, especially as teacher aides in the Education Department. Unemployment might be as high as fifty per cent. The ones who haven’t got jobs are the young people. Those with a drink problem find it hard to keep jobs.

‘In our area in the Lower Murray the people are reasonably healthy. They protested about their inferior housing, letting their voices be heard even as far as the Ombudsman. When the Housing Department wouldn’t listen to them, they went to the Ombudsman and to their MPs. Now they are getting their houses spick and span. This is due to their new life and their higher standards. They expect that the standards of the government should be high, too. They keep within their rights and are protesting in a nice way. They are not demanding, but are making their needs known and their needs are being met. They have a voice now, and the town has to take notice of their Christian standing. This is a different situation now. The pubs notice the difference. Now they are meeting somewhere and praising the Lord. The whole town has noticed and have come to tell me how surprised they are. I say, “God is changing them”. It is not me but God who does it.

‘My work is a work of faith. I am not on a salary or wages, but I trust God to supply my needs. He supplies according to His riches in glory. He supplies my needs and not my wants. God touches the hearts of different ones and they give, so this is how I live by faith. The Uniting Church has helped us tremendously. We thank God for their help. Even when I just started the work at Murray Bridge, they got right behind me from the beginning. Some of the money for paying rent, while the manse was being built, came from Uniting Church members. They help me in whatever way they can. In the Meningie area the Uniting Church is also helping all they can. The Church of Christ helps me, too. I am encouraging our AEF church at Meningie to support their pastor, but they are having problems at times with money. I expect this support will gradually improve. But generally I am not looking to human organisations. I am looking to the Lord as my source of supply. They called me to be a full-time pastor here.’

After this interview in 1983, Pastor Keith left Meningie in the charge of an Aboriginal leader, Robert Day, and moved up to Adelaide.


Robert Day

Robert Day tells how his son was converted during a time in Yatala prison. ‘He made a commitment down there. He was praying that God would send someone he could share with. There was another man from
Murray Bridge who was sent to Yatala. He had pleaded guilty to his charges and was sent to a new division of the prison. On the way there he too prayed that he would meet a Christian so he could straighten out his life. When he got there he was walking down the corridor and passed the cell Robbie was in. He saw this man lying on a bed reading his Bible. They started talking together and reading the Bible together. They were both transferred to Mobilong prison and continued to work there and to witness to other prisoners. There were four or five prisoners converted while they were there. They said the Lord does provide a way, even in prison.’

Pastor Keith mentioned two young men from Bimbadeen who went from Murray Bridge to Bimbadeen. One of those young men, Alban Kartinyeri, tells his story.

‘I married a girl from New South Wales, Donna Naden, and lived in Wagga for two years; I was involved with the Aboriginal Church in Wagga under Pastor Ivan Williams. Moved back to Adelaide, then Port Augusta, where we spent two years with Offenders’ Aid and Rehabilitation Services. I was involved with the Brethren Church in Port Augusta and then moved back to Murray Bridge. I was involved with the Aboriginal church in Murray Bridge and then was offered a job in Adelaide. I worked for OARS for a total of nine years. We didn’t have a pastor at Murray Bridge so the leadership was shared by Victor Wilson,
Clyde Rigney, myself, Barry Williams, Mac Hayes and Barry Weigole (deceased). I spent two years at Bimbadeen; you learn a lot of things at Bimbadeen, including stability and stickability. My life has changed a lot, in that before I became a Christian, I was here and there and everywhere, I didn’t spend very long in one place. But since I’ve been a Christian I’ve worked in one place for nine years. I was only a Christian for seven months before I entered Bimbadeen and I spent two years there. My advice to young Christians is to be involved in the local church, be involved in Bible studies, in activities that use your gifts. Then be encouraged to use those gifts and let the Lord develop you. It is a commitment to your part of service.’

Sid Graham—The Song God Gave Me

‘Singing your own song is very important to Aboriginal people. One morning I woke up and was looking outside the house to where a willow tree stood, and this song came to me. I have dedicated it to my wife Hazel:

The winds are blowing through the willow,
the sun is shining through the clouds,
God is sending out a message
give your heart to him this day.

So come to him a little closer
let your heart find him today.
When you’ve found your faith in Jesus
trust in him and always pray.

Without him life’s a heavy burden
it seems to be of sin and grief.
So take these steps of joy and guidance
bring yourself to him and stay.
Take his hand and let him lead you
through those gates above the sky,
there you’ll see the land of glory,
there we’ll live and never die.

So come to him a little closer
let your heart find him today.
When you’ve found your faith in Jesus
trust in him and always pray,
trust in him and always pray.'
‘As a child I was separated from my parents who lived at Point Pearce and brought up in a Salvation Army home. There is a lot of loneliness in Aboriginal families. I was converted in Sonny Hoet’s ministry and expected more support as a new Christian. I really struggled with my doubts. There was little encouragement to preach or to conduct a pastoral ministry, although I joined the fellowship at Ottoway where Pastor Keith Mildon, Pastor Ben Mason and Sonny were sometimes involved.

‘I found a home in the Anglican Church with Rev. Peter Smith and was commissioned as a Lay Reader with the Nunga Ministry. Because I was hungry for the Word, Peter arranged Bible studies for me and then sent me to Nungalinya College in Darwin. There were a lot of tribal people who still had a strong sense of identity and their tribal ways. I completed the Certificate in Theology course while I was at St James’ Anglican Church, West Adelaide where Father David Williams was priest in charge. Then I started the Diploma in Theology course by correspondence and completed it in early 1996.

‘When Rev. Rob Haynes came from Nungalinya to supervise my studies, we discussed the possibility of building up an Aboriginal college in Adelaide. We listed the barriers and advantages of that kind of fellowship. Nungalinya staff are catering for the needs of tribal people. The lecturers know the customs and traditions of the people of Elcho Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst Island and other Top End peoples. It is time for them to have a look at urban people and their needs. This could be done through a college in Adelaide. It would be inter-denominational, run by a committee for teaching Aboriginal Christian leaders, comprised of David Amery, David Cox, Fr. Jerome Crow, Fr. Mark Nugent, Rev. Bob Vawser, Rev. Gowan Armstrong and others. All these people keep their eyes on Ken Sumner and me as we continue in our studies.

‘The church has always been there to help Aboriginal people. People say that the church has destroyed Aboriginal Culture, but the Anglican Church has built me up. Each Aboriginal leader is the product of a whole group of people as the church.’

Mrs Graham

‘I came from Point Pearce. My ancestors were a white man and an Aboriginal woman who lived at Clare. She lived with the white man for about fourteen months and he wanted to marry her. They couldn’t marry until he got the Governor’s permission. They had two children; Tom and Tim. When the mother died, the father was told to take them over to
Poonindie Mission near Port Lincoln. Archdeacon Hale was in charge of the Mission then.

‘When Poonindie was closed the people went to Point Pearce.’

Ken Sumner

Another leader who was raised up by Pastor Keith Mildon’s ministry was Ken Sumner, who comes from Raukkan. As a boy he had good memories of Keith. When they saw his van coming down the main street the children would all rush up to the church—sometimes for a service and sometimes for the oranges, lemons and grapes that he brought down from the Riverland. Keith would play the guitar, ukulele or the organ.

Ken said, ‘He brought my first recollection of the Gospel and had a great impact on us children. Sometimes he came on his own, and sometimes with Granny Smith and her accordion.

‘The AEF had a church in Ottoway. My wife and I went there although we were not Christians. We travelled from Raukkan every Sunday. Ottoway was a vibrant church, full of life and energy and lots of people. It was there I gave my heart to the Lord. Pastor Ben Mason was preaching as the congregation was singing, “Are You washed in the Blood of the Lamb?” Ben was walking up and down the aisle saying, “Give your life to Christ, come now”. As he gave that invitation I went out and gave my heart to the Lord. He took us out to pray and seek forgiveness. Even though the Ottoway church is no longer there, it will always remain part of my life. I’ve never heard anyone speak like Ben; he made us laugh; he made us cry; he would sing; he would dance; he was a great evangelist.

‘Brother Keith was a great teacher, he would win souls to Christ on a permanent basis. Robert Day, Victor Wilson, Sid Graham, we were all blessed to be part of his ministry. Ben and Keith have gone home to glory but their work remains.

‘Another great influence in my life was the Uniting Church of Australia. Being in this denomination I feel supported and secure. I feel a strength that I didn’t have before and, not having had a home, I feel more solid now I have a base.

‘I became interested in the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and its holistic ministry—caring for a person as a whole; physically, socially, mentally and spiritually. I felt that in the congress everybody was together, everybody was equal. Those in leadership share with those who are not. Congress has a unique ministry fighting for freedom, justice, reconciliation and land rights. [Ken Sumner was appointed
in March 1996 for two years as Chairman of the South Australian branch of the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.]

‘It is important for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals to work together for reconciliation. This is a difficult subject and it is difficult to speak about without feeling angry. Aboriginal people have been dispossessed, they have been tormented, they have been broken. They have been separated from the place they love the most, their land. Reconciliation is not charity, it is giving with justice, it is correcting the wrong that has been done, and is a personal thing.’

Sonny Hoet

Sonny’s wife Lyn gave this interview over the telephone, ‘Sonny is the chaplain for Aboriginal people in the gaol; he’s done that since 1985 under the Aboriginal Christian Fellowship umbrella, which is only an umbrella organisation that we incorporated when the AEF didn’t want us any more. Sonny is very well respected in the Remand Centre, where he mostly works.

‘The only other ministry which we have among the Aboriginal people is visitation at Raukkan when we are invited. We also help when they call on us if they want someone for weddings and funerals, this is mainly the Raukkan people. We’ve withdrawn now for a couple of years from full-time Aboriginal work.’
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Black Fire Attracts Black—
in Central Australia

ALICE SPRINGS CONVENTION

Alice Springs has many natural attractions as a tourist centre. It is rapidly increasing in size and wealth because of these attractions. Bus companies, air-lines, road transport firms and local tradespeople all share in profits from the tourist trade. There is an increasing number of motels being built to accommodate visitors and a growing number of galleries and attractions being organised to make visitors feel that their tour is worthwhile.

For many years there has been a realisation that Aborigines contribute to the tourist trade through their art, their crafts, their traditional culture and different lifestyle. They have a potential to attract visitors, just because they are a different race of people who have been here for thousands of years.

There are social problems, such as inequalities, racist attitudes and a lack of employment opportunities, but a group of Aboriginal people, who have their own people’s interests at heart, are concerned to help them to organise a Christian program that would appeal to those who frequent the hotels, and help them to see the answer to their problems. Even though it was a very brief two or three-day campaign, it could be the beginning of a new kind of life for many young people.

In September 1985, Jacky McLean told me about the convention they had just held in Alice Springs on the banks of the Todd River. This had been widely advertised and people came from many surrounding
Aboriginal communities, as far as four hundred kilometres away. In his account
Jacky emphasised the importance of Aboriginal Christians speaking to
Aboriginal people, black witnessing to black; those who have experienced the
problems helping those who are experiencing them. He and his guitar-playing
team play the kind of country Gospel music which the Aboriginal people love,
and he regards this as a special gift of God for evangelistic work among his
people. Then again, he pointed out the value of the cooperation of the churches
in Alice Springs in advertising the meetings, in backing the organisation, in
providing a visiting speaker from Papua New Guinea for one of the meetings,
and in helping follow up those who made a commitment to Christ during that
weekend.

While it was called a convention, one of the main aims was evangelism; to
speak to those who were experiencing difficulties with drink and associated
problems. But there was a second purpose, as Jacky explained, to bring together
those who are Christians, to help them meet together, to sing together and to
enjoy fellowship together so that they could encourage each other and
strengthen each other in their Christian life. His desire for an annual convention
in Alice Springs has just this purpose. Jacky gave this account of the
convention:

‘The churches in Alice Springs invited me to help them along because I had
experience in conventions in other places and with the Aboriginal Gospel
Crusade. I had been out with Terry Robinson, down to Esperance to the coast
south-west of Perth and later up to the Pilbara and the Kimberleys. Aboriginal
leaders, Kenneth and Mu-mu helped me, as well as the Baptist Church, Uniting
Church and Ivan Christian from the Lutheran Church.

‘On the Saturday evening we had a guest speaker, Walter, a New Guinean
from the Australian Baptist Missionary Society. He had been travelling around
Queensland from place to place with John Whitburn, a missionary, and was
invited to speak in the Baptist church in Alice Springs. We invited him to speak
at the convention on the Saturday evening. Kenneth Ken from Amata and Jerry
Tjangala from Hooker Creek were also speakers and took part in that too.

‘Guitar players and singers brought their own instruments from other
communities and the amplification equipment for the music and speaking. At
first it was advertised that the convention would be held at Rotary Park near the
Gap and we held the first meeting there on Friday night, but we found there
were no power points down there and we had to use a portable generator. We
decided to move up to the park near the Todd River, just across the road from
the hotel.

‘There were more people up there who had gone to buy drink. They usually
listen to country music and when they heard us playing our guitars
and singing they came across to see. We were trying to reach out to people there and to tell them about the Lord Jesus. We had meetings there Saturday morning, Saturday night, Sunday morning and Sunday night. We had planned to hold a meeting on Monday, too, but people had to go home. The New Guinean speaker was well accepted because he was black. During the evening meetings there were a lot of people coming to know the Lord, but it is really hard for white people to reach out in this way to Aboriginals themselves. People look at the colour. Take me for instance, I used to be a drinker. If some white man saw me drunk and came to speak to me, I wouldn’t talk to him. But with black talking to black, people come to know the Lord. I can reach out to Aboriginals here easily because I can approach them and witness to them. Even if I have to go out hunting kangaroos with them I can then tell them about the Lord Jesus.’

JACKY’S OWN LIFE

‘I never went to Bible college, but I really came to know the Lord during the time of revival. I remember when I was in the boys’ home at Warburton Mission, I used to go to Sunday School. During later years, when I left school, I lived a really hard life before I came to know the Lord. I could only read and write English a little, as I finished school in first year (secondary) at Esperance. It was at Esperance that I started to know the Lord, but when free drinking rights came in I turned away from God. Then the devil drink took control of my life so I had a hard time. When I look back I remember that people couldn’t recognise me. I had changed so badly. I used to steal cars and money, break into the store and the church. People didn’t like me as I had a bad record. I used to escape from gaol. When Kevin and Alfred came down from Elcho Island, the Spirit of the Lord really spoke to me and I came back to the Lord. I was able to get married in the church, to be a church leader in my own community and to do something for my own people.

‘Before this I had learned to play the guitar, as a friend, who has now passed away, taught me, but I didn’t know how to play bass until the Spirit of God helped me. I wanted to play bass, but that was a gift that the Spirit of God gave me.

‘When the revival reached Warburton, many people came to the Lord. Some have gone back and some have stayed. Some people find the Christian life too hard and have gone back. Some don’t want to lose their families and turn back but we try to encourage them to keep on. Even though we make mistakes we can be forgiven and continue. If we stay together, we can help each other continue. We look at Douglas and Wilton..."
at Wingelina. They have really changed after wasting all those years and all that money. People learn from them because they lived a hard life but now they are working to help the church.

‘There were a lot of people at the convention on Saturday and Sunday night who were drunk. It was hard for these people to come out the front and accept the Lord and then go and find themselves getting drunk again. After they were converted, they needed to go to their own churches and find help and encouragement. We were just bringing them in. They usually go on to their own churches. They know which church they belong to. The pastor of that church has to look after them. People come from many churches, communities and missions. We had people from Lajamanu (Hooker Creek), Yuendumu, Ameroo, Murray Downs, Papunya, Kintore, Wingelina, Ernabella and Amata. We had Alyawarra, Arrarnta, Warlpiri and Pintubi people, but I was the only Ngaatjatjarra.’

OTHER CONVENTIONS

‘It would be really wonderful to have a convention here every year for the Aboriginal people. Recently the Warlpiri people have had a convention up at Rabbit Flat near Yuendumu. There used to be one each year in Alice. People went down to Port Augusta Convention in January for a while but that was too far to travel. Ernabella has a convention at Easter time and people come from the cattle stations, communities, missions and settlements. I haven’t been down south to the Port Augusta Convention, but I’ve been to Wingelina and to the Mt Margaret Jubilee Convention.

‘There are a lot of people in our communities who are Christian. The time when people are strong is when they are having fellowship at convention times. So when there is a football match we move in to encourage them and meet with all those who have come together. They need to meet together because they are weak on their own. That is why when the crusade moves around some people just follow us.

‘Before the convention I had come to work in Alice Springs and I went down to Finke and Indulkana to minister to people there. In Alice I’ve been recording the Gospel of John on cassette tape in Ngaatjatjarra, my own language. When people hear the Word of God in their own language it helps the older people as well as the teenagers. Some can’t really read properly so we read onto cassettes in our own language and it is easier for them to understand. We make a number of copies of these and people buy them. We also did a lot of songs from the Wingelina Convention in Ngaatjatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and in English. Sometimes we have visits from
missionary Bible teachers like one who used to fly in his small plane from Leigh Creek to Oodnadatta, but generally we look for teaching from our own pastors and leaders.’

Jacky was working with Herbert Howell in a recording studio at the Finke River Mission after the Gospel had changed his life.

Since Pastor Ben Mason went to Alice Springs in 1986 he has seen the need of a January convention in the town. A big convention involving most of the surrounding tribes was held in January 1987 and plans are being made for a continuation of that as an annual event.

THE 1995 ALICE SPRINGS CONVENTION—REPORT BY REV. RON WILLIAMS

‘Next year in 1996 it will be the 10th anniversary. The 1995 convention was a time of refreshing with the rainfall. It had been fairly dry all the year. Our speaker was Edmund Wanganeen from South Australia and Rodney Minniecon from Queensland. It was the conservative and the charismatic working together. When we were out on the showgrounds, on the oval there, one time a big wind came and a lot of people were trapped; the microphones fell over and we were jammed in the showgrounds hall. It sounded like the Pentecostal “rushing mighty wind”. Another time a big rain came over Alice Springs, big rolling clouds, and we had to rush into the buildings. The rain just poured down.

‘Between seven hundred and eight hundred people came from many different places—about twenty different tribes: blacks and whites together; and part-Aboriginal; urbanised Aboriginal; and tribal Aboriginal. We changed the name from Central Australian Aboriginal Convention to Central Australian Christian Convention, so that black and white can come together, to be together and build together. We dealt with Nehemiah quite a lot, where the people were rebuilding because the walls had been broken down. We have something to offer each other. The Elcho people came down from the Top End. Ernabella people gave the main support. We had prayer meetings on Anzac Hill [Danny Colson estimated about five hundred people attended these meetings each morning], and we prayed for all Australia. We prayed for the missions that had been helping over the years. We had Warlbiri people, as well as choirs from Ernabella and Elcho Island. The Hermannsburg Choir had to come through a flooded river and went through three big flooded rivers to go back home. They came, they shared. We like to get the people to share. A number of Aboriginal people came from Perth too, experiencing that we are all one in Christ. We need each other,
the conservative and the charismatic, the missionary and the Aboriginal folk, so let us try to live as a family.

‘The main theme message was in English with the Aboriginal people speaking in their own language. We had our meals there, they were quite cheap and not really flash stuff. We had singing and we had dancing. This was our second convention at the showgrounds. It was a great time sharing with our speakers. We had a meeting afterwards for missionaries that work among Aborigines, maybe over a dozen different groups working with Aboriginal programs in the Centre. We had Catholic Christian folk there, too. It is nice that they all came, with the Lutherans and the Baptists, the AIM, the Uniting Church; being one in Christ. We catered for children and we had a great children’s worker, an Aboriginal, Carol Brough from Stradbroke Island out from Brisbane.

‘The convention goes for seven days. Monday night was country Gospel night. We also had a meeting in the Todd River. It was one of our normal meetings, we went there so that we could get into town. We always try to get into the prison during that time so it was a real time of blessing.

‘We had a baptism for a couple when the Todd River came down. People went in to town for that and it was great because the Holy Spirit wanted to flow. It could have been a big flood there, but our mob prayed that the rain would go on into South Australia to break the drought there. It would have been a record flood, but it stopped raining and so we reckon God answered our prayers and also sent the rain over to NSW and Victoria.

‘An old tribal fellow said, “You tell them we don’t want a lot of rivers flowing”; the river was flowing, and all the creeks were flowing into the Todd River. “We want one river and all the creeks flowing into that one river”. “We’ve got too many churches. We want one Holy Spirit flowing in God’s people, black and white, different denominations flowing together too.” I’ve moved around Aboriginal people and they’ve said they have been divided too much like in the Eastern States. “We are tired of being mathematical formulas like half-caste, quarter-caste; they don’t do that for the Irish or the English.” When we come to church you ask, what sort of church? It’s like being fragmented. I’ve just been around Australia and all over they talk about being one in Christ. So there is a strength there. Sometimes, in the past, when white fellas went to different lands they put up a flag and said this is our flag, the Union Jack or the American flag, or the Portuguese flag; now they try to put up flags and say “this is our Aboriginal group!”, but it hasn’t helped our people; land rights and all that has divided people. The Christians need to be one, but not many support
that idea of the river flowing and all the tributaries. He is a wise old Christian leader.’

On Friday night of the convention there was a beautiful memorial service for Pastor Ben Mason. Ben’s three daughters shared about their Dad. They sang of the blessed hope that we will meet again, bringing tears running down many faces.

**Pastor Ben Mason’s Eulogy**

The following is quoted from the funeral leaflet provided by the family: ‘Benjamin Wongathunoo Mason was born in the early 1930s south of Laverton. His early childhood was spent around the Laverton district with his family until he went to the Mt Margaret Mission.

‘He grew up in the Graham Home and it was during this period he surrendered his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Following his years at Mt Margaret Mission, he left to pursue work opportunities at various stations.

‘His life ambitions were to be either a station manager, police officer or preacher. After considering these vocations he chose the latter, leading him to Singleton Bible College in NSW and also spending a year under Australian evangelist John G. Ridley.

‘During the late 1950s and early 1960s, he travelled as an itinerant evangelist throughout Australia.

‘In 1964, he married and with his family took up pastoring churches in WA and SA until the mid-1980s. During this period he was also involved in the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee.


‘From this time until he died, he still continued preaching on a semi-retired basis travelling to various parts of Australia and even attended a conference in England. He spent the last years of his life with his children and grandchildren, knowing in his heart his homecoming was near, encouraging them to serve the Lord.’

**FINKE RIVER MISSION**

The Lutherans have attended the Alice Springs Convention. There has been a long and successful history of Christian work among their people known as the Finke River Mission (FRM, formerly Hermannsburg Mission). It
deserves particular attention because of its success as an indigenous, denominational ministry and the absorption of some ecclesiological structures despite the cultural difficulties. The work began in June 1877 as the first mission to bring the Christian faith to the Aborigines in the heart of the continent. For the first sixteen years, the Mission was owned and controlled from Hanover, Germany, and supported by a local committee with a superintendent in South Australia. It became Australian owned and controlled in 1893.

