



September-November 2016

Australian Indigenous Ministries

Planting — Partnering — Participating



Nurture

by Jono Wright

Living in a town like Camooweal we get to experience things people in the city can only dream about. Our house has played nursery to all kinds of animals over the years. They were all animals who had lost their mother — or father in the case of the emu. I've lost count of how many orphaned red kangaroo joeys we have raised that were successfully released back into the wild. And who could forget our precious baby emu *Squiggie* with his long and awkward neck.

They were babies that would never survive without care, warmth and food. They needed someone else to help them grow into maturity and be released full of life into the wild again. They needed nurture.

The same can be said for young and immature Christians. They need the nurture and care of others to grow and develop and mature. We usually call this process discipleship. Some churches are very good at it while others fail miserably.

Young and immature Christians, like little children, need to be developed and looked after to ensure their health and wellbeing. When I think about nurture in the church in the bush there are a couple of statements I hear people say that show me a better understanding of the process of nurturing is needed.

I hear Christian people say something like, *'that's between them and the Lord'*. This is usually said where people have been seen to be struggling



spiritually in some way or where they are slowly wandering away from the church. In these situations I have seen people left all to themselves, sadly, without the church coming around them to hold them up and help them through.

Yes, people will pray for those struggling but to actually go and talk with them and offer help as James suggests is not always the result.

This individualistic take on the church that occurs within a culture that is so collaborative mystifies me. How did it get to be like this in the church??

If you see a toddler walking way off into the bush by herself you don't just watch and do nothing, do you?

Another comment I hear is, *'We got no church leaders here Jono. That's what we need, we need leaders'*. A lack of leadership in the church can make the care and nurture aspects of Christ's Church all

the more difficult, especially given the hundreds of kms distance to another community where there may be a stronger church with healthy, spiritual leaders. Thankfully, sometimes the lack of leadership *does* result in those few struggling believers banding together and sharing the responsibility for nurture and mutual support — but not always.

It is very special when the Indigenous leaders and other Aboriginal Christians see the need and travel to these smaller communities. It would be great to see more of it! People often travel at times for funerals, conventions and sport carnivals but in between these it can be very spiritually desolate times for many. In fact, we have the Camooweal Drivers Festival coming up. This is one such occasion where many Christians come to Camooweal from isolated communities to encourage us here and help us to run a church service and other outreaches over the weekend.

Thankfully, unlike the baby animals, God will never leave nor forsake His children. The indwelling Spirit and the Father's faithfulness to His Son Jesus Christ and His co-heirs will never allow God to walk away from those who are truly His.

He will and does keep them and provide for them in wonderful ways, but your heart goes out to Christians living in remote locations with little

support and opportunity to be linked in regularly with a nurturing church that will help them grow to maturity to then be released on the world.

God has given us the church to help us to grow and develop as His people. Like a family cares for their children so they can live well adjusted and strong adult lives, our Christian family is there to do the same to bring us to maturity. The same maturity that is on Paul's heart when he writes to the Colossian Christians in chapter 1 verse 28, 29 (NCV) *'So we continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ. To do this, I work and struggle, using Christ's great strength that works so powerfully in me'.*

There is something special that happens when people are bonded together in the church under godly leadership where people grow and flourish.

We need more community in the churches in communities! Pray for the Christians living in isolated and remote communities that God will provide the nurture and leadership they need and that the churches in those communities will be brought to maturity.

Pray for a care and concern within the churches that goes beyond blood and skin relationships — a love for each other that bonds God's people together as true family — a love that makes other people in the community stop and think 'Look at that mob over there. They are followers of Jesus, you can see by the way they love each other.'

(John 13:35, Ephesians 6:4, 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12)





Jono Wright

A Unique Gathering

When you get a group of hundreds of Aboriginal people from different communities, language groups and denominations along with non-Aboriginal Christians together around God's Word over a long weekend, you truly do have a unique gathering and it is called Katherine Christian Convention.

