



September — November 2020

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Planting — Partnering — Participating



'The Eyes Have It'
page 5

Disasters and God's Work

a message from
Acting General Director Cliff Letcher

Where do I start? So much turmoil has impacted us in the last twelve months. We've had changes in AIM that has led to my renewed involvement as Acting General Director. Very soon after we were impacted by the massive fires which, while in the end not causing us any loss personally, it did mean we suffered months of smoke and a couple of evacuations as a precaution. For many others it was much more serious. Then came the floods for many, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As I have been reflecting on these things in recent months I have realised that it is not only here in Australia that there has been disaster after disaster but in Africa and Pakistan they have been faced with devastating locust plagues. Others have continued to face persecution, terrorism and war. More recently there has been the massive explosion in Beirut. Economies are being devastated. The world is certainly in turmoil. While the world has faced these sorts of challenges in the past, we personally have not had to face them on this scale.

This has led me to reflect on the vast numbers of people yet to hear the Gospel. There are many people groups who don't have any of God's Word in their language nor do they have anyone bringing our Lord's Word and love in person. What are we to make of that? Remember our Lord said, *'Pray that the Lord of the harvest will thrust out workers...'* How can the unreached be reached if there is no money to send workers and if workers cannot travel?

Here in Australia our AIM work has been hindered by travel restrictions. Workers have not been able to freely access communities they would normally visit and we have not been able to undertake some planned promotional meetings where we could challenge people to be involved with the Indigenous Church.

The AIM Council has been continuing to work on restructuring and looking for a new General Director. That has not been easy given the restrictions we all face. What does the future hold? We don't know.

James reminds us that we cannot plan with certainty. We must always be making our plans in prayerful submission to our Lord. We believe He is the Sovereign King. These disasters are not outside His control. He has said there will be people from every tribe, tongue and nation in His Kingdom so we continue to look to Him to direct our steps both personally and as a mission organisation.

Please continue to stand with us in prayer and continue to uphold the Indigenous Church as we all strive to serve Him in faithful obedience. It is easy to get discouraged at times but we must remember God will work His purposes out and the 'gates of hell' will not defeat His Kingdom work. God is using the current circumstances to further this work — we don't always know or see how, but we trust Him and His Word that it is so.





AIM is seeking a new General Director

(A full-time position based in Sydney)

We are an evangelical mission organisation who has partnered and participated in Gospel ministry with the Aboriginal people of Australia for the past 114 years.

We are seeking to appoint a mature Christian leader as the General Director. Reporting to the AIM Council, this key executive leadership position provides essential guidance and oversight across the organisation for mission and management.

To be successful in this role you will have:

- A passion and commitment for the development of the Indigenous Church
- Minimum of 2 years theological training (desirable)
- Demonstrated excellent communication and leadership skills with the ability to work as a member of the council
- Experience working closely with Indigenous people (desirable)
- A willingness to raise part of your financial support

Key areas of responsibilities:

- Give initiative, guidance and direction to the overall work of AIM
- Speak on behalf of AIM to the wider Church
- Represent AIM at appropriate forums, and before government agencies
- Oversee the ministries of AIM representatives
- Recruit new personnel in consultation with the Field Director and Representatives
- Develop and maintain strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations

**To apply for this key role, please forward your CV and cover letter to:
Yane Damanik at AIM.director@mail.com For further information
please call Yane on 0424 743 034**

Rollercoaster Ride

by Grace Wright

Rollercoasters. I've never liked them. Actually, I wouldn't know because I've never been on one because just thinking about it makes me feel nauseous! So when someone described our family's last couple of years as a rollercoaster ride, I had to agree. There have been many times when I've felt anxious, confused and plain dizzy trying to figure out what God is doing in our lives.

We moved down to Rutherglen Vic on the Vic/NSW border at the end of 2017 for a sabbatical 'year' from the field. And yes, that was about two and a half years ago. It kind of blew out for various reasons. When we landed, Jono discovered he had Ross River virus and was flat on his back for a while. When he recovered he had a year of theological study to complete, extra hard work because it was by correspondence. When we felt we were still too exhausted and not ready to go back up north, it was time to find work. And after dozens of job applications, there was still no job. Then suddenly out of nowhere a ministry opportunity of chaplaincy in two NSW primary schools dropped into our laps. I also found work at the local primary school. The rollercoaster was on the way up!

Throughout our time here we have all struggled with culture shock in different ways. It was so different at school, at church and in the way people related to each other. There was the tension between providing our kids with some stability and yearning to be back in a ministry we are still passionate about and where we feel we ultimately fit. Where to go? When to go? We decided to stay in Rutherglen another year.

And so 2020 arrived, first with bushfires all around, the sky full of smoke for months. Following closely behind was Covid-19. Then we suddenly had to leave the house we were renting and quickly find another. The rollercoaster was on one of those nauseous plunges! Now every week the lockdown restrictions change. Will the kids be at school or learning from home? How will I help them with that while still working part-time in at the local primary school? Will Jono be able to cross the border into NSW this week for his work? The rollercoaster is going around one of those loop-the-loop bits!