From the beginning, the Mission developed the people’s language in written form, and began to translate the Scriptures. They encouraged the people to maintain their relationship with the bush rather than depend on government rations, and although the typical European compound mentality was evident from the earliest days, they did not openly denounce the peoples’ values.

The first Aboriginal Pastor was ordained in 1964, and there are now fifteen evangelists ministering to six thousand Aborigines from eleven tribal groups.

In 1996 there have been some twenty-four Aboriginal men ordained since 1964 of whom twelve are currently in active ministry. Of the others, some have died, some resigned and three are emeritus.\(^1\)

The Aboriginal pastors, and the baptised and confirmed people to whom they minister, are full members of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) to which the FRM belongs and is responsible.

The LCA assists with support staff,\(^2\) but the people increasingly assume responsibility for the support of their pastors and erection of church buildings.

Experienced FRM personnel train the pastors in the communities, and they are examined and ordained by the president of the Lutheran Church, SA–NT. Luther Seminary—the institution responsible for training pastors—conducts in-service training for Aboriginal pastors and evangelists and those in training.

The pastors are appointed to specific areas of ministry, and the churches under their care are expected to provide their support. The amount, method and form of the support is up to the people served by the pastor. The recent initiatives taken by the Kintore Community (450 kilometres west of Alice Springs)

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\(^1\) Information provided by D. Paech, P. Scherer, P. Altus and Finke River Mission newsletter of 1996.

\(^2\) Such as salaries for four ordained and seven non-ordained workers involved in pastoral, translation and linguistic work and support ministries.
show the effectiveness of the Lutheran ministry among the people. The community decided that they needed a church building and so they encouraged community members to donate a percentage of their weekly income to a building fund. In 1995 the Kintore church building was erected at a cost of $60,000, and paid for by the Aboriginal people. The building was erected by volunteers from South Australian congregations and the dedication service was led by Aboriginal pastors.

The present Lutheran church among the Arrarnta, Anmatjirra, Alyawarra, Pitjantjatjara and Loritja/Pintupi peoples, within the Finke River Mission area, is the result of a spontaneous expansion. It does not have conventions, nor has it sprung from an initial mass revival. The church is growing as indigenous pastors minister the means of God’s grace by way of the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments. European pastors only assist in this process.

The value which the Aboriginal people place on FRM’s involvement is seen in the changes which have occurred in the Yirara College in Alice Springs. The government faced significant problems with the school which it owned and operated for Aboriginal young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen who came from isolated areas, so in 1993 it was offered to FRM. It was accepted because the venture was supported by the majority of the Aboriginal people concerned. The Mission became owners of the college on condition that no FRM money be used for its operation. Its popularity grew, and in 1996 two hundred boarding students were enrolled with about fifty Christian staff. Traditional customs are respected and strong Christian teaching and care is provided. Yirara is now one of the eighteen colleges/secondary schools of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

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3 This is the advised spelling. It variously appears as Aranda, Arrente, Arrernta.
5 Information provided in correspondence from Rev. David Paech.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

THE UNITING FIRE

At the AEF Conference at Port Augusta in 1985, Rev. Charles Harris was invited to speak at the Annual Meeting. He explained that he was a delegate from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and had come to seek affiliation with the AEF.

Charles is a quiet, unassuming man with impressive poise and dignity. His soft, pleasant voice was unhurried, although he had such a big topic to cover in explaining the UAICC in a few minutes. He gave a very positive account, not over-emphasising the problems and difficulties, nor the enormous task they had in leading such a large and diverse group of people. For a leader from the state which gave birth to black radicals and black power protests, Rev. Harris was extremely quiet and composed. There was no apparent fire in his attitude or speaking; there was no bitterness, no recrimination, no grandstanding or extravagant gestures. He spoke plainly and clearly, but very effectively.

Rev. Charles Harris—His Background

Charles’s parents came from two different groups: his father a Torres Strait Islander and his mother a Queensland Aboriginal. They gave him a Christian home and upbringing but it was his contact with overseas people that gave him a vision for Aborigines to develop leadership. On his trip to New Zealand in 1980, he met Maori Christians who were building up their
own fellowships and spoke of the vision God had given them to lead their own people through evangelism and teaching.

Then in 1982 he came to Adelaide to the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Leaders’ Conference organised by World Vision. Charles was among groups from Queensland and Arnhem Land who arrived a couple of days before the conference started and I arranged accommodation for them at the Bible College of South Australia. During those two days, when the group came around to our home for meals, members of the Queensland party told me quite definitely, ‘Charles is our leader’.

Our peach tree had produced its most prolific crop for the occasion, so the visitors from the north were able to enjoy the fruits of the south, picking and eating plenty of fresh peaches and plums straight from the trees. But, more importantly, these Aboriginal leaders were to share the fruit of experience with Christian leaders from other countries.

**THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

At the conference in Adelaide, we met Dr John Perkins, a negro from the United States, who talked with the Aboriginal leaders. He had shown that an oppressed Christian group could best find their own solutions to the difficulties of poverty and injustice. In Mississippi, Christians negroes had worked together in trading and in housing cooperatives and had educated their own people to become leaders and ministers of the Gospel. He challenged Aboriginal leaders to stop relying on other people and to work out their own schemes as the negroes had done.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kamaleson from India showed how the Christian leader needs to be in touch with God and be led of His Spirit to find out God’s purposes for His people. Bishop David Gitari from Kenya gave examples of how young people had been trained to be missionaries to their own tribes. Because they identified with their people, knew their language and their customs, they were very effective Christian workers.

These overseas speakers, particularly John Perkins, who had almost lost his life in serving his people, made a profound impact on everyone at the conference, and especially on the Queensland delegates. It seemed that a hidden fire entered into their hearts.

**GETTING STARTED**

Even during the leadership conference there was a noticeable stirring of people who wanted to do something. The Holy Spirit was moving them
towards a plan for action. After the conference, events moved much more swiftly than most expected.

In August that year, a group of Aboriginal leaders from Queensland were invited by Charles to meet at Crystal Creek, just north of Townsville. There the hidden fire in their hearts was fanned into a flame as the groups expressed the ideas God had given them. They saw Aborigines and Islanders taking over responsibility for Christian work amongst their own people. They wanted others to see this vision for Christian self-management.

Charles travelled around Australia gaining support for this work. He planned a bigger meeting at Galiwin’ku on Elcho Island in August 1983. Seventy delegates from Aboriginal and Islander groups in every state attended and confirmed the decision to take over the mission to their people. Observers from the Uniting Church World Mission supported the move as they saw evidence of a new work of God amongst these people.

In the five planning groups at Galiwin’ku, evangelism and ministry were affirmed as the first priorities, but properly based on church government and finance and meeting the everyday needs of their people. Land rights, health and other social questions are important everyday needs, as are problems of racism and politics which affect their daily lives. Education and training of leaders for the ministry and community development were discussed, not as theoretical questions but as practical solutions to situations they were experiencing.

‘Black people’, they said, ‘do not feel at home in white congregations, and very few attend white churches. But when black churches are formed, with their own ministers, then people feel free to come and worship in their own way.’ Charles said, ‘We know what our people need and want, but for us to do this work we must have control over our own organisation’. 1

The next conference of the UAICC was held at Ballina on the northern coast of New South Wales in August 1984. 2 There was a continued emphasis on the need for holistic evangelism, where the proclamation of the Gospel is related to people’s Monday to Saturday needs and not to just caring for them on Sundays. Statements were made on holistic evangelism and UAICC structures, including regional committees, land rights and denominationalism.

The fire was apparent in the action that has been taken by Christian Aborigines in Queensland. They were fed up with the paternalism of the

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white churches, who talked at length about the Aboriginal problems but in the end had no constructive policy to deal with the social disadvantages. There is no doubt that the churches knew and were concerned about the difficulties of land rights in Queensland.

In other states the government has allowed, and even encouraged, Aborigines to apply for land rights to their tribal areas and for ownership of cattle stations which can be bought by individuals or held on behalf of a tribal group. This freedom still seemed a long way off in Queensland. There was concern, too, about unjust legislation where laws clearly and unjustly discriminated against Aboriginal people. This legislation denied the humanity of those who were weak and at the mercy of the rich and powerful. It gave priority to the interests of tourism and mining development rather than to the original inhabitants of the country.

The health of the Aboriginal people has certainly caused concern. Many were eating the wrong kinds of foods, especially foods like white flour which has led to a high incidence of diabetes. There are illnesses caused by tension, stress and anxiety. All these factors led to the use of alcohol and drugs. Alcoholism was further increased by social conditions, where unemployment, poor education, unsuitable housing and social rejection all make Aborigines feel unable to get out of the poverty cycle.

**ACTION RATHER THAN TALK**

With the situation for Aborigines needing positive action rather than talk and discussion, Christian Aboriginal leaders wanted freedom to act. The church committees of white people, or even where there was Aboriginal representation dominated by white people, were slow, cumbersome and reluctant to hand over responsibility to a minority group.

The reaction was dramatic and decisive. Aboriginal Christians would break away from the Uniting Church committees and form a separate synod, and report only to the annual conference of the church. Because the title was cumbersome a shorter version was suggested—the National Black Congress, and later the Black Presbytery was used but, because of the association with ‘black power’, the longer title is still used.

**FREEDOM TO MAKE MISTAKES**

Charles Harris spoke about the freedom to make mistakes. It was God’s policy to allow men to make their own decisions, even if that meant that
sometimes they made mistakes. This happened in all churches whether white or black. This was no reason, then, to deny Aboriginal people responsibility because they might make mistakes.

There were always plenty of people ready to point out mistakes, and give advice and sometimes help when the wrong course of action was taken. Right from the time of Adam, God gave man the freedom to make decisions. Now Aborigines need the freedom to serve their people and to serve Christ. At a time when the Australian government policy is one of self-determination and self-management, there should be no difficulty with the request of the UAICC.

The main difficulty came with other denominations. Christian representatives from many different churches were invited to join the congress in the formation of a black presbytery, but this would seriously interfere with their present loyalties and support. However, it would encourage Aboriginal Christian leaders to have more confidence in their own communities to see that they could have a more effective ministry than most white people because of their understanding of the problems, the culture and the language.

The congress had set itself a series of important tasks to change the situation their people were in. The first was evangelism, which means the preaching of the Gospel to all black people throughout this continent. This was the most important task. Secondly, there was a need to wake up those Christian ministers and leaders who were asleep. The whole force of the black church was needed to help in the tasks ahead. The social problems of the people would be the responsibility of the whole church but a special committee would be established to give advice and assistance.

Work amongst young people was especially important. The future of the Christian work depends upon mobilising the youth for God. When young people are looking for training in Christian service, there are suitable programs at Nungalinya College in Darwin and at their extension studies centre, Wontulp Bi Buya, in Townsville. Trained graduates from these and other centres would become the ministers and leaders in Aboriginal and Islander parishes which needed to be set up wherever black people desired to worship God in their own way or language.

The church could provide leadership among young people, which meant clubs for activities and training in Christian leadership, as well as the usual services. To emphasise that this black church was not exclusive, the Congress set itself the task of finding programs for reconciliation between blacks and whites. While, in the past, whites have helped the blacks, it was obvious now that black Christians had much to offer their white brothers and sisters.
The congress also saw the possibility that God might call Aboriginal Christians to minister overseas. As missionaries had ministered to them they must be ready to go where God directs.

**THE LOGO**

Charles gave an indication to the Port Augusta Convention meeting that the UAICC would use a different presentation of the Gospel, by explaining the new logo of the congress. It had been decided to invite people to enter a competition to draw up a logo for a UAICC letterhead. The design chosen and shown by Pastor Harris at Port Augusta featured a vertical Aboriginal totem pole indicating that this was an expression of Aboriginal Christianity.

The horizontal message stick formed a cross with the totem pole, as the universal Christian symbol. It also included a fighting stick used traditionally by tribal warriors. The fighting stick was broken in the middle by the combined symbols of a flame and a dove, indicating the work of the Holy Spirit. The black and white handshake showed the unity across the two cultures, in Christ. This logo was implanted on a red, black and yellow background, emphasising that it was a rising Aboriginal movement based on their needs for justice and land rights.

The explanation of the logo summed up the aims of the Congress. The Aboriginal cross symbolises evangelism in an Aboriginal way, the broken fighting stick shows how the Holy Spirit brings peace among enemy tribes and the black and white handshake foresees equality between blacks and whites, while the red, black and yellow background emphasises the social needs of Aborigines.

The hope is that Aboriginal Christians will rise to these tasks but the congress also had fears that their people may have been put down so much that they will continue to be subservient.

Charles expressed none of these fears but showed that the new position of the UAICC in the Uniting Church, as one of the synods responsible directly to the Annual Conference, gives them boundless opportunities to go forward in a new freedom in Christian work amongst their own people. Charles was warmly applauded for his explanation of the UAICC to the AEF. Although there were differences in some unimportant areas, the main aims were very much the same and the desire for affiliation between the two bodies was welcomed.

**Rev. Charles Enoch Edward Harris**

Rev. Charles Harris died on seventh of May 1993. The following excerpts are taken from his funeral leaflet:
‘Rev. Harris was converted in Ayr at a special rally and he became a member of the Assemblies of God. After a while Charles was challenged to work with young people in Ayr. As always, he began his ministry with enthusiasm and determination. It was a shock to him when, as money became scarce, he was expected to continue on nothing while the white pastor was looked after properly. He was angry and the sense of injustice at the racism burnt deeply into his soul. Then, in a Maori Marae in the Bay Of Plenty in New Zealand, the vision began to take shape. As he saw his Maori friends assuming control of their ministries, and as he heard them speaking frankly to the Pakeha who were their guests in the Marae, he asked why couldn’t Aboriginal Christians take control of their own destiny.

‘The Congress was still raw, barely on its way, when Charles introduced a new challenge—The March for Justice, Freedom and Hope—which would converge on Sydney on January 26th 1988. It was a hard challenge because Charles wanted the march to include all sections of the Aboriginal community.

‘Charles’s message was justice, freedom and hope for all Australians. The march was a tribute to his determination. It was successful, it gathered together white and black, Christian and non-Christian, indigenous people from around the world, radicals and conservatives. He had wide respect as an evangelist, and was known and respected throughout the Aboriginal movement.

‘At the heart of all his dreaming was his faith in God, his passionate conviction that he was called to bring salvation to his people. He followed his Master in seeking life for his people, and not death, so that they could experience life abundantly.

‘In Taipei, recovering from his massive heart attack, his sense of mission remained unquenched, even while still on the heart monitor he continued to dream and to plan for the congress.

‘He remained God’s servant until the very last.’

**Rev. Bill Hollingsworth**

‘We have a number of groups around who are highly motivated, such as St Luke’s in Cairns, places like Yarrabah and some strong groups up on the Atherton Tablelands. There are several fellowships without any church affiliation but which nonetheless are very active.

‘The church had been inactive for a number of years, but now has been revived, young people are coming to the church wanting to be part of it. Signs of hope are there but how do we tackle the situation we have, that is another thing. The harvest is great in general terms, but the labourers are few.'
Women are involved in women’s ministries; we wouldn’t have a church today if it wasn’t for the women, but where are the men? In most places the women far outnumber the men. They hold things together. I have known of many cases where men have failed to take up the leadership, but the women have maintained an ongoing presence and in many of the communities they are the stronger. A lot of this stems from the work of the missionaries and the development that took place at the time. The women developed a faith and a resilience that is hard to find in the current generation. My mother was one of those who was taken from her home at six years of age, transported by ship to Yarrabah Mission, married at a young age, lost her husband when my older brother was nine months old, married again to my father and had another four sons, and then lost her second husband when my youngest brother was about eight months old.
‘But, through it all, she refused to let us go to state homes, even though it was difficult for her. St Paul states in reference to Timothy that the faith of his mother and his grandmother was imparted to Timothy from childhood. That is my experience. My brother and I entered the ministry. So I think the women should hold a prominent place in the churches and in history.

‘Although I am primarily involved in Congress, and am looking at the indigenous aspect of the church in Australia, in about 1987 I was invited to speak in St David’s Cathedral in Hobart, Tasmania. I remember vividly just praying and asking the Lord what it was He wanted me to say there to that group. At about three o’clock one morning, I was standing in the doorway of my caravan, looking up at the starry heavens, seeking inspiration. The Lord spoke to me very vividly, that the church in Australia was to be a partnership. The indigenous church was given the responsibility of the message for this hour to run with that because the mainstream church had the resources both financial and material, it was given the responsibility of material resources. I was to encourage and invite and challenge the leaders to think about that and to do something about that, to see it as a partnership. The indigenous and the mainstream churches are to work together as a team and bring that message to Australia today.

‘It is difficult to change the years of entrenched ideas, and to tackle the mind-set that has been there for so long in terms of the superiority of the western people above the indigenous people. It is certainly not going to be easy. We find within the Uniting Church there is reasonable support for that change, and that the church will come to grips with it and be a part in enabling that to happen. Particularly at the top level of the church, at the Synod Assembly level, we are finding some support, but at the parish level where the real strength of the church lies, when it comes down to property resources, it is not easy to change their ideas. When it comes down to finances and the properties, it is largely in the hands of the membership of the church. It is not easy to change traditions and a lot of decisions are made on sentimental values. It is difficult, even when there are excess properties, for these people to let them go. They are often a memorial to a grandparent or early settler who would not have allowed the use by the indigenous group. This is why the Rev. Charles Harris at the General Assembly in Melbourne moved a motion calling the church into a covenant relationship. Now the church is covenanting together. I would like the church to outgrow the historical things and not just stick with our traditions. A better relationship and a greater spirituality.

‘I had the privilege of representing the reconciliation council at the South Australian Federation at Tandara. I said to their group not to think of the indigenous people as being inferior. There have been two stages, one of
confrontation. We are sick and tired of being kept in the background. We want to be recognised as co-equals in this country.

‘After confrontation came the government legislation requiring consultation. The government departments had to come and consult groups of people. In that consultation there were no requirements of strict adherence to what people were consulted on. After meeting they would then go back and say, “We’ve consulted”.

‘I think since the Mabo case a number of people, Lois O’Donahue and others, went into Parliament House; to walk its corridors, to knock on doors. Out of this came negotiation. In negotiation there has to be two parties that are equal. It is time to move from the paternalistic stage and see each other as equals. Anthropologists say this is the oldest culture in the world. We were instrumental in inventing the first woodwind instrument in the world, the didgeridoo; opened the first art galleries in the world, the cave paintings. In reference to medicines and nutrition and aerodynamics, we raised all these issues.

‘Things have to change, and they could change for the better. Sir Sidney Kidman, when he went across from Broken Hill to Barrow Creek, gained as much information as he could from Aborigines who were working for him, on weather patterns and environment. He was able to make decisions that almost defied human reasoning from the European perspective, but the outcome spoke for itself. There is a photograph of him with seven or eight Aboriginal people who were his station managers.’
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Nungalinya College,
Darwin—1995

REV. WALI FEJO—
PRINCIPAL OF Nungalinya College

This interview with Wali in Adelaide was given at a special meeting called by Teaching Aboriginal Christian Leaders (TACL) to introduce him to the committee as the new principal of Nungalinya.

‘A little of the history of Nungalinya. The Anglican Church and the Uniting Church had dreams in relation to having a place in the Top End for our people there. We knew the difficulties of coming down south, away from home, into the cold or into the fast lane, and the difficulties one would experience with having to try to cope with the studies. At the same time, my people, Larrakia people, dreamed. When you’ve got two people dreaming about the same thing, it’s got to work. So the Anglican Church and the Uniting Church called my clan together and said, “We are interested in this block of land here. We know it’s Aboriginal land, we know it is Larrakia land. Would it be all right if we have a place here where other Aboriginal Christians could come and learn together from each other and begin to develop an Aboriginal theology, an Aboriginal spirituality?” Nungalinya is just offshore from Casuarina. My folks were for it. They made me stand up because I was in their second line of leadership and was able to ask and answer the questions. I was there when the whole of the Nungalinya site was looked at. Nungalinya: its name was derived from our Creator God, “Old Man Rock”, Christ is also our Rock. In our dreams we saw people from different groups and tribes coming together, and this brought joy to
our hearts because with the Tiwi group there was a lot of fighting between Tiwi and Larrakia.

‘There was one time when Larrakia people built a big fire; they said, “We are coming for a very special time of meeting”. When that fire was lit, it called people to sit down and discuss something that was troubling them. That relates to the Spirit of God calling people together for a talk. That was the beginning of understanding where we should be going. So Nungalinya, Old Man Rock, also helps us to understand our Rock, Christ Jesus.

‘We think back to another special visit to Larrakia land, years and years ago. A very high-powered person came from England, and, while we were meeting him, a little boy walked away from his family and walked onto the red carpet and of course he had no clothes on and just stood bare on the red carpet. All our mob knew him so we called him in language, “Come on, come away from there, that’s not your place to be”. He was small and, because of all that was happening round about him, he just kept his eyes on this very important high-powered person walking on the red carpet. This person came, had a good look at the naked boy and took his coat from his shoulders, wrapped it around the little boy, picked him up and carried him for the whole day. That was the Prince of Wales. The boy hasn’t forgotten that story because it connects him with the Gospel and is meaningful for the whole Larrakia tribe. What did God do when He came down in the person of Jesus? How did He see us in our nakedness and sin? He brought down His coat of righteousness, wrapped it round us, lifted us up and carried us. One of the old men used to say; “Just suppose the high-powered man wanted to take that little boy with him. Would it have been possible?” All my mob would have said, “So long as you bring him back”. That whole concept in relation to the man Christ Jesus picking people up, upholding them with His goodness, allowing them to see what His country is all about, allowing them to come back to share their experience with their own people.

‘We are grateful to God for the commitment of the various churches who are now working within Nungalinya, that is, the Uniting Church, Anglican Church and Catholic Church, and I’m sure, not very long now down the road, the Lutheran Church may be coming aboard.

‘Rob Haynes is from the Anglican side, Sister Robyn Reynolds is from the Catholic side, Deirdre Maddern from the Anglican side, and also Elizabeth Caldwell—she is teaching English. Deirdre is forming and putting together programs and prospectuses.

‘I’m grateful to God for the principals who have gone before me. I think they have been able to give me a good track to walk along, for their shoes
Some theological students at Nungalinya College, 1996

Photo courtesy of Principal Wali Fejo
are bigger than mine. I will need to tread a bit softly, especially when you see such characters as Les Brockway and others before him, who were very highly skilled in lots of areas. I bring to the college an understanding from the perspective of an Aboriginal person. So it is important that I comprehend what is there, and then communicate it in my own way.