This year again saw huge numbers come together over the first weekend of May — a long weekend in the Northern Territory. It was to be the last year the Morrow farm facilities would be available for use, which means it will probably return to the showground or one of the school facilities used in the past. The KCC Committee is seeking the Lord's way ahead for the best location and facilities to continue the convention. TEAM Partner *Simon McKee* is on the committee and would value prayer as they plan for 2017.



Lisa leads while Phyllis Ricky from AIM TC waits to do Bible reading

AIM had strong participation this year with *Lisa Mumbin* from the Katherine AIM Church leading the meetings while *Jono Wright* from Camooweal was the main speaker to the mixed crowd of hundreds. It is a unique but complex audience to try and teach, as was the theme — 'Grace and Law'.

Another Katherine Church leader, *David Hughes*, led the very popular night sessions of 'items' — where the various groups and individuals get the opportunity to sing on stage. Others from AIM centres took part in Bible readings and items.



Simon McKee (left) with Glen and Annette Simpkins who led the kid's ministry at KCC. Pray for Annette as Glen lost his battle with cancer in July.

Pray that the large numbers represented at this and other conventions held throughout the year will be reflected in the regular attendance and participation in the life of the Church back in the communities.



NW NSW River Convention

by Erin Strahan

Over 30 years ago *Ron Gordon* (father of *Isaac*) and others would do a convention circuit in NW NSW, sharing the gospel and encouraging believers, spending 2-3 days in each centre. After Mr Gordon's passing the conventions were over long weekends and in one particular town at a time. This year, Isaac really wanted to try and bring back the tradition of the convention circuit. So the two weeks of the April NSW School holidays were spent doing outreach activities for two or so days in each of Brewarrina, Weilmoringle, Goodooga, Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri, Walgett, and Dubbo. Quite a number of outreach BBQ's were provided during this time by Isaac and *Eileen*. They were helpful in bringing the people together to hear God's Word.

People came together from Sydney, Canberra, Fingal, Moree, Gilgandra and local communities, as well as an AIM Mission Awareness Tour joining us. We sang, ate, prayed and read God's Word together. It was an incredibly encouraging time, and we are already looking forward to next year 8th – 23rd April.

Overall there were 17 people who made a profession of faith. Please pray for Isaac and Eileen, *Paul* and myself along with other local Christian people who are doing follow up and discipleship with these people.

If you are interested in being kept in the loop with upcoming conventions we have a facebook page called '**NW NSW River Conventions**'. Feel free to 'like it' and stay in touch.



Isaac Gordon



Holiday Programmes

by Erin Strahan

Holiday programmes are a great way for people to come and serve our local community and teach the children about Jesus! Our first holiday programme was hosted in 2007 and since then we have had a number of teams come and run them. We have teams from schools and from youth groups, teams from universities and from churches – and not just from Australia!

It's great to be able to show the children that there are people who follow Jesus all over the world and that we aren't the only 'strange' people out there.

While we have some basic guidelines for teams to adhere to when they come and run programmes, the guidelines help things to run smoothly, not offend the community and ensure that the long-term ministry work being carried out day in and day out is strengthened and encouraged rather than having an opposite effect.

The local children again loved meeting new people at the programme this year. They are always quick to strike up conversation, and they especially liked joining us on evening excursions to the local river or bore.