‘We are giving more time to the constitution, so that means participation even from this group [TACL], so that we can have a sense of belonging. This group will have a very important role to play.

‘The accreditation of the theology, bicultural and community development courses will be helped by the appointment of another person, who we are still looking for. We have what we call PAC, the Principal Advisory Committee, and once a fortnight we get together. We also have an indigenous committee, made up of two representatives of the students as well as the Aboriginal teachers. Some of the discussion that the PAC have is handed on to us because it needs to have a decision made by the indigenous advisers. So we have a communication network within Nungalinya.

‘My first approach to Nungalinya was in 1970 when I applied to go there as staff. Coming through the college as a student, and then for two years as chairman of the council, and working through the community development as one of its officers, part-time lecturer, and also being student pastor for the Darwin congregation, has been a wonderful journey for me. I can now say, “Here I am as the first Aboriginal principal”.

‘I reflect on God’s goodness; I recognise people who have been around me giving me a lot of support, people who have been able to talk to me and say, “Look at this, Wal, it’s here and it’s on the table. This is not fooling around, this is how things have to go.” I feel that I’m very privileged, and hear my elder brother traditionally. I speak in that way because he needs not only to encourage me, but to talk to me very straight in some of the areas that he feels his wisdom needs to come.

‘I think the flavour of Nungalinya is very important, it is a coming together of different people, knowing each other so much better and realising that we are a family of God. It is an extended family and we are all different strengths and sizes, but we all have something in common, and that is to educate each other in the things of the Lord. From that, one is built up in the most holy faith.

‘As Aboriginal people, even if you are far away in a distant land, I can know how you feel. It is that spiritual attachment that is very typical of Aboriginal people. They can know even before someone tells them, that something has happened. So, when we come together, we have a very deep sense of a family. I like Bishop Tutu’s book *The Rainbow People of God*; it depicts something of the working of God with people as He brings them closer together in a beautiful way. That’s the heartbeat we felt in Nungalinya. These things make me want to praise God. We could hear again from the New Testament and the Old Testament not only the words of the Lord Jesus, but from Jehovah our Creator,
“This is the way, walk ye in it”.

‘Our people will recognise the beginnings of what God has been opening up before the whole of Australia, a leadership that is strong, virile, motivated and visionary, and above all, filled with the Spirit of God and God’s grace and love.’

REV. BARRY BUTLER—PREVIOUS STAFF WORKER

‘I went to live at Roper River [now known as Ngukurr] in Arnhem Land in 1953. I moved to Darwin in 1966 and began discussing with the other church mission bodies the idea of a training college for Aboriginal people, that eventually led to the commencement, in 1977, of Nungalinya College. Then, in the last six years before official retirement, I was on the staff of Nungalinya College, so that, one way or another, I got to know and be known, by a number of Aboriginal people in the Arnhem Land area.

‘We lived at Ngukurr from 1953 to 1966, and at one stage we were visiting Numbulwar, Angurugu and Umbakumba, although I didn’t have much to do with Oenpelli until I moved to Darwin. In 1960 to 1961 we were invited down to Yuendumu and Warrabri, to conduct a mission. When I went to Ngukurr, the church was almost a mission. It was a step forward when they formed a church council. We wanted to see the Christian people as a distinct group within that community. Since then the church has developed and grown. That was very evident when we reached the time when Aboriginal men were ordained. It is still the situation in what were the five original missions. There is also a cattle station called Minyerri, out from Roper, where there were some Christian people. In many of the communities, the Aboriginal Christians live in an environment where there is lots of stress in terms of unemployment and too much grog. The main need is still for solid Bible teaching. There are limitations in terms of what the Aboriginal Church leaders know thoroughly regarding the Bible and aspects of the Christian faith. An extreme example would be the man at Minyerri who did one year at Nungalinya College, but he has not been a reader or writer in English; he has a very clear understanding of the basics; but when it comes to the whole counsel of God it has not been very easy, from the Anglican point of view, to get some of those church leaders into Nungalinya for refresher courses.”
‘When several of the men were ordained, the hope was that they would continue training for a ministry that was appropriate to their situation, because they do need to grow and it hasn’t been easy to organise them in ongoing commitment to study. There have been a lot of practical reasons, such as “Men’s business” or a funeral, whenever there has been an attempt to get the people to Nungalinya College. The minister and his wife from Umbakumba were planning to come in and at least have six months at Nungalinya, but there the Christian group, mainly women in fact, said, “Oh no, we can’t afford to lose our church leader”. Eventually, however, they did come, but soon problems began with one son back at Umbakumba, and they felt they just had to go back.

‘There have been a few changes in Nungalinya in the last year. For example, the first two stages in the theology program are accredited, which means that the theology students can get Abstudy, and that has meant a large increase in the numbers that have come in for short courses.

‘The Roman Catholic Church is now a part of the Nungalinya set-up with the Anglican and the Uniting Church. We have also had Lutheran students there. The Nungalinya network extends into Queensland where there is at least one man employed within the Nungalinya program, in fact the network extends into each state. There are students [the more detribalised people] doing the Nungalinya program, who are studying at home within their own church structures.

‘The college wanted to teach God’s truth in culturally appropriate ways and it has a reputation, with quite a few people, of being very concerned about Aboriginal culture or in Aboriginal people maintaining their culture. There is a sticking point when it comes to some ceremonial aspects of the culture. They don’t want to have anything to do with it. But when you get Aboriginal people talking about cultural things, languages and some of their practices, you get a pretty wide range of views. Most missionaries (with some exceptions) discounted the whole lot, threw out the baby with the bath water.

‘Aboriginal people at Roper, in the early years, told me that, while they still maintained their ceremonies, they had cut out, very definitely, two things that used to go on years and years ago. They didn’t worship any other God, and there was no immorality (sex business). They wanted to maintain a bit more open, not a secret, but a clean, ceremony. It is the religious aspects of the ceremonies, the very strong hold that it has over people when the ceremony is on, that worries some Christians. You find a whole range of views; some Christians will go to a ceremony and look at it but that’s all, while others say, “We are not going to go and we don’t want our kids even to be circumcised”. But others go, dance, take part and sing
and do it for the sake of the old people. There are some women who say, “We don’t believe in that sort of stuff any more, its a story, but we don’t want to be involved in it now”. So you can have some pretty strenuous discussion when Aboriginal ceremonial cultural life comes up. We have had seminars in which it was said, “We’ve got to express the Gospel in Aboriginal ways. The Gospel message came to us in a white man’s pot and we want to break that pot, we want to make it Aboriginal. We don’t want to get rid of the core, but we want the pot, the vessel it’s in, to be Aboriginal.”

‘There was an Aboriginal woman from Kowanyama, which was an old Mitchell River mission in Queensland, who came to study in Nungalinya. A lovely lady, she was ordained as a deacon in the Anglican Church at Kowanyama. Bishop Arthur Malcolm, who was there at the time, challenged the people and said there has to be some change in this avoidance thing if Nancy Dick is going to have a ministry. Is that avoidance thing going to stop her? He challenged them to consider that. There was a fellow in one of the Gun Point prison farms, he was actually baptised there. When he got out, he went back to Groote Eylandt. I was in touch with the minister and we hoped that he would somehow be ministered to. When I went to Roper on one occasion, we discovered that he was there and I saw him on the road. I said to Gumbuli Warramara, the minister who was there, “Call out to Norman and tell him about the fellowship meeting tonight”. He said, “Oh I can’t, he’s my kudgin”. Sometimes people joke about that relationship thing, but it explained to me why the other minister at Angurugu, who was Gumbuli’s full brother and therefore kudgin to this man also, hadn’t been able to make effective contact with him in a pastoral, personal way. I think it will go if the fellowship is going to be real.

‘The church life appears to be very fragile at Umbakumba. The Christian group is a smallish group and mainly women, and have not been able to meet publicly for many months because of murders and paybacks and general fear in the community. Two other ministers have been unwell and still not functioning because of their ill health. One has got diabetes and has had his own son die because of petrol sniffing; this sort of discouragement can creep in very easily.

‘Pray most earnestly for the church leaders to pray for the Aboriginal Christians, that in the midst of whatever difficulties they have, they might be able to keep together and still operate as salt and light and be a visible group. It is not like a parish church or a congregation in the suburbs, where you come from all over the place. Out here, these people are living here all the time, they know one another and can’t hide from one another, there are relationships and big changes in their lifestyle. Even though they own the land, the white man’s world presses in upon them. They are very busy in
organisations, in councils and government meetings, financial matters, unemployment and family problems. It is really a messy situation. How distinct and separate can the group be when they have those visible actual links with people? These are some of the dynamics of their situation, and it seems to be inevitable from the most commonsense point of view that they will affect the way that Christians operate. I think the Christians and their Christianity is stronger than it looks.

‘At Oenpelli, we are doing well and have been for a while. A white person coming to visit Roper these days, and depending on when they get there, might ask, “Where is the church?” They would be wrong if they went away thinking there was nothing there, because what operates in that community is so different to other places.’

DR LES BROCKWAY—PRINCIPAL OF NUNGAFLNYA COLLEGE
FOR SEVEN YEARS

‘I am a white fellow and cannot speak for the Aboriginal Church. We have Aboriginal ministers in almost every parish of the Uniting Church in the Northern Territory. In the Pitjantjatjara area there are two parishes; one at Finke, Indulkana and Mimili; and the other at Fregon, Amata and Ernabella. They are looking at the possibility of an Aboriginal community minister; non-ordained, non-stipendiary lay ministry.

‘What is very strong among our people are rallies and conventions, but there has been a weakness in Christian education for children and youth.

‘The whole issue of Gospel and culture is being considered; how much should they keep and how much should they put aside? The official attitude of the Congress and Nungalinya College is to encourage this indigenous process as much as possible. There is a very strong emphasis in the Uniting Christian Congress to use the language and to study the language. One of the wonderful things in the Aboriginal Church is the strong sense of their unity, but nevertheless, accepting separate identities as well, because of their loyalty to the people who brought them the faith, whether Anglican, Catholic or Uniting. We certainly have to respect the diversities among the Aboriginal people themselves and the ecumenical church.

‘The revival movement has flattened out, and the activities of the people have moved out into the homeland centres. It is still very active in the lives of many, many hundreds.

‘There is a new development of the idea of a community minister. We’ve got to see how that develops, whether it fits the Aboriginal style of more team leadership, not like the old mission with only the white-fellow boss.'
That has been a big barrier for us, overcoming that history and teaching.

‘I envisage that down the track we may well have a number of ministers working in teams, as long as the people are prepared to accept that there is no “reverend” status.

‘There was a number of fears among the white sector of the church, when the Congress was formed, about wanting to take control of all their money and their ministry. There was a lot of grieving that it might lead to separation. The Congress has had to go through a consolidation process to assert its own identity and not be controlled by the European body. It was the Congress nationally who went to the Uniting Church and said, “Let us work out a covenant relationship, let’s develop covenanting”. That’s been going on for about five years now. In the whole covenanting process we are trying to get Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in towns and communities to identify, seek out and find each other and to relate in some way. That has been a very positive thing and it fits well with the development that happened subsequent to the mission of the Congress; that is, the whole reconciliation movement within the government, as we lead up to the year 2000.’

**REV. ROB HAYNES—LECTURER AT NUNGALINYA**

‘I’m an Anglican minister from Sydney. I’ve been at Nungalinya for six and a half years. I came on to the staff as a Bible and theology lecturer. In 1991, I became the coordinator of field education, and then, in 1994, when John Kadima left, I was asked to take over the coordinating of the Theology Department as well. I am also the Anglican Dean of Students and have pastoral oversight of their courses.

‘The way we do our lecturing here is that one week equals one subject, so we don’t have four or five subjects going at once. So we might have our lecturers doing two weeks in a row although we try not to do that. The subject is spread over seven weeks throughout two terms. At the same time we are writing work books which are not just for use in the classroom, but also sent around the TEE network [Theological Education by Extension].

‘In our Associate Diploma we run three-week courses for field education. There is tremendous flexibility available to students from different church backgrounds and personal facilities, in choosing the sort of subjects to do that would be most helpful.

‘At present, we are running two courses in theology and are getting a third one accredited. The first one is the Certificate in Theology; it is
accredited with DEET, so it is at an ordinary DEET standard. It has a number of subject areas, such as Biblical Studies, Old Testament, New Testament and Theological subjects, Personal Development, Field Ministry Studies and Field Ministry Practice. There is a one week compulsory module called Theological Field Education. Then there are some field ministry studies which are practical but more classroom-based and then Field Ministry Practice which is ministry in practice, in the Certificate Course.

‘So the students have twenty subjects to do, the Field Ministry Practice, forty hours rather than twenty hours which the other subjects have. The Certificate is open for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders and generally is not for anybody else. There is no literacy requirement before a person enters the Certificate Course. But, by the time the Associate Diploma is being considered, we encourage the student to have some skill in English, in reading and writing, but there is no particular standard. We value greatly oral discussion, and communication through pictures, banners and plays.

‘In the Associate Diploma the first study area is Indigenous and Bi-cultural Studies, which looks at life skills. There are special courses we run here at the college: Aboriginal and Islander Theology, Aboriginal and Islander Spirituality, Indigenous and Contextual Theology and Theology of the Land. Library Research skills means the library culture, which is a European culture. Money and Economics is an important one. Aboriginal and Islander Languages; quite a few of our students have their own language, quite a few have English as their first language. Then there is Aboriginal and Islander Christian Art. These are very special courses that we run and they are well-attended and liked, and we have been able to get Aboriginal lecturers for most of them. Then there are Biblical Studies, six Old Testament Studies and six New Testament Studies, Theological Studies, five Historical Studies. One in Early Christian Communities, which is an Early Church History course with an emphasis on the community life in the first, second or third centuries of the Christian Church. The other two history subjects are the History of Missions in Australia and Aboriginal Church History, where we encourage Aboriginal people to write their own church history and to be aware of the work of the Gospel around Australia. That forms half of the Associate Diploma. The other half includes the Field Ministry Studies and the Field Ministry Practice. The Field Ministry Studies include that one week as in the Certificate Course. Then there are subjects like Prison Ministry, Public Worship, Family Violence, Shared Leadership, Substance Abuse and Crossing Cultures. We have chosen those, and they are all compulsory subjects to do in the Associate Diploma. The Field Ministry Practice is the
subject where students have a tremendous range of choice, and we allow students and their churches to form the area that they will experience in practice over the 75-hour, or nominal three-week period.

‘The courses we are accrediting will be at university level, or a higher education level, I should say; it is going to be a Diploma in Ministry. We are working with the Adelaide College of Divinity—that works well because we are an ecumenical college here and they are working ecumenically down there and we have a lot of connections with Adelaide. Rev. Dr Richard Wallace is heading up our project there in getting that course written and accredited. All of us in the theological staff are taking part in that.

‘The students of the college come from all over Australia. The college was founded in 1974, particularly for Arnhem Land students from the Uniting Church and Anglican mission areas, but in the last five years the college has responded to critical needs around the country, to people from a more urban background. I could come up with a figure of percentage; it is approximately half urban and half traditional. The students beginning full-time residentially at the college is a very small number, and at the moment are mostly traditional people, but when we have short courses at the college, people come from all over Australia. Those courses are about half and half.

‘I would say one significant group that has sent approximately ten to twelve people at one time, of the same language, to the college for those short courses, are the Tiwi Island people—the Catholic students. They have had a very interesting influence on the college as well as being able to help one another in their studies.

‘We have visiting lecturers with theological backgrounds. They are Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders and are recognised by their own churches as teachers. Or they may be non-Aboriginal people who have a sense of mission, a sense of wanting to empower the Aboriginal and Islander Churches and are willing to give themselves occasionally to that sort of work. I have just written to Rev. Geoff Hilburn, a Uniting Church minister in Perth, who has written a couple of books and teaches on the Theology of Land. I spoke to the Rev. John Harris in Canberra the other day; he teaches courses on the History of Missions in Australia. Dr Sue Boorer will be coming up later this year to teach an Old Testament subject. Rev. Dr Bill Loader, a Uniting Church minister in Perth, has been coming up the last five years to teach a New Testament subject. Amongst the indigenous teachers, people of significance are Rev. Dhalnganda Garrawurra, who has been on our staff full-time for six and a half years. The Rev. Dr Djininyini Gondarra, who works for the Northern Regions Congress of the Uniting Church, lectures occasionally; and the
Rev. George Rosendale, a Lutheran Pastor from North Queensland, has been lecturing part-time with our branch in Queensland, Wontulp Bi Buya, and he teaches Aboriginal and Islander Spirituality. He is an Aboriginal man from Hope Vale in North Queensland.

‘Some students come for full-time studies; they are paid for by their churches. For a family that amounts to about twenty-two thousand dollars a year. These days government money pays for accredited courses but the college requires another seventy dollars a week. The government does not pay for theology training and administration. They are still basically paid for by the churches and missionary societies. Some students just come for short courses. Their travel and accommodation are paid for by DEET and another seventy dollars a week is paid for by the churches or occasionally by the students themselves; sometimes by the denomination or by the Congress of the Uniting Church, or by the Diocese; otherwise by the local church or by the students themselves. All our students must be sponsored by a church in some way; for some of them that means official sponsorship from the bishop or diocesan body, in others the sponsorship is from their local congregation.

‘When I first came to Nungalinya, the husband and wife coming together meant the husband did theological studies and the wife did bi-cultural life studies, so that the wife wouldn’t be sitting at home. In the last ten years since accreditation, husbands and wives started to do theology together, so we encouraged that strongly, though if the woman wanted to do bi-cultural life studies, the Milcraft course or the textile and design course, they are also accredited and freely offered. In fact, we have one man doing the textile course and the wife doing bicultural studies at the moment. The other thing we encourage is for groups to come from a church, so that it is not just one person or just one husband and wife, but three, four or five people from an individual congregation, and we especially encourage that where traditional people come to the college.

‘One of the big things we are having to face now is that a lot of the southern people are saying, “Nungalinya is for the traditional people but not for us”. I personally believe that that is overstating it. I hope as we develop more short courses down south, as we are already doing, we will be able to provide access to them. We will keep the rule that people must do at least three weeks of their certificate and at least five or six weeks of the Associate Diploma in residence at Nungalinya.

‘On the other hand, the traditional students are sometimes finding the more intensely cross-cultural nature of the college quite a challenge. It makes it more difficult, but it also provides for a richer experience. It will mean that some won’t want to come to Nungalinya any more, but others
will value the experience very highly and, even though it has been a great strain for them, they will hope to come again. So, with the short courses we are having, I hope that people like that will be able to come to the college regularly.

‘All over the college there is a move asking us to offer courses in communities, so we are endeavouring to do that. I have been down to Queensland, NSW and Adelaide for three weeks already this year doing the same thing.’

In February 1996 it was announced that the Rev. Dr Richard Wallace was appointed by the Nungalinya Council as the Academic Dean responsible to the Principal.

**REV. SAIBO MABO—NUNGALINYA CAMPUS COORDINATOR**

‘I’m an Anglican Priest from the Torres Strait Islands, a long way north-east of here. I was employed as campus coordinator from 1994, living in the college. I have a special ministry working with the students who come from
different parts of Australia, and from the Torres Straits, too. We have a culture
difference and to learn their culture I have to be with them, to work with them
in what they do. It is my job to accommodate them and give them hospitality, I
oversee their settling in. The residential students are here for one year, I put
them in housing units. Community Organising Certificate students are here for
two weeks, theology students come in for one week, two weeks or three weeks.
I have a pastoral role, a special ministry for me to sit with them and talk with
them; if any needs to go to hospital then I go with them; if any needs prayer
then I pray for them; there is a lot of work for me to do here, it is part of God’s
ministry.

‘My wife, Sonia May Mabo, and our son, he is only six years old; my elder
one is back in the islands. This year I will stay here in Nungalinya. If I
communicate with the people here we get along very well and overcome the
cultural differences. In some laws they have a rule that a woman can hardly talk
to a man, but here in Nungalinya College people talk sense. Maybe they are
theology students and are learning. When they are out in the Homeland, if they
ring straight to me I’ll talk to them, but we have a student clerk and he is the
one who contacts the Homelands. I went with Bishop Richard Appleby when he
visited Oenpelli to see all the people there; they were good.

‘The Katherine Convention this year was a good one. I saw how the people
were in unity, and how they responded to each other; they come from different
parts but they were all talking together. The unity was from grassroots up, not
from up to grassroots. When I spoke at the convention I mentioned the keys that
we have to use, the keys from downstairs to go upstairs.

‘We have people come to play basketball; they want to stay here, well we
accommodate them; Christian families come for church matters. When we have
a student come to the unit and a relation from outside gets drunk and comes in, I
have to try to protect that student from his drunk relation. It is hard for me, but
if I say, “If you drink outside you stay outside”, this is the biggest problem. We
try to solve the problems with the relations; I am here for some purpose: for
college students to stick it out and work it out together, to live in the college in
peace and harmony with each other and how to communicate with each other,
and live as one family. Maybe one day there will be a big fence around the
people in the college! I sit and talk with them, we have to share. For example,
one of the ladies left a kid here while she went to the shop. The kid was walking
around by itself. I said to the kid, “Where is your mum?” The next door
neighbour said to me, “I’ll mind the kid”. I said, “OK”. So I took the kid over
there and said, “You wait here till your mum comes”. I love that example, it
gives me a challenge.
This is only a small community; I might be sent to a community which is bigger than this.

‘My aim is to help them understand finances; how to understand money and to use that money. I want to ask people who read this book for support, grassroots support from a distance or close here, from the white men to a black man.’

JOHN PINSON—A VISION FOR THE LIBRARY AT NUNGALINYA

‘The Aboriginal people who live in communities live there for a purpose. They feel that their culture, their values and their language were best developed in isolation from white culture and the fact of being with white people inevitably compromises themselves as Aboriginal people. Coming to Darwin, to Nungalinya College and living with white people, they see as a threat to their relationships, a threat to their culture, a threat to their language. However, they do want to share the knowledge that we have, they do want to understand what their faith means, they do want to explore the meaning of the centrality of Jesus Christ in their experience and culture. How can we best enable them to explore these things at their own pace and in their own way?'
Every settlement, without exception, has access to computer terminals. A growing proportion of Aboriginal people are becoming reasonably comfortable with a computer.

‘There are a number of distinct advantages in dealing with computers as distinct from dealing with a passive book. A computer may be set up so that it is a dialogue between the computer and the person using it. When you come to a book, you come with a number of assumptions about the nature of the book and the way it works. Some Aboriginal people have taken these aboard, but traditional Aboriginal learning was not by means of a book, it was by means of face-to-face learning, and it was situational learning; they learned around the camp fire, along the trail, by the billabong.