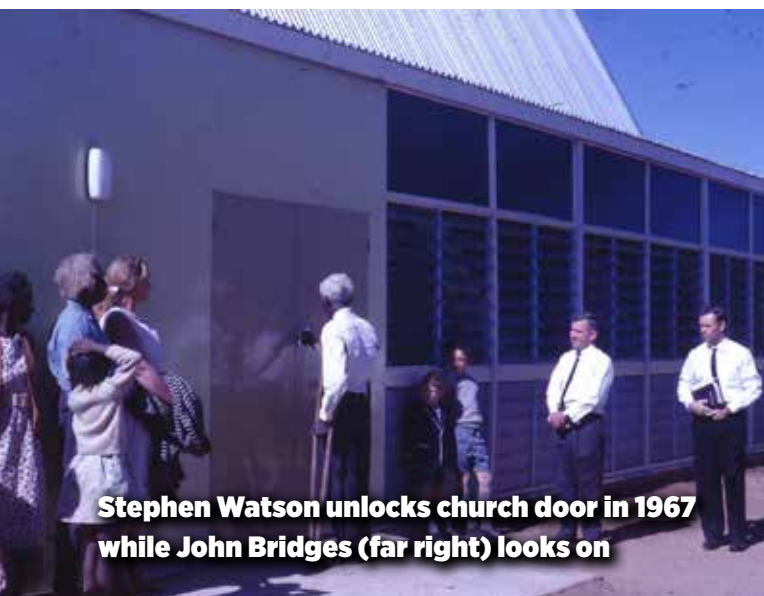
Katherine Church

It has been 80 years since AIM began their ministry in the Northern Territory. Katherine was one of those places where *Arnold Long* and *George Taylor* shared God's Word on that first missionary journey back in 1936.

While Darwin and Tennant Creek had workers put in place that year, it was not until 1940 that Katherine had resident missionaries — though Christians from Darwin visited there periodically. God was at work, and No. 1 Camp in Katherine became the site of the first NT AIM Church. The special opening service was held 26th October 1940.

The only expense for the church building was the nails. The local people helped in getting the bush timber for the framework, and numerous kerosene tins were collected, opened and flattened out, then carried on heads over a considerable distance to create the covering. The floor was made of crushed ant bed. The missionaries — *Daisy Law* and *Arnold* and *Dorothy Long* — were surprised and thrilled to find the Christians had planted trees around their new church for the special opening service. The inside walls were covered with bushes and wildflowers.

Many years later, a church was built in the town of Katherine during the ministry of *John* and *Jocelyn Bridges*. Again the local believers were instrumental in sharing in the building — both financially and practically. The official opening of the church on the current site was 25th June 1967.



Stephen Watson unlocks church door in 1967 while John Bridges (far right) looks on



Then in the late 1980's, the church was closed for a variety of reasons. *Lisa Mumbin* shared, 'We were kind of lost. People from other churches would encourage us to join with them but we kept refusing... and waiting. It was like someone was holding us, protecting us, waiting for the right time. I have often told people, God's timing is perfect. Katherine was hit with a big flood in 1997. This made the people frightened and more than ever we looked for the church to open.'



Two of the current Church leaders Lisa and Noel are helping to keep the church open

In 1999 God sent *Greg* and *Debbie Piper* to Katherine. After they got the grounds and buildings in order, the doors of the church were opened and the people started coming. God has been raising up a group of believers that are going on and growing in the Lord ever since.

They maintain two buses which are used to help those in the communities surrounding the town get into services. They also use them to rotate going out to these communities to have mid-week meetings. For several years during the tourist season when thousands come to Katherine, the AIM Church was able to go out and hold their Sunday night services at the Gorge. Their witness and testimony went out to people from around Australia and literally from around the world.

The Christians have been saving and working towards having a new church built. Many avenues to gain land were sought but a variety of problems saw them finally give up that idea. Instead, they recently used some of their building fund to have the current church renovated with the help of MMM (Mobile Mission Maintenance). By the time this goes to print, they are hoping they will be enjoying the air-conditioning they are having installed.

Pray that the Christians — God's living Church in Katherine — will keep working together as God's family, growing together in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and reaching out with the Good News to those living without Christ.



These ladies are happy the church is open again



Albert serves God by keeping the church yard in great shape



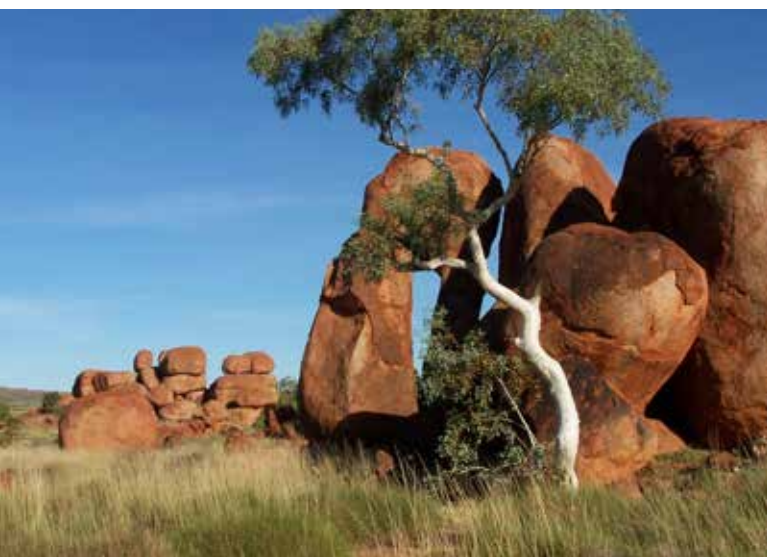
Church leaders Noel and David collect unsold bakery bread on Saturday and divide it up for the church family and for morning tea

Fear & Hope

The Tennant Creek Church has grown in strength, numbers, faithfulness and faith since AIM first shared God's Word 80 years ago. Like others, they have been faced with challenges regarding their traditional ways and beliefs and have made some decisions that have cut across cultural practices.

Former worker Elizabeth Ham shares the following two stories that give us a glimpse into this as well as showing some of the challenges missionaries can suddenly face.

If you have visited Central Australia you may have seen the Devil's Marbles — and closer to Tennant Creek — The Devil's Pebbles. They are remarkable sights. Back in the 1970's the Tennant Creek Town Council decided to move one of the 'Pebbles' to a town park as a feature of the area, complete with an appropriate plaque.



But — the aboriginal people said, *'People will die if that is not taken back!'* One of the tribal custodians — who was also a church member — was their spokesman. Sadly, that man did die soon after saying this.

FEAR spread like a bushfire!

One day someone walked past me on the street and without stopping said, *'That old lady sick'*. Wow! That old lady was also a custodian and a professing Christian. I went straight to her house, praying for the Lord's guidance! Her daughter was a very active and dedicated Christian, Sunday school teacher and Church member.



When I arrived, the old lady was lying in the centre of the living room floor, and the whole room was packed with people. No one spoke. The fear was palpable. They were waiting... waiting for what they feared and believed was the inevitable... I crouched beside the old lady and spoke quietly to her. I stayed with the group for a while. Some wailing started — that mournful sound of hopeless grief.

I took two of her daughters aside and asked if I could talk to them. *'I would like to take your Mum to the hospital and ask the doctors to see her.* What do you reckon?' They instantly agreed and their mother gladly agreed to go too.

The FEAR was suddenly replaced with HOPE!

I sat praying in the hospital waiting room. Soon the doctor appeared with a big smile! *'She has pneumonia. We've started her on medication and she will need to stay in hospital for a while, but she should be fine. Would you like to see her?'* In that very short time she was like a new woman! She was sitting up smiling and waving excitedly. She not only recovered but went on to live for many years after that.

Later the Tennant Creek Council did return the pebble to the area from which it had been taken. In time the Christians dropped 'Devil's' from the names of the Marbles and Pebbles areas. They said, *'They are God's creation, and good for everyone to look at!'*

Thank God, He has given us all His Word — *'a lamp to our feet and a light for our path'* Psalm 119:105 and He is able to cast out all fear.

Baptism Sites

by Elizabeth Ham

What a joy it is to have believers ask for baptism! Soon after arriving in 1974, I was shown the baptism site — a section of the Tennant Creek, 11 kms from town. This was close to the 'church tree' where early missionaries gathered people together to hear the Good News of Jesus.