‘In dealing with a computer, it does not even have to be language specific, you can have icons. By the use of icons you can have situations which are much closer to Aboriginal expectations. I envisage a situation where Nungalinya can be a culturally relevant and sensitive learning environment. When you come to a book, you need a reasonable command of the English language to pick it up and work with it. A computer screen can be set up with icons; rather than words. So we could have an icon such as an Aboriginal flag, a person clicks that icon and that would open another set of twelve icons; one could be an Aboriginal camp fire, one could be a *juringa*. Each of these icons would represent a series of texts. The text could be in English with a voice speaking in the student’s Aboriginal language. What we are looking at is not one CD-ROM, but a tower. You can put six CD-ROMs stacked in a juke box. It will probably take about two to three years to set this up. A lot of this raw material is already on our shelves, there are video tapes of corroborees, some of the great revival services, there are language recordings. Nungalinya staff have been very active over the years in recording on video tape. They can be put on CD-ROM and they can be indexed. The key to it all is the index. The icons are the means of retrieving this material.

‘If we could get one or two strong Aboriginal leaders who could develop this, the whites could provide the infrastructure. Those leaders could provide the overall shape of the final product and how they want to see this expressed.

‘What the machine is so supremely good at doing is providing information. When I was down in Melbourne, I sat down in front of the religious index which is the American Theological Libraries Association. I put the words “Aboriginal Theology” down and I had one hundred and ninety-five references printed out. I can go a step beyond that with a CD-ROM. I can get the articles printed off and the student can look them up and have the full text on the screen so there is an anthology of work to start with.
Once you can do that, you can include in that clues for the student to go for
more material. There is no need for the student to leave his community. The
Nungalinya leader of a tutorial group can be sitting in Darwin and link up with
his group on the screen. The student can be sitting in the security of his own
environment and therefore be a lot freer. We can have whiteboards, and if a
person wants to draw a diagram on the board they draw it and it can appear on
similar boards in the other rooms. At the end of the tutorial they just push the
button and the record is printed out.

‘The Scriptures are the basis from which to work, but it is absolutely
essential that the theology is shaped by their culture and not by ours.’

John Pinson left the Nungalinya staff in 1996.1

\[ \text{REV. GOWAN ARMSTRONG—}
\text{CURRENT SECRETARY OF TACL} \]

The greatest need at present is the training of Aboriginal leaders, as pastors and
community advisers and leaders, who will know the particular needs of their
people and help them to find ways to meet those needs. The time for white
missionaries to minister as evangelists is rapidly passing. TACL was formed in
1995 to achieve this goal. It is comprised of Rev. Max Stollznow, chairman (past
Australian Lutheran missionary), David Amery (Christian educator), Rev.
Gowan Armstrong (Uniting Church retired missionary), Rev. John Koch
(Lutheran Seminary), Rev. John Hewittson (Anglican and past worker for
Wontulp Bi Buya), Father Jerome Crow (retired lecturer at St Francis Xavier’s
Seminary), Father Mark Nugent (Director, Otherway Centre, Adelaide, now
deceased), David Cox (Secretary of AFA), Nelson (Snooky) Varcoe (member
AOG Church), Rev. Bob Vawser (Uniting Church), Rev. Chris McLeod
(Anglican Church), Pastor Brian Phelps (Church of Christ), Rev. Bill Edwards
(retired lecturer in Aboriginal Studies, Underdale), Mr Bryce Clark (Uniting
Church).

Gowan Armstrong (Secretary of TACL) was formerly minister at
Maningrida and was later with Keith Cole on staff at Nungalinya College from

‘Many of the influential Aboriginal Leaders in Australia were nominal
Christians and some were very committed Christians like Doug Nicholls. With
the coming of the self-determination policy, many mission responsibilities were
taken over by various education departments, and today there are many
Aboriginal lawyers and teachers who have responsible positions

1 Nungalinya News, no. 81, February 1996.
in society because of their education. Nungalinya is there to produce people who will be able to communicate with these educated people.

‘It is a great joy to us that several people have gained their Certificate in Lay Education studies; Sid Graham, Ken Sumner, and prior to that Eddie Champion had done diploma studies which is a qualification for ordination. Now the accreditation of the diploma course at the Flinders University is seen as a very welcome step and a further opportunity and challenge for Christian leaders in the future.

‘We began, as Bob Vawser euphemistically put it, like a “Dad’s Army”; many of us are retired or nearly retired. But when Rob Haynes was here he put to us the challenge of setting ourselves some goals. Nelson Varco has made some valuable contributions to the committee, and we hope that he will be able to continue to come regularly. Only yesterday he said that drugs rather than poker machines were the major problem at present.

‘One goal is to have a field officer like David Thompson of Wontulp. We would follow Wontulp in that we would not have a campus, as such, but we would have a centre, and work in regional areas.

‘The committee would be responsible for South Australia. We have had people from Ernabella come for courses here and Bill Edwards has conducted courses in Ernabella. We have had a couple of courses in Ceduna and here in Adelaide. We plan to hold one in Port Augusta and another in the Riverland soon. At Ernabella we are waiting on a signal from Bob Capp for the arrangements. Dr Norm Habel lectured at a couple of courses; he has been a guest lecturer at Nungalinya, and was present at the thanksgiving service at Elcho, 1990 for the Renewal movement. He has also written a paper: New Directions. Max Stollznow is our chairperson, and we meet in the Lutheran headquarters in North Adelaide.

‘The main focus of the Lutheran Mission activity has been amongst the Aranda. They have been ordaining pastors for many years now. The Finke River Mission have got this very much under control.

‘George Rosendale of Queensland has written a book on Aboriginal spirituality which is used in the Nungalinya Training Course. A conference is to be held shortly at the federal level on the future directions for training of Aboriginal pastors.

‘In Port Augusta, Denise Champion, with Rod and Shirley James, have arranged a couple of what is called in the Uniting Church circles now, About Time programs. This began a couple of years ago with a number of non-Aboriginal children spending a weekend in the homes of Aboriginal children at Port Augusta, and subsequently Aboriginal children were received into the homes of non-Aboriginal children, and that has been quite significant.
‘In the Murraytown Church, there were photographs in which people like Eddie and Denise Champion and others were present in gatherings in which there were opportunities for them to get to know Aboriginal people in the Murraytown scene.

‘There is no substitute for knowing Aboriginal people. In the Uniting Church right across Australia, the covenanting process is under way, and one of the things that is encouraging is the interaction and the building of friendships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.’

Gowan Armstrong assured us that Ken Sumner preached with acceptance here in Adelaide. Both Sid Graham and Ken Sumner were very well received.

‘In settings where Aboriginal people can feel at home and comfortable, this kind of ongoing interrelationship is good to encourage. One of the sayings of Chairman Mao, “If friendship and trust develop, anything can happen; if friendship and trust do not develop, nothing can happen”.

‘Rob Haynes is writing a paper which I am looking forward to receiving, and his experience is that the church has shown eagerness in supporting the training of these people around Australia, but when they are trained, tend to leave them to it without due support. That is a concern that he is determined to raise, that people must not be left unsupported.

‘In traditional Aboriginal life, people have small ceremonies for death ceremonies, but each year there were one or two or even three major ceremonial gatherings. There would be intense activities day and night and then the people would disperse to their homelands.

‘In our European way of life, we are accustomed to our regular Sunday services, but Pastor Ben Mason once said, “Aboriginal people are just not used to having a regular Sunday service”.’

NGANJMIRRA PETERSON FROM OENPELLI

‘In the middle of the eighties there was a great revival that moved across East Arnhem land. At that time it was really great, it covered the whole area. People became more respected. Christianity should be kept going. When, in the past, missionaries left Oenpelli, there were some people who decided to hold strong religion, they thought about their life on earth and their life between themselves and God. They tried to get more useful things they could do for their living. Since the missionaries left, the people have continued on and the revival has taken hold. In some areas people are living a strong Christian life.
‘The young people have two languages, English and our Aboriginal language. They are able to teach their own people and not depend on white people coming in from outside. These young people are the same colour as us and have the same culture. My role as a parish priest is to celebrate the sacraments, baptise new Christians and conduct burial services. My most important work is to keep on a team that is translating the Scriptures. We have been doing this for a long time. We need to finish translating the whole Bible. At present we have a mini Bible which includes a few books from the Old Testament and a few from the New Testament. This was printed in 1989.

‘In the fellowship, we have about ten people who meet in the evening when it is cool and fresh. People love singing and then after that we have a message. I studied at Nungalinya College for a year and I go back there for refresher courses or I have a tutor from Nungalinya coming out to help me.

‘Missionaries raised some questions about our tribal people. These people lived in Oenpelli; now they live outside Oenpelli on their own land. There are certain places which are very quiet, no cars, no violence, no drunks. These people have to decide what to do with their own land. We don’t need other leaders with different ideas to come in, dividing up the people.

‘When I visit these people, I go where I speak the same language and we can talk to each other. In other areas the Uniting Church visits those people who have different languages.

‘I can have fellowship with some others in the tribe but others I have to avoid. But the Lord can speak to anyone, my cousin, my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law, my mother. We need help from others who understand our cultural background. Our languages are different in different areas. We are separated by languages.’
CHAPTER NINETEEN

Some Characteristics of Aboriginal Christianity

As we travelled back to Derby one evening, a huge bush fire cast a brown pall of smoke right across the western horizon. It was an eerie feeling to see this brown cloud cover the sun and change the colour of the whole landscape. Then, as the sun began to set, it glowed as a reddish ball of fire through the trees, finally setting in a beautiful glow of red, golden orange and yellow sunset colours across the sky. For me, this was symbolic. Out of the invasion of the country by whites, out of the shameful cruelty and oppression by the invaders, out of the dispossession and suffering of the Aboriginal people, shining even through the misunderstandings and misrepresentation of the Christian message, there has come a beautiful and striking light. As Aborigines have grasped the truth of the Gospel, they have given it a different colour and perspective. The same scene, but a different light through a bushfire cloud. Not all these characteristics are shown by every group of Aboriginal Christians, but different lights show in different areas.

FORGIVENESS

One of these rich colours is the characteristic of forgiveness. Despite the ignorance of many missionaries and others about Aboriginal people and their culture, even about their languages; despite their paternalism and even autocratic behaviour; despite the very narrow, racist attitude which regarded everything Aboriginal as devilish and wicked, Christian Aborigines have
expressed their gratitude to missionaries for bringing them the message of life. At an Aborigines’ Friends’ Association seminar in August 1984, the late Pastor Ben Mason, before describing how his organisation had to begin a separate and lively existence run by Aboriginal people, said that ‘the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship owed much to Christian missions’.\(^1\)

In this spirit of gratitude and forgiveness, he overlooked all the faults of the missions which made it necessary for Aborigines to start their own fellowship. There was no bitterness about the inability of the missions to understand the Aboriginal point of view, only thankfulness for the message which they had now been able to accept in their own context. The motto of the AEF—’All One in Christ Jesus’—shows the extent of that forgiveness, and the black and white handshake symbol used for their convention is another indication of lack of resentment. This contrasts strongly with the attitude of some black activists who have no good word to say about missions, claiming that they destroyed Aboriginal culture.

Although this forgiveness covers the white man’s crimes of the past, the continued apathy and neglect of the needs of Aboriginal people at present must strain the resources of that Christian fellowship. We cannot alter what happened in the past, but we can regret those attitudes and actions of our forefathers, and adopt a more positive and helpful attitude to fellow Christians of other cultures, in the future. As we accept the benefits of living in this country, we must also share shame for the conditions many Aborigines are living under.

**PEOPLE MORE IMPORTANT THAN TIME**

A second characteristic of Aboriginal Christianity is that people are more important than time. When I asked the minister at Elcho Island to give me an outline of the work at Galiwin’ku, he took me to a shady area and we sat down. He was due to catch a plane to Darwin in about an hour’s time, but he didn’t once look at his watch or appear impatient with me as the interviewer. He told me his story from the beginning, clearly and logically, as though he had all the time in the world. He treated me as an important person, a Christian brother, although I was a stranger to him and a member of another race. He had dignity himself and he gave me dignity by giving me his time unstintingly.

This same quality was noticeable at the Ernabella Convention, when a question was discussed about placing a deceased lady’s photo in the church.

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\(^1\) Aborigines’ Friends’ Association, Seminar cassette tapes, Adelaide, 1984.
Several people spoke in favour of the proposal, but, because an older man objected, it was decided to wait until some later time and then discuss it again. The tradition which the man supported could easily have been overruled, but he was treated as an important person. People were not impatient to get this done in a hurry when it meant offending someone. This one opinion was respected and a clash avoided because time wasn’t important. It was more important to reach consensus in the fellowship. This could be contrasted with some church or secular meetings in our society where bitter attack and sharp conflict are not unusual. Pressure to make a decision within a limited time means that, on some occasions, time has priority over people. Rev. Charles Harris and Rev. Dr Djininyini Gondarra both said that when black people go to these meetings, they often do not fit in. They feel people are being rude to each other and not really thinking about the feelings of other people. 

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY

The third characteristic is that people do not cease to be Aboriginal on becoming Christian. Christianity is not a Western religion, although many whites only see Christianity through the blinkered eyes of their own culture. The late Bishop Festo Kivengere, speaking at the Christian Leaders’ Conference in Adelaide, urged them to be themselves, not to try to be white fellows, but to be Aboriginal Christians. This idea struck a ready response among many of the leaders and was discussed in my presence afterwards. Black Christianity is not a new or different Christianity. It has the same God, the same Lord Jesus Christ, and the same Holy Spirit who helps Aboriginal as well as white leaders. When a black person is baptised, he does not become white. He is baptised in his culture as well as into new life in Christ. More of his Aboriginal identity can be expressed because he becomes free to be himself, being less inhibited by the demands of what others think his behaviour should be like.

ABORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

This leads to the next characteristic—a desire to contribute something Aboriginal to God’s glory. There have been many glorious contributions from different nations to the glory of God, in the way of magnificent

buildings and cathedrals, wonderful choirs and musical instruments, very helpful books and writings, inspiring paintings and works of art, outstanding preachers and evangelists.

One particular and unique contribution, which is Aboriginal to the core, is the corroboree presentation of Bible stories and truths. These have been performed very effectively by the Warlpiri people at Lajamanu, Yuendumu and other centres. Music, song, art work, dancing and craft work are combined in very human presentations of Bible truths, such as the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the story of Ruth.

The presentation of a corroboree demands the coordination of all the art forms. The songs have to be carefully worked out, with suitable tunes and words in the Aboriginal idiom. This means careful checking with the elders to see that the tunes convey the message without copying too closely any tribal songs. The words have to be clear in expressing the story and its meaning in Aboriginal language in the way a traditional song would, while remaining true to the message of the Scriptures. The art of carving out the shields and painting them must be carefully worked out with the elders and the craftsmen. The body painting of the dancers is also very important. Then the actual dance itself must have the steps and sequences coordinated with the song. All of these must combine in presenting the message in several different ways at once, not as an Aboriginal gimmick, but as a way of helping people to understand the Gospel, and come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, in any presentation of the Christian message, the songs, the equipment, the regalia and the body language of the messengers have an impact, as well as the actual message being preached.

Generally, Aboriginal people, whether tribal or urban, whether they still practise many of the traditional customs or whether they live in a suburban culture, are proud to be associated with an Aboriginal presentation of the Christian message and are glad their heritage brings a new understanding of God’s glory. Some have unfortunately been taught to consider that anything of the tribal culture must be satanic and evil, mainly because very few whites understood the language or the culture of the tribes they came in contact with.

TRADITIONAL WAYS

The Aboriginal church, as any other group of Christians, must operate within the society in which it lives. Those on the outside of that society may criticise Christians who appear to be conforming to a way of life different from that of other believers. One young white teacher, soon after arriving in a Central Australian community, observed that church leaders
were taking part in circumcision ceremonies. He asked one of them why they continued to support these ancient practices. He got a brief reply that it was to help maintain law and order in the community. When the young teacher said he couldn’t understand how a Christian could take part in these ceremonies, the leader replied, ‘That’s your problem!’ He didn’t expect a newcomer to understand the profound philosophy of community organisation and law. That understanding could only come with patient and sympathetic study and observation. In terms of Scripture, this is honouring the powers and authorities set over them, as it is through these ceremonies that the older men retain their authority to keep law and order. Unfortunately that authority is fast slipping away, but could be effectively replaced by Christian leadership.

At Numbulwar, there was an evening fellowship meeting where a number of the elders were involved. When the time of the year came around for a certain ceremony to be held, the fellowship meeting was held just a little earlier to allow the men to attend both, and so that the fellowship and the ceremony would not be seen to be in competition by operating at the same time. It was an unusual situation for me, to join with the singing and sharing of the fellowship meeting and to hear, a little later, the singing and didgeridoo playing at the ceremony held on a sandhill just a short distance from the first meeting.

There is obviously some difference of opinion about Christians taking part in traditional ceremonies. Some missions completely forbid it, while others allow tribal Aboriginal Christian leaders to decide for themselves. We, who belong to a non-Aboriginal culture, are obviously not qualified to make these decisions for people who have understood their own culture since childhood and are guided by the same Holy Spirit in their lives as we claim to have in ours.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

I asked Rev. Cedric Jacobs—1985 President of AEF—what he considered the most important contribution of Aboriginal Christianity to Australia. He answered with very little hesitation that it was to bring the whole church back to the simplicity of the Gospel. During the last century writers and preachers have questioned the truth of the Scriptures, debated the authorship of various books of the Bible and raised doubts about the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Christ. Many theological colleges debate the basic truths of Christian belief, and spend a great deal of time discussing the opinion of eminent writers who cast doubts on different aspects of the faith. No doubt it is useful and necessary for students to be aware of the
trends of modern thought and to be prepared to give answers to those who seek to undermine their beliefs. However, at the Bimbadeen AEF Bible Training College, the emphasis is on teaching the simple truths of the Bible from both the Old and New Testaments, with a bias towards practical application in everyday life.

The present situation in most Aboriginal communities is so grim, with problems of poverty, ill health, unemployment, gambling, drugs, alcoholism and petrol sniffing, that it would be irrelevant to discuss questions of authorship and nineteenth century German theological opinions. Students themselves have been through shattering experiences and have entered college to build up a faith that has helped them to find strength and stability in a hostile world. They plan to pass this life-giving faith on to their people, and are not concerned with gaining mere head knowledge and academic status, important as they may be in other situations.

The same emphasis is seen at conventions, where the discussions, studies, seminars and evening meetings are related to the teachings of Scripture in relation to everyday life and everyday needs. The message must always be the gospel of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and the need to respond to Him. When the members of the convention know that the lives of some of their children are threatened by petrol sniffing, and that certain of their young people are doomed to become drunkards unless they can find the answer to these problems, the preaching becomes simple, direct and realistic. As many of the preachers themselves have been through these difficulties, their preaching is based on their practical experience of a life-giving faith. There is every reason why they should concentrate on the Gospel, which is ‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes’ (Romans 1:16).

There is a refreshing tendency to concentrate on direct, vital preaching in these meetings. Few books are displayed or sold, but cassettes are in much greater demand. Cassettes are used to record messages and singing as well as passages of Scripture. For a number of the tribal people who don’t have a high proportion of their friends who are literate, the obvious way of taking back home some of the benefits of the convention is to buy a series of tapes which record the singing as well as the messages of the meetings.

**ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP IN TENNANT CREEK**

Richard Driver became blind in 1986 but in spite of this he had quite an impact as a speaker at the 1994 Katherine Convention. He is one of the elders in the AIM Church in Tennant Creek.
He said, ‘The majority of the people in the church are Aboriginal. They come from the Aborigines Inland Mission Church. We ourselves take the Sunday services, and also have services on Wednesday evenings, and a men’s meeting on Tuesday evenings, and the ladies meet every Friday. All are welcome to attend because the Lord Jesus came for all people. We don’t mind people coming to our church and sharing with us.

‘Tennant Creek was touched by the revival. I can remember in 1984, that was the year I gave my life to the Lord and so did many other people from the township itself. I can remember one of the older missionaries, Mr Pattemore, baptised twenty-eight people at one time there. I was one of them. There was a big revival at that time among our people, not only at Tennant Creek, but in the surrounding country, in the out-stations and the cattle stations as well.

‘Even though we had a revival in the ’80s, a lot of our people did turn away from the Lord and only a faithful few still keep coming, the number is about fifteen or twenty. There was an earthquake that struck Tennant Creek in 1988. When this struck, the church yard was full of people because they knew where to find help. We know the evil one was at work also, but a lot of people did come to the church in the ’80s; gradually they
started to drift back to the old ways and they drifted away so far that they started to keep to themselves instead of attending churches or going to fellowship, and so it was a bit of a struggle.

‘Now that we are in the nineties, just a handful are coming to church, but attendance from my point of view is still very good.

‘The main need of the Aboriginal Church in Australia is spiritual growth. People understand the Gospel, and they believe the Gospel, but people are not giving the Lord a chance to work in their lives so they can see things happening or how they can mature in their Christian lives. This is one of the greatest needs for our people, and for all people, for that matter. It is a spiritual warfare, and we only lean on the Lord Jesus.

‘The Lord is the one who is building up the church. As one of the Elders in the Tennant Creek church, I do most of the preaching. Sometimes I take it in turns with the other leaders and let them take part in the preaching because if I were sick they could fill in the gap and do the teaching themselves. It might be when I am away on other matters, like outreach, that they can help.

‘The missionaries that came to the AIM Churches built up a church, and then they let the Aborigines run it themselves just like Paul did in the days of the early church. He raised up leaders in those communities, then he left them, and they continued to run the church by themselves. The non-Aboriginal missionaries have done this in our communities, they come back and help us whenever we get stuck or get a problem. We also get teaching from one of our missionaries who is based at Darwin Bible College; Richard Davies, one of our former missionaries from Tennant Creek, he comes about once or twice a year. We have our own Bible College situated at Humpty Doo. That is where Richard Davies is. He is the principal of Darwin Bible College, and that is where we attend our training sessions once or twice every year.

‘Another way of teaching the Gospel is to use Aboriginal symbols. We got the iconographs from the Aboriginal culture. We are using this to teach Aboriginal people in a way the Gospel can be understood; a better and much easier way, especially for our older people who are illiterate. So this is one way we can get the message across. Richard Davies says that the iconograph track drawings at Tennant Creek are not able to be used in the west of WA, because over in the west of Australia they are offensive because they are secret things, but can be used in the Central Desert area.

‘The ladies want to run their meetings by themselves. Some of our ladies are leaders there. They do drawings and paintings from the Scriptures; it is not something they make up. They read the Scriptures, and this is what they want to share. When we have a Sunday night service they
come and share what they have drawn, they share with us in the fellowship. We visit town camps every Sunday night because there are about eight town camps around Tennant Creek. We take the message to the people so that the message about the Lord Jesus can come across to them so they, too, can understand and be saved from sin.

‘The fellowship meetings are for everyone. If the kids have got a program they can come and share it in singing, or maybe drama, or maybe a singalong, or by a Bible reading, or perhaps a song with actions. Whenever we have the church service it is a fellowship for everyone to join in, we can understand and learn about the others, what the Lord has done in their lives and how they are growing as Christians. Because of the many tribes that are in the Tennant Creek area, I mostly preach in easy English. We try to bring the message about the Lord in the language that they can understand.

‘We have a vision for the Tennant Creek area for people to grow in their Christian faith. It is a spiritual battle; we are not fighting human beings, we are not fighting flesh and blood, but the dark spiritual forces.

‘We sometimes have prayer times in people’s homes and pray that the Lord will build up this church in the Tennant Creek area and right around Australia, right across the nation and to the uttermost parts of the world, to all people not just one group of people. Sin affects all people. Also He rose up to show us that He has the power over death; so that’s the vision we have.’

**ABORIGINAL ICONOGRAPHY**

**Elizabeth Johnson**

‘I’m the leader for the ladies’ midweek study group. We always meet up together in Tennant Creek every Friday, and always pray and ask God to help us, and we got together always with the Bible verses. Sometimes these ladies don’t understand Europeans. I use these drawings. It is a gift from God, I’ve never done anything like this before. Everything comes into my mind, so I really wanted to encourage my own people living out in the communities. We always tell the ladies to go back and pray and ask God to help, they probably have a different gift from mine. These are used for sharing the Gospel together, sometimes to evangelise, sometimes we teach each other. Sometimes Aboriginal people don’t understand New Testament stories, so we encourage them with pictures like this, and talk in their language and we share, sometimes in English and then in our own language.'
'I had never painted a picture in my life until I came to the Lord and then I got baptised in Tennant Creek at Easter time 1990 and I was really different. I had never done a picture like this before and I’m only a young lady and these others are older women. I’ve got a book here and it’s got some European pictures. I had to draw pictures like these Aboriginal ones.

'I'm the leader for the town ladies at Tennant Creek. I always pick these girls up with the bus and sit around every Friday. I'm always asking what we are going to do next week. I always tell them, “We should go back to start learning quickly so we can encourage our people of Tennant Creek to come to know the Lord”. These sort of pictures are a gift from God. I drew this picture on my own, from my own mind. But it’s real; man, Jesus and God. There is no other way to God but it is through Jesus who died on the Cross. I have to draw all these pictures because Aboriginal people like doing all these things. Sometimes people can’t read so I have to draw a picture like this. We read the Bible, sing a song and praise Him and He picks us up. We also use Letter Sticks and Today magazines.

'If you don’t know the Lord you’re lost, but if you do you’re saved.'

Elizabeth had two banners. One about four feet by three feet was used at the Easter Convention at Ali Curung and the other, bigger one was used at the Tennant Creek tenth anniversary of the opening of the new church.
Artwork used by Elizabeth Johnson in the Tennant Creek area to preach the Gospel.
USING ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Translation work into Aboriginal languages has taken a turn into this oral tradition. Passages of Scripture are translated and recorded onto cassette tapes to reach those who live on out-stations or homelands, so that those unable or unaccustomed to read their own language can listen to the Bible being read in their own language, without having to travel long distances. A linguist from Oenpelli, Steven Etherington, wrote about one Kunwingku person, Laura, who ‘sometimes flies by chartered Missionary Aviation plane, at her own expense, to other out-stations to sell Christian literature, booklets and cassettes, and talk to people about Christ’. These tapes include singing and messages from Scripture in Kunwingku, and this is not an isolated case of the use of cassettes as these Scripture tapes are being used widely in many communities to pass on the messages from the Bible to people in isolated communities in their own languages, generally using their own people as speakers. White people generally underrate this oral tradition and expect Aboriginal people to read and understand English as easily as they do. Those who have had to learn Chinese or Japanese would understand the difficulty of just interpreting a new set of symbols as well as learning to understand a new language.

Although in some cases it was necessary for missionaries to teach in English, the Christian work didn’t advance very quickly or deeply until the people received the Scriptures in their own language and were able to listen to them being read in services or on cassettes in their own tongue. Aboriginal people have particular ability to learn other languages. They generally learn these orally, rather than in a written form, and respond most deeply to the spoken word.

SEEING THE SUPERNATURAL

There is a strong sense of the supernatural in Aboriginal thought. This is evident in their Christianity. The sense of the presence of evil spirits in every part of life can be seen in the many stories about the mamu in Pitjan tjatjara folk stories. The mamu is an evil spirit which can bring disaster, accident, sickness or even death, unless one guards against it. Children are warned not to go too far away from the camp, especially at night, and even adults fear to walk away from the camp fires alone.

At Ernabella Christian Convention in 1982, the late Pastor David Kirk was speaking on the power of the Gospel. He spoke quite loudly into the microphone, at times even shouting, because the audience was scattered
around the lawns and seated on some of the low rocks. Normally, when the speaker starts to preach some of the women and children leave, as they have come mainly for the singing and testimonies, and many don’t understand enough English to appreciate the message. However, on this occasion, no one moved. There was, by some chance position of the speaker boxes, a curious double echo sounding back from the granite boulders that surrounded the site. As David spoke the words, ‘I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ’, the echo came back, ‘Gospel of Christ, Gospel of Christ’, with startling clarity. David went on with his preaching ‘for it is the power of God’ and the rocks echoed back, ‘power of God, power of God’, as if a spirit was emphasising the words. No one moved. Fear took hold of the whole audience, and they sat still as David continued, ‘It is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth’. The voices echoed back, ‘that believeth, that believeth’. As he continued to speak loudly and deliberately about the power of the Gospel, so the voices continued to echo back from the granite, and the people sat in fear of these echoing voices.

White people might have changed the position of the speakers, or turned down the amplification, or just discounted the echoes as being due to the very still night air. But it was remarkable how very still everyone sat, quite unusually still, until the speaker finished and the voices stopped. Whites look for a secular explanation for these phenomena, but Aborigines often see a supernatural explanation. It is easier to accept the world of the supernatural when the stories, the songs, the beliefs all support the existence of the spirit world round about, and when there isn’t a scientific explanation offered for every unusual event in life.

**LOVE FOR THEIR LAND**

An important difference between traditional Aborigines and white settlers lay in their attitude to the land. The settlers saw the land as an enemy to be fought and conquered by modern technology. The Aborigines saw the land as a friend, even as a mother, who provided for them. The settlers had to build houses and sheds to protect themselves and their equipment, but the Aborigines lived in the sun and the rain, with very little protection except what nature provided. They lived in harmony with nature and knew their surroundings well enough to use the foods and medicines that were there.

There was a great appreciation of the beauty of the country and a great respect for the ability of the land to survive harsh years and to continue to
remain fertile and beautiful. I have seen Aboriginals admire patches of wild flowers and blossoms, but have never seen them rush over to pick great handfuls of them. They have expressed great appreciation for the changing scenes of the country, as Namatjira and other artists have depicted in their colourful paintings.

Because they live close to nature and are happy with their natural surroundings, services and convention meetings have often been held outside in the open. Sunday morning services at Warburton were held outside on a patch of grass; at Ernabella some larger services were held beside the football field; and at Port Augusta the evening services were usually held outside on the oval, surrounded by tents, caravans, buses and cars, but within sight of the Flinders Ranges.

People come along to these outdoor meetings who would never go into a church building, and in the open air they listen to the message with a greater interest. This is usually only possible in country conditions where there are not the distractions and noise of passing vehicles and people, but even in Alice Springs successful meetings have been held in the park on the banks of the Todd River where people could be heard and seen from the city streets.

SEMINAR ON LAND RIGHTS
AT THE AEF CONVENTION, 1986

The land rights issues have been discussed and debated by most Aboriginal groups, often as the main solution to social and political problems. With the AEF, social problems, such as land rights, education, health, housing and unemployment, are not seen as primary causes of life’s problems and therefore not the principal enemy to be attacked. Nevertheless, discussion has taken place about the Christian approach to land rights, with considerable differences of opinion about where to put the emphasis.

Pastor Ossie Cruse put the emphasis on the Christian’s responsibility to God, to care for the land He has given, and the need for whites to restore the land taken from the Aboriginal inhabitants, where possible, or to make reparation where necessary. The situation differs in every community.

Rev. Cedric Jacobs emphasised a different aspect of the situation and stressed that land ownership should be in the original form, that is, of families and family groups, rather than taken over by land councils or other committees. He urged the government to respect the Christian and traditional Aboriginal practice of making families the responsible units. The following are brief accounts of their papers.
Pastor Ossie Cruse

Ossie based his arguments on the Scriptures. ‘In Genesis it is written that God created the heavens and the earth and that He placed man above all the other creatures on the earth. He gave man custodianship of His creation and instructed him to fill the earth, and to spread out over all the earth. Having accepted that God owns the whole universe and that He gave man dominion over the life of the earth, it follows that God gave man the wisdom and knowledge about his environment.

‘Australian Aboriginals settled in their own homelands, as did other people of the earth, and continued a hunting and gathering existence for thousands of years. There were land rights and laws among Aboriginal people, hunting and fishing rights that could not be transgressed.

‘Colonial powers from England, with superior strength, invaded the country in 1788 without the free and informed consent of the Aborigines. They brought new laws about land ownership. Were these laws superior to the land laws of the Aborigines? They were enforced by superior strength.’

He gave a definition of law as ‘an acceptable standard which is true justice, an acceptable standard of human rights and behaviour. In the interest of true justice should not the land be returned to the Aboriginal inhabitants where they still exist and reparation be made for those without land? The question is one of true justice.’

Rev. Cedric Jacobs

Cedric believes firmly in the need for land rights and agrees with Ossie that Aborigines were dispossessed and should be compensated. However, he sees the method of compensation proposed by the Land Rights Committee as inadequate.

‘In the beginning, God placed men and women in families. The Genesis account says that the man and his wife became one flesh. In the New Testament husbands were instructed to love their wives as their own bodies, and wives were to love their husbands.

‘The government is not concerned about God’s plan for marriage and families. They give the title deeds for the land into the hands of councils, not to families. It was significant that the Aranda people at Hermannsburg petitioned the government and put a very clear case for land ownership to be held by family groups, not by a council. The homeland or out-station movement has shown that family structure is still intact.

‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article sixteen, clause three, states that the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society
and is entitled to protection by society and state. Since the family was instituted by God, and is recognised as very important in society, Christians should see that legislation about land rights recognises this importance, and do everything possible to see that the rights of families are protected and that land ownership continues to be based on family group structure.’

There were speakers at the annual meeting who said that land rights were likely to be disruptive in the AEF platform. One speaker urged the fellowship to concentrate on the task of evangelism and not to become involved in social issues. Others said that, while they themselves may not be directly affected by land rights, it was a problem faced by the whole Aboriginal population and needed support to see that justice is done.

It was decided that a paper on land rights should be prepared and submitted to the AEF the following year. There were obviously two factions, those who believed in a holistic Gospel which meets people’s needs as well as preaching to them, and those who are influenced by a narrower view of evangelism where any time taken to meet social needs is considered to be a distraction from the main task.

**GOD’S FAMILY**

In traditional society, Aborigines lived in small communities of clans or extended family groups. Their loyalty and obligations of service were confined to that family, and to a minor extent, to the whole tribe when there was a big corroboree in which everyone was involved. The tribal boundaries marked the extent of their land and hunting rights, beyond which they were in alien country. The Christian family is an important concept to those who have become believers. Belonging to God’s family is an extension of belonging to the family, the clan and the tribe. There is a Christian duty to share together, to fellowship together and to work together.

At conventions in Alice Springs, Katherine, Ernabella and elsewhere, choruses about God’s family have been very popular. ‘We are all one happy family, God’s family’ is a favourite. These are important because they give expression to this extension of the family to include, not only the tribe and neighbouring friendly tribes, but also to include Christians from those tribes who were traditional enemies. So at Alice Springs, Pitjantjatjara people can work with Warlpiri and Aranda, while in Katherine the people from Arnhem Land can have fellowship with Gurindji, Warlpiri and Waramungu. This family idea extends to include the Christians of all other races.
INDIGENOUS CHURCHES

Very few Aborigines can be found in city churches because of the question of identity. But they can identify with indigenous people of their own kind in an indigenous church. This is why Pastor Rodney Minniecon’s group was so successful at Griffith in attracting Aboriginal people to an Aboriginal church with an Aboriginal minister. White people may gain this identity from their denomination, but to the Aboriginal this means little. This identity comes from his own community and his relationships. He wants to be himself, an Aboriginal, identified with other Aborigines and particularly with those of his home country.

The Aboriginal church helps to build this sense of identity as an Aboriginal Christian. They find it difficult to identify with a group of people unless they are already friends through other associations.

The Christian family is strongest at the local level where indigenous people need the strength of an indigenous church to help them meet those of other tribes and races. Having taken a family from the Anglican church at Oenpelli to worship at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Adelaide, it was easy to see their confusion and culture shock. There, instead of a few familiar dark faces, were hundreds of strange white faces. Instead of the Kunwingku language, the service was all in English. The hymns and choruses were mostly unfamiliar, the prayer book was difficult to follow and the preacher referred to experiences and concepts which were outside their experience.

When invited to meet with the Aboriginal people at the AEF Church in Prospect, they found a much smaller congregation and were personally welcomed and recognised. Although the service was much less formal than their service at Oenpelli, it was quite easy to follow, and the English used was easier for them to understand. The whole experience was less strange than at the big city church. Erica Kyle says, ‘My desire is to see indigenous churches throughout the country, because our people are very frightened to worship in white churches’. 3

REVERENCE FOR AGE

A further difference is that Aboriginal Christians look for a leader of wisdom and age, rather than a younger man with drive and enthusiasm. A youth leader complained at the Port Augusta AEF Annual Meeting that

opportunities for young leaders were very limited. Young men and women who have finished theological training are not immediately given positions, but rather are left to find their own calling instead of being assigned to work with an older, more experienced pastor.

In tribal society, the older men have been the guardians of the sacred sites, the ceremonies and sacred objects used in these ceremonies. A young man is required to show respect and to learn from these patriarchs so that in the course of time he may have the knowledge and wisdom to take over the responsibility. In the leadership of the church, most of the Aboriginal pastors are older men who have grown-up families and have been tried and tested over many years. This means that there is an uncertain future unless some of the vigour and enthusiasm of the young men can be used. However, it does mean a greater stability for the work at present, provided that funds can be found to employ young men in responsible positions as a training for the future.

**TEAM LEADERSHIP**

The concept of individual leadership by one person is not followed exclusively. Very often a team approach is used. This is particularly true of the Warburton team where a number of leaders worked in the crusade, both in the work in southern areas of Western Australia and up into the northern regions of that state. Usually in a crusade or convention, the speakers at the evangelistic meetings are changed each night to give opportunity for various leaders to take part. Also, when a challenge is made, it is not unusual to see several leaders from different groups exhorting their friends to repent and believe the Gospel.

The Aboriginal centre where the Melbourne Church meets is called ‘Minajalku’. The leaders there feel the need for deeper theological studies. They are Pastor Neville and Mrs Lilley, Pastor Jim and Mrs Lawrence and Pastor Ricky Manton.

**ESCAPING FROM PATERNALISM**

The Aboriginal church thrives best when it is free from the control of whites. While the missionaries take responsibility for the spiritual work, the Aboriginal leaders are not free to develop their special capabilities and gifts. There must be a point where the training and preparation has gone far enough, and those who have been trained for leadership are given complete control.
Ultimately this had to come from the Aborigines, as it did with the formation of AEF in 1970 when a new movement was born and the Port Augusta Convention was started. In the formation of the new movement, the advice of white people was sought, but not necessarily followed. The new growth came through the leadership of Aboriginal men and their wives.

In the Uniting Church, Aborigines had finally to say they wanted an autonomous movement to deal with their own people in their own way and so the UAICC was born, again using the advice of white advisers, but with freedom to make their own decisions.

In Western Australia it was when the situation under government and mission control at Warburton became the worst in Australia, that a miracle happened. God used a Warburton team to take the Gospel all around Western Australia, from Albany, to the goldfields, to the Kimberleys. This kind of successful preaching had never been accomplished under missionary regimes.

The movements at Elcho Island, at Griffith, in Alice Springs and in numerous other places, follow the same pattern of Aboriginal initiative and leadership supported by the advice and finance from Christian friends and helpers. This pattern is not unique. It is a similar pattern to the movement amongst the American Indians, amongst the Maoris in New Zealand and, according to accounts from Dr James, similar to the formation of the Asian Evangelical Fellowship and other movements in countries of the Third World.

There is a time when the paternalistic approach of the whites is only hindering the spread of God’s word. Paternalistic, because we have never really understood the abilities, the gifts and the more successful strategies that Aboriginal Christians possess for bringing the message of Christ to their own people. They still need financial support, prayer, advice and, to some extent, translation work and training to make the task possible. But the success in the future will obviously come from the power of God working through Aboriginal evangelists and teachers.

**A VISION FOR AUSTRALIA**

When the group of leaders at the Ernabella Convention prayed for a group of whites, they were thinking not just of those present but saw that, through the blessing that had come to Aborigines, the fire would spread from Central Australia to Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in all parts of the country.
This vision was also maintained by the Warburton team when the crusades in Perth and the south-western part of the state spread to churches for white people as well as the Aboriginal churches. Pastor Rodney Minniecon also saw the blessing he experienced in his church as something to share with other churches in Griffith, and did not hesitate to take his group into the white churches when invited, and to find a deep response from the white congregations when Aboriginal people shared their experience of Christ.

A student at Bimbadeen College showed her enthusiasm in outreach work when she spoke about her desire to talk to both her own people and also non-Aboriginals and to share her faith with everyone.

Two East African Christians speaking to an Aboriginal from Central Australia advised him in words from the Book of Deuteronomy, ‘The Lord will make you the head and not the tail. You will be a blessing to others if you follow the Lord Jesus Christ instead of waiting for others to help you’.

The vision is still strong despite the many setbacks that have been experienced by the leaders and the people of different Aboriginal Christian groups.

**Rev. Bill Bird**

‘My name is Bill Bird and I was connected with the AEF church. I have since retired from that position and I’m now involved in the work of reconciliation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of Sydney.

‘Since I had a stroke in August 1994 I believe that God has overruled in my affliction and I am now focusing on what God wants me to do. I believe it is the work of reconciliation.

‘We have not resolved the atrocities of the past committed against the Aboriginal people, nor have we resolved the attitude the Aboriginal people have towards the white people in this land. God spoke to my heart and told me it would be impossible for me to develop as a Christian, as a child of God, without resolving that broken relationship between black and white Christians in Australia. I am only one of many Aboriginal people working to resolve this question of reconciliation. The churches are blind to the fact that God requires that we resolve that which is past and seek healing for it. We cannot go forward. I know the old saying is “we weren’t here when all those atrocities took place”, but the thing is that we have inherited this land and all the blessings that our forefathers worked for and we are true Australians. In that sense, then, we must accept responsibility for what
happened in the past in regards to black and white relationships, and therefore we must seek healing, and I for one, as an Aboriginal, would like to ask white people to forgive me for the bad attitude I have had towards them for what they did to us. I had so much hate and resentment towards white people that God has spoken to me now and I have experienced God’s forgiveness and love, and therefore want to find forgiveness from my white brothers so we can live in peace in this land of Australia.

‘In II Corinthians 5, it tells us that God has committed to us as a body, the Body of Christ, the Church, the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, we have a responsibility where we see this need for reconciliation, to pick it up and run with it.

‘In our nation especially, there is a lot of apathy and failure to understand what has happened in the past and what the spiritual implications are for the operating of the church in Australia today. It is not until we have experienced the forgiveness of God in our life that we can understand what needs to be done in reaction to the past.

‘Europeans need to be aware of themselves as persons of a non-Aboriginal culture and be aware of where they are coming from, so that they do not present the gospel message as part of their culture; it is not their culture, it is something God has given to the world. They must present God to all the people of the world to enter into the fellowship of God and His Son. It is something above man, beyond man. In the past the white man presented it as white man’s Gospel. We were led to believe that it was the white man’s religion and therefore it has been rejected for so long by the descendants of the first inhabitants of the land. The message must be presented in such a way that it is for other people so that it can be theirs, they can hold it, and it is an invitation from God to come into a relationship with Himself. That is what reconciliation is all about, God reconciling the world to Himself.

‘The Gospel is what Jesus prayed for in John 17, “Build us into one body Father, that all may be one as we are one”. So we should present it in a way that God is inviting people into a relationship with Himself. Jesus said to His disciples “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. I want you to continue in that love”.

‘It requires a full acceptance of that message, a full allegiance to Jesus Christ. Our Aboriginality will be enhanced by that relationship. God only wants to renew. If you come pretending to be something else, you will never get to know God. He wants to renew you as you are, if you are an Aboriginal then that is what God wants. He multiplies us, He enriches. In a sense we have to strip ourselves to put on new clothes. If anyone comes to this land as new citizens of Australia, that person must indicate an
allegiance to Australia, legally the previous allegiance is made null and void in our allegiance to a new country. So, as you come to your new citizenship, you grow in the identity of another country. That part of the country becomes richer for that experience. Australia becomes a richer country when we have that experience of being a Christian.

‘One of the mistakes the missionaries have made in the past is to teach indigenous people according to the white man’s ways. The indigenous people lost the spiritual power to develop special gifts in their own lives. It takes spiritual insight to detect those gifts within the people. People coming from other countries tend to retain their own culture and their own language, and that is very important. Missionaries coming into our country come as “faith missions” and didn’t need their indigenous Christians to support them. When it came for that fellowship to develop as an indigenous church, it fell apart because the indigenous people didn’t see the need to tithe and to support their own pastor. Without the pastor, the church fell apart. It was a very subtle thing that made us dependent on the white system and on deputation to the white people. This is what happened to the AEF. It wasn’t viable economically for them to continue because the AIM, UAM and other church missions had attracted the money and gleaned the field, depriving the AEF of an economic base.

‘The Cross Roads Mission started way back in the early seventies when the AEF decided to meet Aborigines at their point of need. The people of Redfern were street people, they were homeless. We started a centre for providing breakfasts for them. It has developed into a church now, with a fellowship of thirty to forty people.

‘The white churches failed to meet the social needs of this group. I remember when I was young, a missionary said to us, “Don’t worry about the social needs, the important thing is to save the Aboriginal soul and get them ready for heaven”. That missed out on the full development of the Aboriginal people. The church didn’t develop amongst them. They were so heavenly minded that they were useless on earth.’

_Ministry of Reconciliation (Rev. Bill Bird)_

‘God spoke to me in 1993 about the need for reconciliation between the Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginals of Australia. The Lord was saying to me that I needed to be involved in that area. This was a priority in the situation in Australia.