We were very surprised in 1984 to have a group of the Christians tell us that they wanted the planned baptism service to be at a waterhole closer to town. They took fellow worker *Jenny Benson* and myself to see the place and we were happy to go along with their suggested change. The baptism service held there was another wonderful occasion with eleven men and women declaring to all that they were following the Lord Jesus Christ!



original baptism site



new site

Many years later when I was serving in Darwin, a lady who was writing a book about Tennant rang me. She had previously asked me for photos from my time there. We met at a designated place, along with several Aboriginal friends from Tennant that had come with her. All went well until she brought up on the computer screen the pictures of the baptisms. It was the place the locals had requested they be held. *'WHAT is happening here? WHAT were you thinking — having Christian baptisms in an aboriginal sacred site?'*

I answered honestly that I had no knowledge until that very moment that it was a sacred site. Church leader Michael Jones was there with us and he spoke up. *'What Miss Ham says it true. She did not know. All us Aboriginal people knew it was a sacred site because that is our culture. It was our own decision to have baptisms there. We were saying 'We have a new Master now — Lord Jesus!'*

Jesus said, *'I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.'* Matthew 16:18

Elder of the Year



During NAIDOC week local areas give awards in a variety of categories to outstanding Indigenous people. This year in Tennant Creek, the prestigious male Elder award was given to *Mr Richard Driver*, one of the AIM Church leaders.

Unfortunately Richard was in hospital when the award was given. But while there, as at other times in hospital, he was busy serving the Lord. In the bed next to his was an old man who was also a family member. One day Richard was able to lead him to a personal faith in Christ. After that, each morning and before going off to sleep the old man could be heard praying to God. During the day he would often say, *'I love you Jesus.'*

It was such a joy to Richard and his daughter *Barbara* to see the old man share in the love of Jesus. And the praise he gave each day was a real encouragement to them. Within days, Jesus called him home. Barbara said, *'It was a sad but happy day to rejoice in the Lord taking this old man to heaven and out of his suffering. All honour and glory to God for how all things are taken care of by Him.'*

Connecting

by Rhonda Coats

I have often said we don't really do anything of importance — God does. He does all that is significant, spiritual and lasting in lives. But it is such a privilege when He gives us a front row seat when He is doing it! God has allowed me to have long term connections with people in many places which sometimes gives me that front row seat, and with that has come an abundance of joy.

Heading down the track to visit our centres and connect face to face is one of the things I enjoy so much. First stop — Katherine. What a joy it has been to be connected in friendship with *Greg and Debbie Piper* and through them with the Church God has been developing there.

Not far from Katherine is Barunga Community where I have had strong connections over the years.

There is a an American family living in Katherine and working with the Barunga Church and the ladies there have been asking me to meet them. That finally worked out and I enjoyed hours of sharing and connecting them to the AIM history there. We also discussed ways that might help ensure the people are connecting to Jesus and not to them.

In one place it meant so much to have one couple take time off work to spend the entire day with me. What a privilege it was to talk, laugh, pray, and look into God's Word together. In Tennant it was great to connect again with the church elders, then spend time in fellowship with some of their adult children.



Ladies lead the singing at Barunga

Borroloola has always been a place close to my heart. With some the connection is 3rd generation now. Spending time there as in other places and having friends share their joys and sorrows, problems and heartaches is a privilege. Sharing together in prayer and around God's Word, finding His comfort, challenge, and direction is even better!

In all the places, one of my main reasons for visiting is to try and connect people with resources and literature that will help them keep going and growing in their walk and service to Christ. I try to do this respectfully and in co-operation with fellow workers and local leaders and thereby seek to create a sense of 'team'. It is also good to have connections with groups like Summer Institute of Linguistics, Bible Society, and Global Recordings who are always keen to share new resources so I can show them to people.

Connecting the Christians and churches in particular regions is also something I am seeking to do. It is amazing how far they travel for conventions and funerals. Oh to see them travel more to connect with and encourage fellow Indigenous Christians!

It was a week full of connecting while 'Missionary of the Week' at **Sydney Missionary and Bible College**. From the first people I met upon arrival to



kids share an item at Barunga



Miriam Charlie and Muldoon Noble look over some resources



Great to see this family connected to the Borroloola Church

the last person I met at lunch time Friday, God had connections for us to discover!

There were the workers who thought I might not know of their small mission, only to find that I knew a board member and one of their fellow workers. Then there was *Elaine Webb* who worked at Retta Dixon Home and other AIM centres. She volunteers at SMBC and it was very special to share with her.

During the week it was great to re-connect with students *Alice Schroers* (TEAM partner in Alice Springs) and *Ellyn Rowe* who spent a few weeks with me last year — as was seeing *Peter* and *Karen Dixon's* son *Ben* who is also a student. Then to meet people with mutual connections in Parkes NSW, and family of long term supporters — God kept amazing me with His connections!

The students were very open and engaging about so many things, including seeing how God might connect them with Aboriginal people wherever they



Borroloola friends



Norma Timothy — a long-time friend busy making a pandanus basket

may go to live in Australia. One fellow shared where he lives and... yes! I know a Christian Aboriginal couple there. A phone call then an exchange of email addresses and the connection has begun! Similar connections took place during the week and I can only sit back and say *'Thank you Lord. Being connected to **You** and **Your** World Wide Web is amazing!'*

That was followed by the weekend at **REACHOUT** in Katoomba where the connecting continued. Hundreds of mostly young people were there to be challenged and encouraged about missions. Some good connections were made with many of them and information about our work and possibilities for them to connect with those areas were shared.

It was very special to see God making these and numerous other connections and sharing in the purposes of God in these different places.

'I Love the Aboriginal People'

by Young Seek Lee

This is my story about why I became a missionary for the Aboriginal people. When I was a student at theological seminary, I was working as an associate pastor at a church in Korea. One day I was praying at an early morning prayer meeting which happened at 5am every morning, just like in most Korean churches. After the prayer meeting everyone left, leaving me alone.

As I continued to pray I heard footsteps behind me. I thought that the senior pastor had left something behind and come back. When the footsteps stopped next to me I opened my eyes but there was no one there. I continued to pray. The footsteps approached me again and stopped beside me. I opened my eyes again but still nobody was there. When it happened the third time I did not open my eyes because I remembered the story of young Samuel in the Bible. Immediately I knelt and prayed, *'Lord speak for your servant is listening.'* At that time God said strongly to me, *'I love the Aboriginal people in Australia.'* I was very surprised and shocked. I could not understand. Why did God say that to me? However I realized at once that it was God's calling.

At that time I did not even know that the Aboriginal people existed in Australia. So that day I went to the library. I began searching for information about them, but I couldn't find much. I hung a big Australian flag on the wall because I did not know about the Aboriginal flag. From this time my wife and I began to pray for the Aboriginal people.

After graduating from seminary, my wife and I visited the mission training centre of my denomination called Global Mission Society. However we were rejected by them because they had an age limit policy of 35 years and at the time I was 39. I was so sad, because by that time I had been waiting in prayer for a long time. Sometimes I was disappointed, sometimes frustrated and sometimes thought of giving up my mission. However God demanded us to keep waiting and praying. Even though it was a heavy task for me, it made me stronger day by day. The following year I decided to go to Australia. At last, after ten years we arrived in Sydney in December 2000 which finally opened a new season in my life.



At first I tried to meet Aboriginal people but God blocked the way to go to them because although I had a passion for mission, I was not trained as a missionary. After three months I established 'Han-min Presbyterian Korean Church' in Blacktown. The church quickly grew to 120 members.

Another ten years passed and then God again told me to go out to the Aboriginal people. But I didn't obey because I had a very stable life in Sydney. I couldn't give it up. I asked God, *'Lord, could you wait for me until my son enters university? And how will this church go without me?'* God said to me, *'This church is not yours but mine.'*

My wife and I went back to Korea and we knocked again at the door of the mission training centre who had rejected us ten years before. After an interview, we were accepted as trainee missionaries. They saw our passion and the experience of church ministry in Sydney. After three months of training we came back to Sydney and Korean Mission for Indigenous Australians (KMIA) was organised by eight Korean pastors in the area. I joined KMIA and also participated in several AIM Mission Awareness Tours. Two years ago God led me again to go out to the mission field. At last I handed the church over to another pastor and I resigned in March 2014.

KMIA has now seconded us to work with AIM. My wife and I moved to Taree NSW to continue our preparation with language learning and to work with Aboriginal children.

Partnership Your Support With



The requested amount of \$10 per year helps fund the printing and posting of this quarterly magazine.