‘The white people of Sydney kept saying to me, “How can we be reconciled to the Aboriginal people when we don’t even know an Aboriginal? We haven’t seen an Aboriginal.” We came up with this idea of bringing the Aborigines to meet the non-Aborigines. I prayed about it and asked the
Lord where we should start, and the Lord showed me that we should start on the North Shore of Sydney. I prayed again about it and some Aborigines rang me from Cairns (North Queensland). They said, “We had some Aboriginal people from Arnhem Land, and they were speaking to us, ‘Go to the white people of Sydney and tell them we love them and ask their forgiveness for the bad attitude we had towards them’. Could you arrange for us to have a meeting with them?”

‘I said, “God has already gone ahead of us, so come on down”. They started off with forty people when they left Cairns. I organised with some from West Pymble and Kalara; I asked them could they have some Aboriginal people in their churches, their homes and their schools. When the bus from Cairns arrived there were eighty people, they picked up another bus on the way. When the people from Cairns rang me they had already hired a big tourist bus. They were all ready to come down. They got support on the way by ministering on Aboriginal reserves, and other Aboriginal Christians helped them. When they came to the Sydney base the white churches took up offerings for them, and we had no problems of finance. It just came in because everybody was believing that it was of God and God would provide.

‘The idea of reconciliation was to provide an opportunity for inter-action. God was moving in the hearts of our people, and they were anxious to go amongst the white people and tell them they loved them and wanted to forgive them. We said to the churches, “We want to speak to your congregations. We would like to give the pastor a rest and take his sermon on Sunday.”

‘These Aborigines came down and were billeted out in two or three churches. The Aborigines shared with the white people about their customs and ways and learned a little about the white people too. On the Sunday we worshipped together and shared the way we worshipped and learned the way the white people worshipped. We had a great time of interaction.

‘God developed this and we have now been to many churches throughout NSW. We lived with white people, talked with them, went into their high schools and primary schools. We shared our culture. We told them how white people came to our shores and suppressed us.

‘As for reconciliation, we are hoping to do more in 1995. Unknown to us, God was doing the same work throughout the world. The Maoris and the Native Americans now want to know what is happening in Australia because they had never heard of this. They have been trying to bring reconciliation to their own country.

‘So I believe that through God we are leading the world in this ministry of reconciliation in the country where there has been a lot of hurt and a lot of
disruption through greed and wantonness. I praise God that He has touched our hearts and we are able to forgive the white man. We have always believed that they had to come to us to ask for forgiveness but God was saying to us, “No that is different, that is man’s way, my way is that the one who has been offended must go and be prepared to forgive, to receive that brother and sister back again into fellowship, into relationship, because this is the work of reconciliation. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” So our ministry of reconciliation is based on Christ’s reconciliation because we are in Christ’s stead now. We are depending on the finished work of Christ for reconciliation in Australia. This is what we are working for now.

‘This year we are going to formalise it a bit and set up a committee, we would like to see a church or denomination actually promote reconciliation in Australia with Aborigines and white people, and we, the Aboriginal people, are prepared to spearhead it, if you like. But I believe that a denomination must pick it up and sponsor it throughout Australia. I believe that will call on most Christian people in Australia to give and support this great work of reconciliation.’

Rev. Bill Bird’s Personal Testimony

‘I was born and raised on a government reserve in Queensland. I grew up with a lot of hatred towards white people because my uncles taught me that the white man was there only to destroy us. We had to be careful not to trust the white person. I experienced a lot of discrimination from white people, and, even when I became a missionary, I wasn’t given the status of a fully-fledged missionary. I was only a second-rate missionary, because I wasn’t given positions in that mission, executive positions which were only regarded as positions for white men. That cemented the sort of resentment that I had in me. That hatred got stronger, even as a Christian. God spoke to me about it because I wasn’t getting anywhere in my Christian life and my own Christian development. God told me when I made a confession that I had this resentment towards white people; God was saying that my relation with Him was more important than what people have done to me. That is the thing we should safeguard, our relationship to God. So, even though people do wrong toward us, we need to be sure that we don’t sever our relationship with our brothers and sisters because of some petty thing, it even might be a major thing. We have to maintain our relationship with Almighty God, the Father, and we can only do that by maintaining a good relationship with our brother and sister. I wasn’t in that position because of my attitude. It was only when I found forgiveness with the Lord that I forgave the white man in my heart. I began to see things in a
different light. That is how God led me into this reconciliation movement, to go out to the white people and tell them I forgive them, and doing that releases them because they in turn are able to ask my forgiveness. That’s a releasing experience that I found in my own life and I want to share it. More Aborigines are finding this secret of forgiveness. John 20:23 says that whosoever sins you remit they shall be remitted. I’m not saying that people should confess their sins to us, but, where a wrong has been committed against us as individuals, if we forgive that person then that wrong can be forgiven in the sight of God. God will bring about a situation where the person will find forgiveness also. This is what needs to happen in Australia.

‘My prayer is that by the year two thousand we will be able to bury all the past of Australia, all the hurts and the wrongs, and come together as a new nation. I can imagine the power of God flooding this land, we as a nation will send out missionaries to South East Asia and other countries.’

Bill has produced a booklet: ‘Australia: Network for Reconciliation’; it is a manual for churches to conduct reconciliation ministries.
CHAPTER TWENTY

Taking Responsibility

PASTOR BOB BROWN

‘I am the minister of the Torrens ville Congregational Church in Adelaide SA. It is one of the three Congregational Churches that didn’t go in with the union of the Uniting Church. The Congregational Church has no Aboriginal work now, although they were the first people to translate the Bible into an Aboriginal language. I have been the minister for the past nine years, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the ministry. But there is no doubt that it is coming to a close, and we are waiting on the Lord for direction.

‘I was pastor of the Aboriginal Church called the Berean Fellowship, and we had been moving from one place to another because the church had grown to about eighty members and we found difficulties in getting a large enough place. Somebody suggested that we try the Torrens ville Congregational Church because they were meeting at a time that would not clash with us. As time went on, some folk suggested that rather than paying the fee for hiring the building, they would be happy if I took on the role of teaching and preaching, so I did that for a couple of years. During that time we had several young men who went away to Bible College, one of them was Edmund Wanganeen who is now the pastor of the Berean Fellowship. When he graduated, the Berean Fellowship called him to be their pastor, and so my time concluded and Edmund’s began. But, prior to that, the churches combined, and so we had a mixed church consisting of the Congregational folk and our own folk. It was about sixty per cent Aboriginal and forty per cent non-Aboriginal. Torrens ville Church asked me to stay as their pastor. I found it was most enriching, although not always easy, because we had people from large companies. For years we had about
thirteen different languages and nationalities in church. It was a wonderful process because it wasn’t just lip-service, but practical outworking of what the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be.

‘I reflect back to the early days of the AEF in South Australia when the nature of the whole church was strongly evangelical, when it didn’t matter where you went; the Brethren Assemblies were preaching, “You must be born again”, the UAM was preaching, “You must be born again”, and if you went to AEF the message would have been the same. If you went to some of the Lutheran guys who were working with Aboriginals in those days, even their message was, “You must be born again”. Regardless of the denomination people come from, I think the nature of the church has changed. I believe there has been a swing towards denominational identity. In those days the push was towards fellowship, and it didn’t matter where you came from, if the Spirit bore witness with each other’s spirit that we were indeed the sons of God, then denominationalism was of no account. Those days were wonderful and full of really warm fellowship, embracing each other, with every man free to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Today that is not the case; the evangelical flavour has gone, and it is strongly denominational with more of a social type of emphasis. I am thinking of all the churches, including the AEF. They preach more of a social gospel these days than in the early days.

‘The whole church scene in South Australia has changed, which I believe has been to the church’s detriment. I fear that syncretism has also come into the church, where there is a mixture of the Gospel and the cultural gospel. I believe there are aspects of the Aboriginal culture that are worthy of consideration of anybody, anywhere and at anytime, but where that becomes the Gospel, there are major problems. To remain true to what was happening during those early days when God was moving, is to be considered narrow. But there are very few who hold today what was being done then.

‘One of the problems that existed in those days was lack of direction from good teaching. Instead of the emphasis on teaching to consolidate what God was doing, the emphasis moved to, “We’ve got to become a denomination”.

‘This brought a real impact on the hearts of a number of Aboriginal pastors to search the Scriptures as we had never done before. That came because our people were wanting to know things. There were many who were coming to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; they were hungry, they got hold of books from anywhere they could, they got tapes of messages from anywhere that the words of Jesus Christ were mentioned. It didn’t matter what church they came from, they fed themselves on those things.
It created confusion in the midst of all the joy. Many of us felt that we had to become students of the Word and study the Scriptures as we had never done before. Because in those days we were pursuing the souls of men for conversion only, we were giving birth to babies. But all that mattered was the birth, there was never the development of the life.

‘A number of men like Frank Johnson, Lindsay Grant, Cecil Grant, Graham Paulson and David Kirk—prior to him going to be with the Lord—felt that we have really got to knuckle down and discover where we were going as Aboriginal pastors and teachers. This was one of the good things that came out of the revival.

‘Another thing, there were a number of people touched by God who were never called to be pastors or ministers of the Gospel, but fine, fine people. Men and women who were starting to take up positions of leadership in the Aboriginal community and emerge as leaders of their own people; they are still there now. People like Bill Lennon, who is with the Brethren Assemblies, and Mark McKenzie; young fellows like Ian Crombie, a policeman who is working at Coober Pedy. People who were attending the conventions in those days and who are now chairmen of the communities, like Gary Lewis who is chairman of the “Pit” [Pitjantjatjara] Council, and Leslie Tucker and quite a few men from the goldfields. Wherever you go around the country you come across Christian leadership that didn’t exist before those days.

‘There are a lot of women who are in leadership today; Maxine Knapp, Lorraine Lilley, Winn Coe and many others.

‘A guy like Terry Manton of Eden, NSW, who has a beautiful voice. He was never a pastor nor an evangelist, but his sons, one of whom graduated from the Presbyterian College in Melbourne in 1995, Ricky Manton and his brother Brett, those two men are the most exciting I have come across for a long time. I didn’t have a lot to do with Rick, but Brett has the stamp of God upon his life, and he will become a great Bible teacher in the years that lie ahead. Brett is still in the College in Victoria, and Rick is taking up ministry. No doubt that they were set up by God. There is the AEF College at Bimbadeen in NSW, and the AEF College in Perth and Nungalinya College in Darwin.

‘The AEF colleges are for people whose educational standards are not as high as that required for the Presbyterian College which has a degree course.

‘While we were at Swan Hill we had our 1995 Easter Convention there this year. Frank Johnson and I did the preaching and teaching.

‘The greatest need has been for men who have the gift of teaching the Word of God to be financially free to teach. Laura and I have been praying for some time that God would raise up a team of itinerant teachers to go
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from place to place and stay for three to six months to teach the Word. We have had itinerant evangelists from the days the Gospel first came amongst our people, but we have never had itinerant Aboriginal Bible teachers who could make themselves available to local churches. That is our prayer and aim for 1996. A teaching ministry for two, three or six months, whatever the people require. To have a couple of guys give a two or three hour session two or three nights a week. We would work out a curriculum so that the church that calls could have a choice of subjects, and so that a couple of subjects could be done at once. Some of the things Frank Johnson and I have talked about are: “Practical Christian Living”, “General Bible Knowledge”, “Bible Overview”, and also more specific teaching subjects which would be followed up with tapes to create a Bible College. Videos could be played at church, and the teaching could be done with exams as well.

‘As far as I can see, the need for white missionary brethren will continue. For example, an Aboriginal pastor in an area where the Law and Ceremonies are still practised will be under pressure, but a white fellow can remain there and continue to teach. In some of our major city churches, rather than sending an Aboriginal person to set up an Aboriginal Church in the city to reach Aboriginal people, it would be better if the Aboriginal pastor was a co-pastor to bring the Aboriginal people to Christ and into a mixed congregation. So that the division based on colour and culture would cease. Heaven is not going to have corners for different cultures, so why can’t we have a little more of heaven now? There are a lot of Aboriginal people who totally disagree with me, but we respect each other and still maintain our bonds of fellowship.

‘There is still a great need among Aboriginal people. The church must never arrive at the conclusion that because the government is pumping millions of dollars into the Aboriginal scene that there is no longer any need for the church to contribute. I would remind the church that the government has its own agenda and that is not for the glory of God but for the glory of man.

‘The church should open their doors wide for Aboriginal people to come in and be a part of its life. Not ghettoising the Aboriginal Church by giving them a few dollars and saying, “God bless you” and then let them go. That is not the life of the church, but the isolation of Calvary. Bring them in and say, “You look different and have different values, you speak and do things differently, but you are my brother in Christ”. It has got to come or else the church will always fail in its task of making people feel that they belong to Jesus Christ and are one with Him. I’ve got to live the life and not just lip the language on the point of reconciliation.
‘The only reconciliation that will ever happen is when men are reconciled to God and then to each other. Christians, black and white, don’t have any problems with reconciliation, only mutual recognition.

‘Laura and I left the AEF when it became denominationally-minded, not because there was any doctrinal differences, but we felt that that is not what God called AEF to be. We were already part of a denomination anyway and all we were going to do was change denominations on the basis of colour and not on the basis of doctrine. We continued to do Aboriginal work for a number of years, I trained to be a Congregational minister and last year, in 1994–1995, I had the privilege of being the president of the Congregational Fellowship of Australia, the first Aboriginal person ever to hold the highest office in the Congregational Church. It was a good experience for me because it gave me an opportunity to do and say a number of things.

‘Laura and I are looking to the Lord for a change of direction for 1996–97. We hope this will involve an itinerant teaching ministry to isolated areas through cassette tapes and maybe videos.’

CECIL GRANT

‘I belong to the Koori Church in Albury, NSW. About 1975 we started meeting together in small groups. We are supported by the Church of Christ. We ought to be developing local fellowships. The universal church consists of local churches with the ministry and the administration looked after by the local elders.

‘I was brought to the Lord by Aboriginal men and I try to maintain my Aboriginal connections and regain as much of the Aboriginal language as I can. I am very much into Aboriginal philosophy and theology, and I am not in favour of following blindly in the mould of failed European Christianity.

‘All the attempts by government bodies, like the old Aboriginal Protection Board of NSW, was to assimilate Aboriginal people and destroy Aboriginality. At the moment I am reading a book by Peter Read about the hundred years’ war of the Wiradjuri people. It is about the struggle of the Wiradjuri people against the system of both Church and State to destroy the culture of the Wiradjuri people. Now I’m still trying hard to contextualise my faith to communicate it through my culture. I learnt a little bit of the Wiradjuri language when I was growing up, but I’m now redoubling my efforts. I’m trying to encourage my people to affirm their traditional identity, Wiradjuri cultural heritage, and to get back many of the things that were forcefully and wrongfully taken from them. I believe this is not just a
philosophy, it is a theology, and I am very much into the development of indigenous theology. I am not in favour of blindly following European Christianity. I think I’m a fundamentalist, but I’m not a “fat-headed” fundamentalist.

‘I’ve got the ability to teach my people that Jesus Christ is the one way to God the Father and there is no other way, but there are many roads to Christ and many ways we can bring men to know Jesus. If there are ten thousand cultures in the world, there are ten thousand ways of communicating the Gospel to mankind. Jesus is the Saviour of the world, He is the universal man, He is the Son of man and the Gospel is the message for the whole world. I believe that God, in His infinite wisdom, placed the redemptive principles in the hearts of all His people from all over the world, so that if we have the wisdom to find those redemptive principles we can bring men to Christ to be reconciled to Him. I am very much involved in developing this theology. I believe that the church is the be-all and end-all, and that all of our God-given gifts and abilities ought to be discovered and developed in the context of the local church.

‘Jesus is a tribal man, He was of the tribe of Judah, and His lifestyle was similar to that of my people. His life-style and ministry were itinerant and, when He went walkabout, His tribe went with Him. He suffered rejection, “He was despised and rejected of men”. He also knew the pain of dispossession because, although He was the Creator of the world—“the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”—yet He said, “Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head”.

‘I believe these things relate our Lord very much, not only to Aboriginal people, but to all people. I don’t think that modern theology has sufficiently taken this into account. There is a great move now, worldwide, to develop indigenous theologies and not necessarily follow western fundamentalism. I am evangelical and I believe in living and teaching the faith, but my faith is connected to my traditional past and I see no conflict at all. A lot of our people have been trained, brained in western culture and divorced of their Aboriginality so much that they think everything Aboriginal is evil, and therefore we should discard everything that is Aboriginal. It disappoints me that a lot of our Aboriginal brethren with years of experience and training have been taught to deny our Aboriginal heritage.

‘We use boomerangs and didgeridoos and our own language in tribal dance and corroborees because we are trying to be what the Lord generally made us to be, we are trying to be Christian and biblical because I believe the Bible speaks to tribal situations.

‘I am excited about the Wiradjuri Christian Development Ministry. We’ve been given a twenty-eight acre property in Wagga. We still need to
develop it as a major conference and seminar centre. Some of our people have gone there and done some training in preaching development and theology and all the normal things you do in Bible college. But we also have Aboriginal Church history and the teaching is culturally based. We draw from our own resources, which are still very embryonic because we have two hundred years of disaster to undo. I’m hoping it will become an Aboriginal church and not just a white European-type church peopled by Aboriginals.

‘I don’t know if you have heard of Edjeton Long who was the son of the founder of AIM in the late sixties, and also principal of the AIM Bible College at Singleton. He became pastor of the Hornsby Baptist Church and at the time he was still involved with AIM, one of their areas was Cherbourg. The late Pastor David Kirk was the pastor of the AIM church at Cherbourg. Mr Long was visiting on a Sunday morning and Pastor Kirk was the preacher. After the service Mr Long said to David, “I enjoyed the service very much, but where is your Aboriginality? I am a pastor of Hornsby Baptist Church and all of you people have had Baptist orientation. I could have shut my eyes and imagined that I was still in my white Baptist Church in Hornsby, you did everything the way we do it back there.” This was a challenge to our Aboriginality. Where is the Aboriginal character and conduct of the church? It all comes down to training. I say whoever trains you, brains you. We need to contextualise the faith and see it through the eyes of Aborigines, and express it through our own culture and not the European culture.

‘I believe in working with the denominations, but the church among the Aboriginal people throughout Australia ought to be Aboriginal in theology, ecclesiology, and everything regarding the expression of the faith ought to have an Aboriginal character to it. I see that it is happening and yet a lot of our people still believe that everything Aboriginal is evil. They have been thoroughly taught and trained by many sincere missionaries who taught from their own background; if the missionary was German then the culture was German, if he was Irish Catholic then the culture was Irish Catholic. It was only natural: men communicate through culture. But when Aborigines do it, everybody throws up their hands and says, “Oh! Horror! This is wrong”. They are still saying it today, but to a lesser degree because of the revived interest in Aboriginal culture.

‘I am a senior member of the Wiradjuri Council of Elders. There is an increasing interest among my people in regaining their culture and their language. I’m just reading a book called The Stolen Generation about the children who were forcibly removed from their families. The whole purpose was to destroy their Aboriginality, and that meant destroying them as people. There is a lot of rebuilding to do, we’ve got a whole generation
to reach. I’m prepared to work away slowly, not looking for great numbers or build empires around myself or for myself. To work slowly to get the Scriptures to my people and make sure it is culturally relevant. To communicate it, wherever possible in my own language, using whatever authentic biblical principles I can to show that Jesus Christ was in our culture as the Son of God, way back from the beginning time.

'I represented the Churches of Christ in the Aboriginal and Islander Commission and that worked with the Australian Council of Churches which is the National Council of Churches of Australia—the Word is ecumenical. I believe that we as Christians ought to be cooperating. We have a lot of social and moral evils confronting us in this country and we ought to be working together. Only born-again Aboriginal Christians empowered by the Spirit of God and thoroughly conversant with the Word of God can do that. It is happening and I’m excited about it and that is why I’m a part of the Church of Christ denomination, and why I encourage my Baptist brethren to be a part of the Baptist denomination, and the same with those who work with the Uniting Church. We should be there in the mainstream churches in Australia instead of hiving off to form our own denomination. We ought to be developing local churches with an Aboriginal character in the mainstream churches. We need to be working and pulling together. I despise sectarianism, the sooner we are rid of denominationalism the better off we will be.

'In regards to Aboriginal culture, if it is good it is of God, because every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father above. All cultures are permeated by the evil one, but the Gospel will destroy that which is evil. The culture illumines the Gospel and the Gospel transforms the culture. I’ve written a couple of articles; one on “Christ in Culture” which relates to the traditional Wiradjuri spirituality through initiation, and shows the redemptive principles that have always been there. Another article I’ve written is called the “Gospel and Culture” which is based on our Lord’s ministry.

'I am a Wiradjuri Christian. In the paper “Christ in Culture” I have a diagram of my understanding of the Wiradjuri initiation—the Man-making Ceremonies; when all adolescent boys were taken and familiarised with Wiradjuri Law which was handed down from the beginning time, which the missionaries called the “Dreamtime”. It relates to “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”, and “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. John’s writings in particular are about ‘in the beginning’, and the things that were handed down to us from that beginning time. In Wiradjuri, nurkumbu means the creation period, maratal is the ancestral times and balanda is right back
in the beginning. What I am saying is that all this relates scripturally and not too many of my people are aware of this. I am duty-bound to show this relationship and pass it on, to affirm their traditional identity and culture and show that everything in Aboriginal culture was not evil as we were taught. Christ was in the culture. Jesus became a Son of the Law like all Jewish boys around twelve years of age. At that age, He went to Jerusalem with His family for the Passover, and it was discovered by His parents that He wasn’t among the people on the return journey. They returned somewhat concerned and searched for Him all over Jerusalem and finally, after three days, they found Him in the temple, and the Authorised Version says, “among doctors of the law both asking and answering questions and they were amazed at His wisdom and understanding”. So you see He was a Son of the Law and He was sitting among the doctors of the Law, and when His mother mildly rebuked Him He said, “Why did you search for me?”, in other words, “You ought to have known where to find me”. When a Wiradjuri young man of about twelve becomes a Son of the Law or is introduced to the Law, then he is taught his rightful responsibilities.

‘When the Holy Spirit shows me these matters, I am duty-bound to pass them on, to show the relationship between the traditional times and Bible times and how the Gospel relates so easily to the indigenous theology. It is exciting.’

RAY MINNIECON—MANAGER OF THE INDIGENOUS PROGRAM, WORLD VISION, AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal Christians have a vision for the whole Christian Church in Australia. They see the revival of the whole church as a result of the growth and spread of their own faith and vigour.

One such leader is Ray Minniecon. ‘I am the manager of the indigenous program in World Vision of Australia, an international program that looks at supporting our indigenous people in a whole range of areas. World Vision is pretty much involved with the Aboriginal Church in Australia and its development. We also do other things outside the Christian Church. Aboriginal people have other needs, like social and spiritual ones, that we try to address.

‘I went through the Baptist Theological College in WA, and I graduated from that institution in 1990. I gained a degree in Theology from Murdoch University. We work with Aboriginal people and we think that the World Vision philosophy has a lot to offer the situation in Australia.

‘I have many opportunities in Aboriginal and white churches to proclaim the Word across racial and denominational barriers. The Aboriginal Church
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has a lot to offer the rest of Australia in its understanding of spiritual things, its simplicity, and the way the faith is worked out by Aboriginal people. It still has a long way to go, but it is making incredible inroads into our communities and the broader society. I can remember what the Pope said on his Australian visit in 1988 when he was in Alice Springs, “The church of Australia would not realise its full potential unless the Aboriginal people had made their incredible contribution”. I think that was a great insight, especially coming from someone of his stature. I think it summarises the challenges which face us as Aboriginal people. The broader church still has huge problems with Aboriginal people. It is still very racist. Some of the churches have failed us in many ways. Over the years its biggest failure is sharing its resources with the developing Aboriginal church. I don’t think it has come to terms with our existence. The moment we mention “Aboriginal Church”, I guess that is a problem for white churches, it conjures up the idea of apartheid South Africa. There is some kind of fear in the white man about the development of the Aboriginal church. In a multicultural society, we can have a Taiwanese Church, a Chinese Church, even a Fijian Church, why not an Aboriginal Church? It is this kind of inconsistent idea that hinders the growth of the Aboriginal Church. If they were more open toward us there would be a lot more resources flowing our way. I know Aboriginal pastors in many places who live from day to day, who have a hand-to-mouth existence; when they want to develop their ministries, they can’t because they haven’t the resources. Apathy and ignorance haven’t been dealt with sufficiently.

‘Most of the structures of the European churches and missions are imported from other countries, and the white churches have to come to terms with them and their own “ecumenicalism”. They are so rigid, there is no way in which it can even incorporate the grassroots movement where the Aboriginal leaders can come to the fore and take their place within the church to do what God wants of them. They are always oppressed and limited by the white churches. The Anglicans, Catholics and others need to get their own reconciliation act together before they come to reconcile us. We can do our work ourselves in our own way.

‘Nungalinya College is going a long way towards helping our people develop an Aboriginal Theology. Some non-Aboriginal people are encouraging this also. The difference between Aboriginal Christianity and western Christianity is that western Christianity is much more commodified, whereas for us, we just want to relate to God, each other and the land. That is the type of theology that I see. It is “commodified” versus “relational”. We are trying to relate Christianity to our own lives. We also have another issue which is very real to us; we are not only relating to our own history, our
own culture, our own ways of seeing things or our own world view, but we are also trying to relate to the white church; we have a bigger struggle than the white people. And yet it is through that struggle that we are going to emerge as leaders. We have so many leaders that are emerging with a lot more strength and stability and understanding.

‘We have to rise to that struggle and find the way we want to express Christianity. That is going to be different right across the country and would be difficult to unify. It is going to reflect on that relationship which we feel is more important.

‘Rev. Dr Djininyini sees Aboriginal culture as a gift, we have to have the freedom of finding our own ways of expression.

‘I am real brother to Rodney Minniecon. He is a part of the AD 2000 campaign. I think they are meeting over in Seoul to look at unreached peoples in the 20/40 window. It is part of an evangelistic campaign. Peter Walker, my brother Rodney and others are going. Rodney lives in Townsville as an AOG pastor.’

RICHARD DAVIES

Richard Davies is currently the principal of Darwin Bible College. He and his wife, Sue, spoke of their previous experience at Tennant Creek. ‘We worked with the AIM Church in Tennant Creek for eight years (from 1985–1993), helping the church members to recognise and use their gifts, make decisions, and reach out to people in the community.

‘There was a revival between 1985 and 1987, when three to four hundred people came to Christ, it was exciting and humbling. Particularly in the Alyawarra language area where the evangelism was done by the Aboriginal people. There was a man from Epanarra [approximately two hundred kilometres south-east of Tennant Creek] who came in and wanted to “change up his life”. We talked and prayed and then he went back to Epanarra. The next week he came with his wife and said, “she wants to change up her life”. They returned home and began witnessing to God’s goodness. On subsequent trips to Epanarra and Canteen Creek [a further eighty kilometres into the desert], people said things like, “You can’t leave yet because look over there under the bough shelter, they want to change up their lives too”. Lack of English skills and the size of the groups (sometimes up to twenty people) often made discussions impossible. I often prayed, “Lord you know these people’s hearts, I leave them to you”. The fact that you don’t have to go to a white missionary to find Jesus or get baptised was taught very early in the ministry although it took a while to be accepted.
‘The Alyawarra Christians did all the follow-up and discipling. I prepared teaching cloths and taught those who were fluent in English, and they in turn would teach the Alyawarra because, even though the people understood English, they were shy of it, they’d rather speak their own language. Then often someone else would tell me what had been taught. This was a check to see if any misunderstandings had crept in during translation. There are now two SIL translators helping the Alyawarra people to translate the Bible into their own language.

‘In 1988 I took [the late] Rev. Laurie Reece, a retired ABMS missionary, out to Epanarra to visit friends from many years before. He was excited to see the tree where he used to hold outreach meetings and had tears in his eyes when he heard the people witnessing to their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For many years he had travelled to Ali Curung over terrible roads to reach these people, with seemingly little result. He was overjoyed to see what God was doing in those desert communities.

‘The AIM Church in Tennant Creek is still alive, and the people make their own decisions. Sometimes they include us in the discussions and sometimes they do things that we wouldn’t, but it is their church and they have to live with their decisions.’

NELSON (SNOOKY) AND DENISE VARCOE

‘My name is Nelson, people call me Snooky, and my wife is Denise, but people call her Neecy. We fellowship at the Sunshine AOG Church at Torrensville. We’ve been there twelve months now and we are elders in the church. Over the years I’ve been fellowshipping with Sonny Hoet down at Noarlunga at the Colonnades fellowship, and then at a home fellowship at Sonny’s house. Then we came up to Jack Haradine for a while and helped him out with music. In 1993 we were involved with the Nunga fellowship at Richmond; it was going pretty good for a while. It was with Kenny Sumner, Sid Graham, John and Bronwyn Newey, Sandra Ken and Muriel Olsen. We had it once a month as a family day, different ministers preached at different times and shared in the ministry. We were getting quite a few people and were going pretty strong and in unity for a while. I think that church has been pulled down since then; it was just a little Anglican building with one big large room and a toilet and kitchen block.’

Neecy spoke of her involvement in ministry. ‘On Saturday nights I help with the Kids’ Club at church. On Tuesday I go to the Uniting Church for Art and Craft, because I’m a person that takes a challenge with any group of ladies, just to learn. I’m one of the students. I go along to get to know them;
they are really good to mix with. If there’s any women’s meeting, I get involved with it. From 1993, I’ve been to a lot of women’s fellowship meetings with Bronwyn Newey, but when she got too busy we had to stop.’

Snooky explained, ‘Even though we go to an AOG Church, I don’t think that should stop us fellowshipping with the Anglicans, Lutherans or anyone. It would be unfair of the church to say you belong to that lot so stay out of my place. I think God is going to bring all the churches together one day, and, who knows, it might be happening now. We try not to stay in one particular area, we try to help everybody. I’ve been mixed up with music for quite a few years. I’ve helped Sid Graham and Jack Haradine of the Anglicans, Ken Sumner of the Uniting Church Congress. But I fall more in line with AOG mob because I feel more at home with the way they worship, but that doesn’t stop me helping out with someone who might need the music or whatever. I believe that is what it means to have God’s calling on my life, to be there to help people.

‘Each fortnight, the women have a fellowship meeting at Francis Lindsay’s, they call her Dolly, she’s Neecy’s sister. The men have their own meeting at the same time; when that is not on, we have a fellowship meeting together at Dolly’s place. People from different churches go along to it and enjoy the Word of God. The learning never stops; it is just a continual thing.

‘Gowan Armstrong asked me to come along to the TACL group. The name stands for Training Aboriginal Christian Leaders, and once a month we meet and go through a few issues about how to help Aboriginal ministries. There are quite a few denominations involved in that. I think they are in touch with the Nungalinya people. I was fortunate to go up there last year for two weeks to do a bit of study, and I’m looking forward to going again this year in 1996. Over the years since I’ve been a Christian, I’ve done a lot of study. When I was with Sonny Hoet I did a lot, and then when I came to work with Jack I did a lot which, I think, were based on the Nungalinya stuff. Over the last five or so years I have been doing the Nungalinya courses. I first did one at Kenny Sumner’s when he was living at Elizabeth. Then at the Otherway Centre in town with Bruce Rosier, and Gowan comes here to my place and we’ve done quite a few, and we’ve just finished one with Father Jerome Crow, now we are looking forward to doing some more. All the studies I’ve done over the years have been repeated each time a new pastor comes, and I’ve never got any credit for the training; but now with Nungalinya it is not going to waste because these studies will have a qualification at the end. I know there is a need to learn as much as you can and then go on and teach someone else, but I’ve never juggled the idea of me teaching, but it certainly is a possibility.'
‘The Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair has been a big problem for Aboriginal people. Even Christian people have been hurt by it because there are Christians on both sides. That makes it even worse when the people who stood up and spoke out are called liars because they said there isn’t any such thing as women’s business there, and that’s very sad. Two ladies from Murray Bridge phoned a pastor in Melbourne who used to fellowship with people in Victoria Square in Adelaide, and I used to help him out with music. He rang me up and told me about the ladies and their need of prayer and counselling, so I went to see them. They were two ladies that opposed the bridge, but I didn’t let that stop me ministering to them because I’m not one side of the fence or the other. I knew that taking sides could damage my ministry, because people ask if you are for or against them. I didn’t want anything to do with that attitude so I went and offered them the comforts of Christ. We had quite good fellowship for a couple of months and it grew. The damage that the Hindmarsh Island thing has done is enormous because it is splitting families. People that have been friends all their lives are now not even talking to each other, especially the old ladies. People in families have to choose what they believe and this is causing turmoil. It is sad that it is affecting their ministry and the way they think about God. The ladies that spoke against the bridge because of women’s business were Christians, and they were called liars. The people who opposed them, saying that there is no women’s business, were put up on a pedestal. This shows me the division and, if they are divided amongst themselves, how are they going to be before God? Now it is harder to get people in one frame of mind and in fellowship. One day I went up to Murray Bridge to look for my daughter because she was helping her auntie and they took too long coming home so I went to check in case they broke down. I went through Murray Bridge and my own flesh and blood wouldn’t even tell me where certain people lived. It was very sad to see that. I thought what effect is this having on the kids? Is it going to make the younger generation distant from one another, even the relatives—if you’re a distant cousin you’re close? When I see this distance coming between us, it is frightening. What is it going to mean to our kids in the future?

‘The relationship between black and white seems to be on the improve. Anywhere you go, you will see one group here and another there, but now, when you walk in a church, it is a multicoloured sort of thing. Like in our church we try to mix up and this is good. Not everybody does it; but we are starting to mix very well. In the few years I’ve been a Christian, I’ve seen an increase of different churches wanting to minister to Aboriginal people, and I feel that it is a movement of God that cannot be ignored. People are wanting to minister to Aboriginal people and bring them to the Lord.
A few years ago when brother Ben was alive, we had a meeting at Salisbury North. There was Edmund Wanganeen, Jack Haradine and Harold French. They discussed about how to get back together, like it was before AEF and the ACF divided up. Edmund spoke about how we had to get ourselves together before we can make the right move as a body. But it didn’t eventuate to anything. A meeting was made for the following month, but it never came about. To me, at the moment it seems that we are all going different directions. I remember when Brother Ben and Brother Keith Mildon and Sonny Hoet, even though they were going in different directions in their work, they were always ready to back one another up, but it is not like that now.

‘Since I’ve been a Christian, I have heard a lot of black and white talk. People you bring to the Lord don’t want to hear that, because they come from a world that is full of prejudice where they are made to feel that, because you are Aboriginal with black skin or dark skin, that you are lower. Before you become a Christian your world is full of that prejudice and you don’t want to hear it in the church. I’ve seen it in the churches and I’ve heard children talk about black and white dogs, and I’ve said, “Where’s that in the Bible?” That sort of thing can be really damaging when you are out amongst Aboriginal people. They say he’s got a black heart, but black in white culture means bad, but it shouldn’t mean bad or evil. These little things have got to be understood. I tried to explain this to a minister’s wife and she said, “No, they have to hear these things”, but she’s wrong. When they come to church they want hope, a way out of those attitudes, so if it is not in the Bible then don’t preach it. I tried very hard to make her understand what I meant. There are a lot of beautiful people who know that others are sensitive about these things.

‘Last year I was working with the Kaurna language, teaching it in schools, but I’ve given it up this year because it is a bit too demanding for me. There is a big push to make it the number one language and have English as the second language, but that is a long way down the track. There is enough of the language still there for us to do it.’

DERRICK WALKER—FARM MANAGER, RAUKKAN

‘I have a Diploma in Farm Management from Roseworthy Agricultural College (now Adelaide University), although I am an electrician by trade. I am the manager of community lands, and farm manager, and I am responsible for training fellows as far as farming is concerned. The property we are on belongs to the Aboriginal Lands Trust, but we use it as our own.'
Taking Responsibility

My dad is from Point McLeay, and my mum is from Point Pearce. Although I didn’t live here until I was twenty-four, it has become part of me, it gets into your blood.

‘I learnt to love the Lord, He has given me purpose and direction, He has given me life and given it abundantly. I first came to know Christ and He has given me focus and purpose in what I do. For example, I wouldn’t have gone to Agricultural College and I wouldn’t be here managing a property, without Christ. When I first got back, the company was going to be foreclosed; there wasn’t any stock, the fences were run down and the water points weren’t there.

‘I knew before I came back that I had other job offers. The public service wanted to employ people with diplomas and degrees. But God told me to come back home. There wasn’t a job, a house, or anything, but God provided and it has gone from strength to strength. Last year we took a hundred tonnes of potatoes, five hundred tonnes of maize and two hundred tonnes of sorghum off the place. We also have about seven hundred head of stock at this point.

‘When I came back I was pretty fired up and quickly became a leader in the church. In Point McLeay, as in most missions, people came in and ministered and pastored in the church. There wasn’t a lot of growth; I fell into that same pattern. I was pastoring the fellowship and people came for a while and then they stopped. I got really frustrated. I felt that the Lord did not want me to be part of the Raukkan Christian Fellowship. It wasn’t so much not to fellowship with the people around, but to come away from doing it for the people and just be one of God’s people; we do that now. We meet with people from Narrung and Raukkan. When we went down to Narrung once a month, we would worship their way, and when they come to Raukkan, they do it our way. We certainly have things to learn from the white Christian community but I think Aboriginal Christians have an awareness, or a spiritual perception of what is happening about the place, and so we have something to offer in that area. As we come together, God will be touching people’s lives and reconciliation will take place. True reconciliation will never come unless Christ is involved.’

DANNY COLSON

‘I live in Mintabie, a small opal mining town of about four to five hundred people. The Mintabie Evangelical Church is made up of about thirty to forty people when Aboriginal brethren from Indulkana come and join us. Mainly they are older people who are strong in the Lord. We also have visits from
the AOG pastor from Coober Pedy. A few years ago, a number of Koreans were here at Mintabie; they raised money and built a small church, but then they had to go back home because of visa trouble.

‘I was taken from Ernabella as a child in 1938, to the UAM home at Quorn called Colebrook Home. I grew up there for a while. Then we were transferred to Eden Hills in Adelaide when Colebrook Home was moved. I ended up working for a poultry farmer in the Adelaide Hills. He was a fine Methodist lay preacher. But I wanted to ride horses because I came from up amongst the northern stockmen. He got me a job with Mr Ashby. Then I went down South to Millicent. I wanted to go back up north, but when I went back to Ernabella I had problems communicating. Now it is a bit different because I think that if culture takes hold, then Christianity is weakened.

‘The greatest need of the Aboriginal Church is faithfulness and holy living. The Scriptures tell us to come out from those things that are dangerous. Christians know when things are done in secret, that is not of the Lord. We are free indeed when we come to the Lord, and we must not indulge in anything that is in darkness, we are to trust in the Lord and lean not to our own understanding.

‘There are a number of tribal elders who are preachers in the Pitjantjatjara communities. We also get Elcho Island people down here every year, and they always bring a blessing. They have revival there every year, similar to us at Ernabella. People are still bubbling over with joy. I am the leader at Mintabie, also I am one of the stewards.

‘The Alice Springs Christian Convention wrote to me just before Christmas asking me to provide a bullock, and I gladly agreed as I have done it before. God knows that the only thing that will stop me from being at the convention is that I’ve got my sick daughter in Mary Potter Hospice. It all depends on whether she is called home. My only daughter, she is a beautiful daughter, she is thirty-four years of age and is dying of cancer.

‘The other day, when the ambulance bought her in, she said, “Mum, this is the place I saw in the vision when the Lord takes me home to be with him”.

‘That is wonderful, my wife and I have accepted it. She doesn’t like the children to see her suffering. Last night we handed her over to the Lord for whatever happens is in His will. The Lord put us here and He takes us when He is ready. [Danny and Gloria’s daughter died on the 17th of February 1996.]

‘When a person comes to the Lord, we want to see them do away with old things and trust in the Lord, then we have the joy of seeing people become new persons in Christ.
‘I am a privileged person. I was brought up in a mission home, a good Christian upbringing even though I was not with my family. All through my life I have had the privilege of seeing miracles happen in my life and in other people’s lives. Psalm 34 says, “I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise will continually be in my mouth, the humble shall hear and be glad, O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together”.’

**DR ANNE PATTEL-GRAY**

Anne Pattel-Gray holds a PhD in Religion Studies, is secretary of the AIC; and has published various works, including *Through Aboriginal Eyes* and *The Cry From the Wilderness*.

‘Many of our people are being continuously stifled by the lack of adequate education to equip them to become theologians; to have the critical concerns and the critical thinking. We have to look at the church and say, “Is that Christianity, or is it Westernism?” We have to pull away the wrappings that Christianity was found in and look closely at the Christian principles, so that Gospel and culture can emerge in their own way.

‘Indigenous people need to actively challenge authorities to secure opportunities for theological education. The AIC has received some criticism over the form of training and the curricula being produced for this training because it is very much white based and interpreted and is also being taught by whites. The question is asked, “When do we begin to do it for ourselves?”

‘We have young people in the church today doing theological education who say this is not enough, and they demand more. We want to be equipped as Aboriginal people to understand the dialogue so that we can debate from our perspective. Universities also have to open their doors. Now that I have a PhD, I’m going to make sure they do. I am going to find out how to give other people the opportunity and the support that is required to get through. Not everybody in Australia is academic, but unless Aboriginal Australia moves towards enabling Aborigines to obtain higher degrees in education, we will not have the leadership that we will need for tomorrow. It will take all different Aborigines to be able to meet the struggles of tomorrow, but, because everything is in English, they have to go and learn it in English. These people would excel if they could learn it in their own language, but English makes it more difficult for them to succeed. So language can be an empowerment or a disempowerment.

‘All denominations are able to go to Nungalinya, but it was established for traditional people to be able to obtain qualifications to perform ministry
to their own people and to achieve ordination in that context. This causes a problem; because it is structured towards the needs of traditional Aboriginal people, the urban people are finding it difficult. For what it was created they have done a marvellous job, but it doesn’t go far enough academically, it doesn’t offer higher degrees.

‘We haven’t even begun to recognise opportunities and possibilities. It is like sitting with a cake in front of you and you see a crumb on the floor and say I’m going to enjoy this crumb. We have tasted the sweetness of the crumb and haven’t realised there is a whole cake sitting in front of us. When that happens, we are going to see incredible things, not just for ourselves, it is something to share with black and white. It is not going to be done separately, but as we learn about each other and grow in respect for each other. The Holy Spirit is going to do some work in each of us. God created the indigenous people for a reason, and that is to bring the humanity of Christ back to white people. If you look at the white churches, they have become somewhat desensitised. Salvation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is inextricably bound, and when it happens it will happen together.

‘Reconciliation and justice is not going to happen through government legislation. Governments cannot change anything in the sense of attitude, emotions or the human spirit. Some things can only be done through the church. Justice and reconciliation are achievable in this country, but only through a church that is humble and at the same time proud: a church that has repented.’

WOMEN’S MINISTRY OF THE 1990s—
LOTTAINE LILLEY

When I spoke to Mrs Lilley, she said that she was very encouraged by the growth of the Aboriginal Christian Women’s work in Australia. A group of women are planning to go from Melbourne to the Kimberley Christian Convention in 1996. They will travel by commuter bus to Halls Creek, halfway around Australia.

THE AEF WOMEN’S MINISTRY

The AEF women’s ministry is divided into two main areas, the eastern and the western sections. In August 1994, representatives from these two groups came together for a four-day convention in Perth. Thirty-two women came from interstate and thirty-three from WA. Key speakers
introduced topics on health and education, followed by workshops which enabled helpful discussion. Qualified speakers were invited to deal with practical topics such as domestic violence and child abuse, alcohol and drug problems, financial management and victims of crime. Mrs Lorraine Lilley spoke on financial management, and Mrs Norma Todd spoke on her involvement in community and prison work.

The aim of the conference was to bring together Christian Aboriginal women leaders from all parts of Australia to discuss issues affecting us as Aboriginal people and to discover how we, the caregivers, can have an input into our own communities.¹

Devotions were held every morning when different speakers brought uplifting messages from the Word. It is planned to have these interstate conferences every two years. The next one will be in Brisbane.

**AEF Western Area Women’s Convention**

The Western Australian women chose the beautiful wildflower time to hold their annual convention at Orange Grove in September 1995. Mrs Lorraine Lilley spoke on the home and family, from Ephesians chapter 5. It was an appropriate choice of speaker as her daughter, Mrs Maxine Lawrence, is prominent in the women’s work and her son, Timothy Lilley, was chosen as NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Official Committee) Victorian Youth of the Year. He also received the National Youth of the Year award. About fifty women came to the Keswick Convention Centre to fellowship together and to strengthen each other in the work of the Lord. A new executive committee was elected for a three-year term. They were Mrs Jackie Eades, Mrs Ann Dann, Mrs Jane Ronan and Mrs Roslyn Hayward. Mrs Lilley challenged the women in leadership and outlined the responsibilities which go with the committee.

**AEF Women’s Safari Team**

An evangelistic team consisting of four Perth AEF women set out for the Kimberleys in July 1995 for a two-week safari; they were joined in Derby by Mrs Shirley Humpries who accompanied them to One-Armed Point and then to Fitzroy Crossing. They were the first AEF Women’s Safari Team to undertake this work, although combined Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women’s safari teams had ministered previously.

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AEF Eastern Section Women’s Convention

‘The twenty-fifth AEF Women’s Convention was held at Wyee in NSW, in June 1995. As in the West, the topic was the Christian family, and about fifty women attended. Many were pastors’ wives and lead very busy lives. They were concerned for their Aboriginal sisters who live with poverty, sickness and lack of education, and often have insufficient support from husbands who are in prison. The Key Speaker was Mrs Helen Smith from Brisbane. Women of all ages, from teenagers to grandmothers, enjoyed fellowship together. Over the twenty-five years the convention has welcomed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women to their fellowship.

‘The eastern area executive council was elected; they were: Mrs Lorraine Lilley, Mrs Kaylene Manton, Mrs Michelle Taylor and Mrs Maxine Lawrence.’

MURIEL OLSEN

‘I belong to the Yungkuntjatjara people. When I was five years old, and living on a sheep station at Ernabella run by Mr Fergusson, the police came in 1936 and took six of us. Our mother tried to hide us, but the police found us and took us in a truck to the United Aborigines Mission. I tried to run away with my cousin who was four. The train started coming in and we were very frightened. To us it was *mamu*, the devil, and the only place we knew where we could escape it was the mission. So we ran back there. We had to have our heads shaved and wear clothes, we had to live in a house and sleep in a bed up off the ground. We were separated after being used to sleeping close to each other on the ground. We were forbidden to speak our own language. But there was worse to come. We had to get inside that train and travel down to Quorn. When we got there it was a new life for me. Sister Ryde showed us the love of Jesus. We didn’t always like the discipline, but, with a mob of thirty kids, discipline was necessary or else they would be overrun. Sister Hyde and Sister Rutter made it a home for us. The biggest hardship was the fact that we were forbidden to speak our language. This was something very dear to us, the ability to communicate, and I’ve never regained that. This meant the cutting of our family ties, the cutting of cultural ties; the destruction of everything that was familiar to us and the total destruction of us as people. That is something that I have really had to commit to the Lord. The love of Jesus changes things, He is a great God. I know that God had a plan for us and we kept very close together.'
Kids need a mother to relate to. This was a different culture, a different language, a different understanding for us of what relationship was.

‘We learned a verse of Scripture each day in English, but, like parrots, we didn’t understand the meaning. One day I wanted to be alone; I was thinking of my mother; I was looking across the creek to the Flinders Ranges when the sun was going down; we had been learning Psalm 121, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth, he will not let your foot be moved, he who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep”. These were just words, foreign words that had no meaning for me. I needed to know that someone was watching over me because my mother had been my protector. I needed that Father in all His brilliance above me and then looking down at me. That night I was really crying all by myself, then God came to me. God gave me understanding of all these things I’d been saying like a parrot. He was my Father, but, because I didn’t know anything about this God, He gave me understanding that I was precious in His sight, that He was my Father and would never leave me, never forsake me, He was always, always watching over me and has stayed with me all my life.

‘I went to Quorn Primary School up to sixth grade. In 1943 there was a drought and we all came down to Eden Hills in Adelaide for a holiday. The continuing drought prevented us from returning to Quorn after our holidays.

‘I don’t judge the missionaries; at the time they could only do what they knew; I’ve got no anger about that. They moved us without consulting our people. That is what they thought would help us make a quick transition into the white fellows’ way of education. But they didn’t reckon with the fact that we were proud of being Aboriginal. The missionaries I remember were: Sister Amery, Sister Hyde, Sister Rutter and Mr and Mrs Noel Wiley (Mr Wiley would come and do maintenance around the place). We carried their babies around and looked after them. That was John, Ruth and Joan, that made us feel very much that they were our family. There was also a young woman from Tasmania, Miss Loone, and a Miss Longmire. These were the ones involved in my life.

‘Then we went to Colebrook Home at Eden Hills in Adelaide and we got a lot of flack because people didn’t want us at school. So we had a one-teacher school at Colebrook. I did grade seven up there and then went down to Unley Girls’ Technical High School. When I left school I stayed at home to help. There were about twenty children under two years of age, that was a big percentage of little kids, so we older ones had to be responsible for two kids each. Then at night we were responsible for six or eight
little ones. We had to get up and feed and change them, then we would go to school the next day; sometimes we were not very bright. There were always about forty kids at Colebrook Home, new ones coming in and older ones going out.

‘I went to work for Dr Donald Kidd and his wife Joan, looking after their little one, Heather. I thought about it—those missionaries—why did they sacrifice so much, just for me to look after someone else’s kids? To thank them enough I should do something worthwhile. My cousin Nellie had gone to Victoria to the Bethesda Salvation Army Hospital. She had done her training there. She had also done her midwifery. She said to me, “Would you like to come and be trained as a nurse?” So, in 1949, I gave my notice to Dr Kidd, and went up to Kadina with Nellie. Why did we have to go to country hospitals and more or less prove ourselves?

‘I was very shy, I had lost all my confidence; when exam times came my mind went blank, I understood my work, but I couldn’t put it down on paper. From there I went to Murray Bridge and then to Dr Charles Duguid’s wife, she was very sick so I came and nursed her for a while. Then I went back to a private hospital on Osmond Terrace.

‘In August 1953, we hired the Adelaide Town Hall for the Aboriginal Advancement League, under Dr Duguid. We told the people of South Australia that we didn’t only want to be trained to be servants and stockmen. That night we had an all-Aboriginal choir, the hall was full and it was really beautiful. The grandparents got up and told of their dreams and expectations for their children, and the young people spoke; there was great unity.

‘Out of that meeting, Wakefield Street and Memorial Hospitals opened their doors for Aboriginal trainees. Lois O’Donohue prepared to go to the Wakefield Street Hospital but then she said, “No, this is a time when we’ve got to demand the best hospital in Adelaide”. Three or four of the trainees were accepted at that time. I wasn’t one of them because I went to Adelaide Bible Institute out at Payneham, under Rev. Allen Burroughs, his father Reg Burroughs, and Rev. Vic Goldney from the Methodist Church. I loved Rev. Burroughs like the father I never had. I loved it there. The ministry was good and the teaching was excellent. I had officially made a decision to follow the Lord after that encounter with God first, when I was eleven years of age

‘After I finished at Adelaide Bible Institute, I continued on in 1956 and went to the Royal Adelaide Hospital. I trained and qualified and then went to Tasmania to do some fruit picking, where I met my husband, a Swedish man named Olsen.

‘The mission could have done better if it had got our people involved instead of just taking us away. They thought that being cut off from our
families would help us assimilate better into the white culture. But God made me an Aboriginal person and I’m proud of that, because I know that in that capacity that is what He wants and that is how I could do it, but I could have been so much more effective if I had my own language, but God knows that, too. I’m really crying out to God about the fact that something really important was denied to me. Our mothers and grandmothers cared for children through the generations. How was it that, all of a sudden, they weren’t fit people to look after their children and grandchildren? I don’t understand that.

‘To be a whole people we needed to have our parents working alongside of the mission to keep our culture, and our language in particular. I’ve been up to Mimili where I was born, working in the clinic as a nurse. I could have been much more effective if I had known the language. You don’t even snatch a kitten or a puppy from its mother like that.

‘One of the most traumatic things in my life after I had been to Sweden was going back to my birth place. My husband said, “I want to go up where you were born and meet your people”. We went there, and we stood there, he and I and our two children aged five and three. We couldn’t say a word, it was like someone cutting with a knife. If I had known what the cost would be, I wouldn’t have had the courage. I praise God that I didn’t know the future that He had in His hands. I am very grateful that I went back to see my people, even though I don’t understand, I know the love that grows there.

‘I haven’t got a problem with colour; that is, how we have been brought up, or it is something I’ve come to understand myself and what I’ve taught my children: to regard people as people. The time when I failed was when I was running a clinic at Davenport Reserve, Port Augusta. I became involved in politics and I started to talk black and white: “If you continue to do that you need to get out”. My children gave back to me what I taught them. I’ve had the opportunity of going to primary schools, high schools, universities, cross-cultural studies and things like that, and the single most important thing is to make the children understand that it is very important to listen to other people and not to think that any one culture has got everything. We need to see and understand that you can gain from other people if you are prepared to listen, and I think that is where change can come, when we are prepared to respect others.

‘When I was in ABI, the Lord spoke to me, out of the dust, out of the ashes. I believe that what God has given me for our people is that they are going to rise up and there is going to be a big revival in Australia. I believe that comes out of suffering, knowing Jesus Christ and the fellowship of His suffering.
I came to live in Adelaide in 1986, and then in 1987 the “Churchwomen of Australia” invited Lois O’Donohue to speak at their national conference at Henley Beach. She wasn’t able to go so they invited me to step in at the last minute. I can’t remember what I said, but I think it was to do with Amos 5:24. I said a few words, and then out of that they asked me to go all around Australia with another woman, a Uniting Church minister. We went all around Australia and spoke to every Christian denomination, it was called “Christian Understanding”. I also spoke on the radio in Victoria and in other places in Australia telling them what we were doing in this process of understanding and reconciliation.

I like to think that God had known me even before time began, that He has a plan and purpose. I wasn’t a mistake. In 1990, the “Churchwomen of Australia” asked me to go to Indonesia as an observer to a conference. Sixteen Asian countries in all were represented, and, although I went as an observer, they asked me to speak. It was a privilege to be chosen to represent our people, but, of course, when you look back on what you said, you have to trust God.

In 1994, I was asked by Moral Rearmament to go to Switzerland. I had a real struggle with the fact that it was an inter-faith organisation. It was a peace conference, a women’s initiative. I said to the Lord, “If it is your will and purpose for me to go, you will have to provide the money because I am penniless. I am not too sure about this inter-faith. Will I be strong enough? Will I be this? Will I be that?” Anyway, I went to Switzerland, there were five hundred people and fifty-five countries represented. When I heard about the suffering of all these people, I grew also. There were Hindus and Muslims as well. There was a man from Israel who became very, very upset as we introduced ourselves and our particular group. There were about twenty of us and we all testified to our faith in Jesus. But God turned it all about on the third day. When we had a group session, they asked me to speak. I was able to speak from the Old Testament, and it was his own book and he changed, he totally changed from his tension and terrible antagonism toward the people of God, he just totally turned about and I really praised God for that.

I had a thing about anyone who touched black people, but God drew me alongside two American girls who became my best friends. It was just beautiful to see all these men and women who had such a respect for each other and how they had gone through all these things together. God was dealing with my prejudices.

Before I left for Switzerland, I said to the Lord, “Isn’t it possible for me to go and see my daughter in Sweden?” He directed me to see the Italian airline I was travelling on and I asked how much extra it would be for me
to go to Sweden. He said no extra, but I would have to go back to Milan and then fly to Stockholm.

‘Next door to my daughter and son-in-law’s house was another house. My son-in-law, who wasn’t very happy about Christians, called the neighbour the “hallelujah” man. One day the hallelujah man came and we were able to speak about the Lord, somehow or other we understood, although he couldn’t understand English. It was really amazing. Then he went back and told his pastor. Next day the pastor knocked at the door. He asked me to preach, but he wasn’t sure about a non-Christian interpreting for me. So God arranged that, didn’t he? Within a few days, on the ninth of August 1994, a young American man, Kurt Havel, who was married to a Swedish girl, was ministering in the village. Through his ministry, Katherine, my elder daughter, was converted and was able to interpret for me the following Sunday.

‘While in Switzerland, I think that the most marvellous thing for me is that one night there was an electrical storm. The thunder was so loud. We were three thousand feet up in a place called “Mountain House”, surrounded by snow-capped mountains. The thunder seemed to be rebounding from one mountain peak to another and the lightning just lit up the whole place. I was shouting and singing, *How Great Thou Art*, when it really hit me, this mighty and awesome God, who created all this magnificence, cared about me, little me; I was important and precious in His sight and He loved me.’

**BRONWYN NEWEY**

‘I had a Christian upbringing at Swan Reach. My mum came from the Flinders Ranges and my dad was an Aboriginal ferry operator who loved to play Christian songs on his button accordion. I and my husband are joint leaders of a fellowship group at the Paradise Assemblies of God Church.

‘In my employment I have had a wealth of experience. I’ve worked in Aboriginal-run organisations like Aboriginal Health, but I’ve also worked for DEET (Department of Employment and Educational Training), the Commonwealth Employment Service and Telecom. From Telecom I went to Tabor Bible College and graduated in February 1995 with an Associate Diploma in Charismatic Ministries. I was then employed as Coordinator of Nungamiminis. We provide emergency accommodation for up to six weeks for Aboriginal women and children. Recently, when I was on leave, I could see that the Lord was using the skills I had developed in my own family, even though I was the second to youngest. In the shelter we
worked as a team, we need each other. For the people who come into the shelter we are the most normal family that they have ever seen. For them violence and drug abuse are normal. We want to develop the idea of having fun together, enjoying each other’s company, relating and being responsible. We need them as much as they need us. It is not manipulation, they are part of us and our family, that is what Aboriginal families are; extended families.

‘We are developing, along with other Aboriginal groups, Aboriginal sites and heritage, Aboriginal family structures; at Point Pearce, the Coorong, the Kaurna Plains, Pitjantjatjara land and the Riverland. In Aboriginal culture, it is important to know who you were before and where you are now. When people learn who they are and are healed as individuals, the community is healed, and therefore it functions better, and more effectively. The people would then know their roots and their identity. They would know who they are, this is what God intended them to be, an Aboriginal person. We can’t be a black person wrapped up in a white skin, we can’t be a clone of somebody else. I can never impose my beliefs, my understanding, my values on another person. God is a self-revealing God, and He will lead a person on, and reveal Himself to somebody who has a seeking heart and a heart that wants to serve and love Him. It is not up to me to force that person, it is not up to me to impose my values, my lifestyle, on somebody else. First Corinthians 13 is about love, it is patient, kind and gentle.

‘In 1993, the men were thinking of holding a men’s camp. My husband John was having a discussion about men’s camps and prayer meetings, and while they were discussing this, we were quite anxious and keen for them to have it, but things were preventing it from happening. Harold French’s wife Dorothy, and another friend of theirs, Margaret White, we were talking about it and we asked, “Why don’t we go ahead with the ladies’ camp, the three of us and with the help from others?” In the two camps we have had so far, we have enjoyed rich fellowship. We leave home and work and every other responsibility, and concentrate on God and each other. Mary and I shared the task of providing music with the guitar; I asked a visiting lady speaker from Paradise AOG. We have had two camps, with twenty to thirty people at each. More recently Sandra Ken, Muriel Olsen, Neecy (Denise Varcoe) and Dolly Lindsay and myself got this Aboriginal Ladies’ Fellowship off the ground. We met together monthly and shared fellowship and prayer to be united. Zechariah 4:6 says, “It is not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord”.

‘Recently there was an issue in our marriage because for us two cultures have come together. John came out from England well over twenty years ago.
He came from a very individualistic culture. How could he leave his people halfway around the world? It was a real bone of contention for me. We have different ways of looking at things; different perceptions, values and ideas. Aboriginals have always been brought up with the idea that relationships are far more important than anything else. It was hard for me, being brought up in an Aboriginal culture and in a country town, to come to an individualistic and materialistic culture of city life and married to John. That is what being an Aboriginal means. I think it is really important for people to find their identity and not be ashamed of who they really are.

‘Generally my observations of the western world, of non-Aboriginal people, is that they tend to be analytical; they emphasise head-knowledge; they strive to be successful in education, wealth, status and material gain. But for Aboriginal people, issues of the heart and relationships are more important. They give and share, even if their circumstances are tragic.

‘We know that church culture is predominantly white, middle-class culture, and seems to be growing that way, but it doesn’t seem to meet the needs of those who have poverty and hardship. They are not accepted in the church. If you don’t measure up to the standard it is very difficult to become part of that body. A new Christian has to struggle and strive to reach a certain standard before they will be accepted, and that is how they then perceive God. But God comes to where we are, right to our point of need, because he made us. It is devastating when a new Christian comes in and doesn’t find a warm and safe environment and gets expelled to wander the streets alone and eventually dies. When I first started coming into Christian circles, with Pastor Ben Mason and Pastor Keith Mildon and that fellowship group, there was a Christian evangelical fellowship. That was like a stepping-stone to enter the wider church. Now we are born of the Spirit, and we are functioning and being effective in the fellowship of Christ. We can also be a part of the wider fellowship and become part of the body.’
Carrying a firestick on a journey from one camp site to another was a common practice in Central Australia. On cold mornings, a firestick provided warmth, as well as having the potential to set a spinifex bush alight, providing more heat and indicating where the people were hunting or travelling. On reaching a new camp site, it was easier to start a fire without having to find the materials for making a new fire.

Just as this traditional practice of carrying firesticks was necessary, so it is necessary to have young men and women to carry the fire of the Gospel to new camps. Colleges such as Bimbadeen, Perth Bible College, Darwin Bible College and Nungalinya should be operating to capacity. A few students each year is insufficient for the needs of those areas of Australia that these colleges supply. Not only is there a need to fill these existing institutions, but the late Pastor Ben Mason also saw the need to establish a new college in Alice Springs for the tribal people of that area. The recently formed TACL group could play a large part in fulfilling the need for more leaders.

The young people converted through conventions in Central Australia needed teaching and instruction to help them carry the firestick of the Gospel into their own communities. Ben said they found it too difficult to leave their friends and relatives for two or three years to go to Darwin or elsewhere for training. Those who attend the existing training institutions are cut off for a year or more from their own way of life and culture, and are trained in a western-type environment. There needs to be a tribal Aboriginal setting, where students can learn, not only the Christian message, but also how to apply it in a tribal community, in their own language, with some knowledge of the social problems their people are facing.

For some communities the problem will be one of land rights, although not all Aborigines agree that this is the main problem. Some see
unemployment, poverty, alcoholism and racism as more urgent. It was significant that, at the Port Augusta Convention Annual Meeting of 1986, when the majority of those attending were from urban areas, a decision about making a statement on land rights was postponed; instead, evangelism and social justice were emphasised.

There has been some movement against alcoholism in these conventions. Some of the evangelists have been converted themselves from drunkenness to a new life as Christians, and urge others they know, with the same problem, to accept the help of Jesus Christ in their lives. In the training of evangelists and teachers, there should be a place for learning about the physical and mental effects of alcoholism on the human body, and the danger of accepting too simplistic an answer to the problem. The underlying causes of the trouble need to be understood and dealt with. The same is true of petrol sniffing. It exists in a background of family and social problems, which can be overcome by the whole community facing the new situations of rapid change and taking positive action to help those who are the victims.

The firestick needs to be carried to light up new areas of growth. Murrabuda told us how one man was trained as town clerk and another as secretary for the trust fund. One of his sons is training as a bank manager, while two of his daughters help in the supermarket. Every new position successfully taken over by Aboriginal people gives a dignity to the whole community. Not everyone can be a pastor to the people, but the pastor can encourage others to train for different positions of responsibility which will support him in the work of the church. Non-Aboriginals have rarely been successful in training Aboriginals to take over their work, because doing themselves out of a job is not an inviting prospect. It is usually much easier for non-Aboriginals to do something for Aboriginals rather than training them to do something for themselves.

People in medical or educational positions are particularly unsuccessful at handing over responsibility when very often there are opportunities for developing real skills and abilities. Missions have been forced by lack of funds and the government policy of self-management to hand over to trained Aboriginals the work of the local council as well as spiritual tasks. Very few of these communities are financially viable.

Government grants to their councils help to support them and social service cheques keep individuals and families from starvation, but pastors and evangelists need support from the community, as they cannot expect to be financed by the government. Outreach programs are financed by the members of the teams who go on these evangelistic visits to other communities, as Rupert explained happens in the area around Numbulwar.
But Rupert himself now needs ongoing support in his full-time work as pastor, and this is much more difficult to find. The firestick needs to be kept alight or there will be hard work ahead to rekindle it at the next camp.

Because most missions, in the past, provided both the clergy and the finance to establish a community centre and a church, the local people developed a ‘mission mentality’ of dependence on white clergy, initiative and finance. It was the successful break with this attitude that made the AEF such a spectacular triumph in organising the Port Augusta Convention, establishing Aboriginal churches, and setting up training colleges such as Bimbadeen.

The Elcho Island Renewal Movement also demonstrated that Christian Aborigines could take the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to other communities in the power of the Holy Spirit. This built the foundation for the UAICC, and has demonstrated the ability of Aboriginal Christians to run their own affairs.

The camp fire needs to be kept burning. When left to itself, it gradually dies out. In planting Aboriginal churches, a ‘hit and run’ evangelistic policy is not effective, unless a leader can be found to tend the fire after the evangelists have moved on. The local leader needs to be aware of the problems of his area and adopt a holistic approach—teaching and caring for his people at their points of need. It can’t be just a Sunday religion, but must also be a Monday to Saturday application of the Gospel to people’s lives.

There are indications from the accounts given in this book that Aborigines can understand and help their own people more effectively. That does not absolve whites from the responsibility of helping the Aboriginal believers. Black and white Christians are all part of the body and one family. Though Aboriginal believers are comparatively few, they need to keep their identity and to be proud to be themselves as Aboriginal Christians. The whites who have taken over this country are generally quite apathetic about the plight of the original inhabitants. It is only through the efforts of their own people that strong Aboriginal churches will flourish.

Rev. Bill Bird stated in his interview that ‘We have always believed that the white man had to come to us to ask us for forgiveness, but God was saying to us, “No, that is different, that is man’s way; my way is that the one who has been offended must go and be prepared to forgive, to receive that brother and sister back again into fellowship, into relationship, because this is the work of reconciliation”. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. So our ministry of reconciliation is based on Christ’s reconciliation because we are in Christ’s
stead now. We are depending on the finished work of Christ for reconciliation in Australia. This is what we are working for now.’¹

The Rev. Bill Hollingsworth saw the respective roles of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians in the development of the church in Australia: ‘In about 1987, I was invited to speak in St David’s Cathedral in Hobart, Tasmania. I remember vividly just praying and asking the Lord what it was He wanted me to say to that group. At about three o’clock one morning I was standing in the doorway of my caravan, looking up at the starry heavens, seeking inspiration. The Lord spoke to me very vividly, and said to me that the church in Australia was to be a partnership. The indigenous church has the responsibility of the message for this hour, and to run with that because the mainstream church had the responsibility of material resources, both financial and material. I was to encourage, invite and challenge the leaders to think about that and to do something about that, to see it as a partnership. The indigenous and the mainstream churches are to work together as a team and bring that message to Australia today.’²

The two men have given the essentials of the message; a reconciliation to God through Christ’s atoning death on the Cross and a reconciliation to each other, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, with each having a part to play in God’s plan.

¹ cf. chapter 19, p. 226.
² cf. chapter 17, p. 181.
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