And as my anxiety climbs and my confusion waxes and wanes about what we should be doing this week let alone in the future, I need to hang on to promises such as the one in Proverbs 3:5,6:

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.'

We are so conscious of God smoothing the way for us in every up and down of life. We can see how He has made our path straight through many years and we know we can trust Him with today and every day into the future. I guess my rollercoaster is straighter than I think! We appreciate your prayers for our family that God will give us more faith and more wisdom as we follow His straight path.



**Manoah,
Elijah, Grace, Tjanara, and Jono Wright**

The Eyes Have It

by Karen Dixon

A **ngry eyes**, staring at me from behind the empty desk with its contents lying on the floor where they've been thrown. A few choice words have been thrown around too. Behind the confrontation is the pain and frustration — *'Why do I have to be here? It's not fair. I'm dumb'*.

Excited eyes, shining out with the glow of success — *'I got it right! I can do it! I couldn't do it before, but I can now!'* And every little win, we will celebrate.

Confused eyes, wanting to come up with the elusive, expected response but turning away in shame because the teacher's hopeful, encouraging smile seems like an accusation of stupidity. *'I knew it yesterday, but trauma, FASD*, or maybe both (getting a diagnosis is so difficult) mean that I'm firing one day and the next I just don't know'*. (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder)

Proud eyes, on the faces of the Aboriginal language teachers on their first day back after their Covid-19 absence. The children are singing a Warumungu song the ladies wrote and recorded before they had to stop coming. The class is a mixed bunch of non-aboriginal children and aboriginal children from different language groups, but they are all singing unaided with confidence and enjoyment.

My eyes — daily pray will be the eyes of Jesus to see the children as He sees them - to give them high expectations because they have the right and the ability to learn. To give them the support they

need so that they are not pushed beyond their limit and they know it is okay to have an off day. There are moments when I get there.

I am convinced that giving children an effective education in a culturally sensitive way

is a matter of justice in the contemporary world, and as such is close to God's heart. In spite of a school culture which genuinely tries to value all children and their backgrounds, there is still entrenched injustice. As well as systems which can be unbending, schools are staffed by people like me who bring all their own personal and cultural baggage.

The bigger challenge is that education, though valuable, can only go so far. Although our church lockdown was brief, not many children have returned to Sunday School. We long to share with our kids that only in Jesus can they find not merely justice, but the hope and the power to be the people God made them to be.



Are you a teacher, nurse, or in some type of work that God wants to use as His eyes, hands and feet, among the Aboriginal people?

Many of our AIM Churches would benefit from having dedicated and sensitive people like Karen working in the town or community and also encouraging the believers. Are you willing to work alongside and not in the lead, giving encouragement as they grow in their faith and in serving Him in their communities?

Contact Cliff Letcher (Acting General Director) for more information: cliff.letcher66@gmail.com

What Covid-19 has meant for us ...

Richard and Sue Davies

At this time of year we are usually back in Canteen Creek for 5+ months but we are still in Cootamundra. While this is a little frustrating, we have continued to be busy:

- writing Bible studies and Sunday school materials
- translating the Bible
- having pretty constant contact via social media and telephone

There have been some interesting spin-offs from this difficult time.

1. The Canteen Creek church continues to minister to people in the community and are having fellowship with the Epenarra church. One woman said, 'We realised that we shouldn't depend on you so much, but trust God and do more things for ourselves.' We feel very positive about this.

From the time the Northern Territory borders were closed, the church in Canteen Creek has seen a number of people commit or re-dedicate their lives to Christ. Numbers of people at Bible studies and prayer meetings have increased.

During this renewed interest in Christian living, the people decided that they would like to travel to a number of the Alyawarr speaking communities in the Barkly/Sandover districts. They produced a play, painted teaching on canvas and prepared messages to share. They had also invited some of the Epenarra ladies to join them on 'outreach'.

The plans were going well for the team until the leaders realised that some of the cars weren't registered and a number of the drivers were unlicensed. They determined that if they were going to do the Lord's work, they should obey the law, and so they have set about getting all the cars registered



and drivers licensed. We were sad that their plans had to be postponed, but delighted at their maturity. They now plan to do what was going to be a big trip, in several shorter trips.

2. If we were in Canteen Creek, we would be checking the PEV (Plain English Version) text we are translating with the people. But, as we can't be there, we are sending draft portions of text to people in Canteen Creek, Tennant Creek and recently to Yuendumu so that the local people can read it and give us feedback on readability and comprehension issues. This isn't as efficient as face to face contact, but it is the best we can do. We plan to have internet and telephone conferences with the various groups after they finish each piece of text.

When the PEV was first developed, it was assumed that there would be only one version. Sue and I would write our text in an appropriate way for the people we lived with, and it was then submitted to the project supervisor for editing. This resulted in the text being altered to be appropriate for the Arnhem Land people that he worked with. It became clear that the people from Arnhem Land speak English differently from the more southern people.

In July 2019 in consultation with the Darwin AUSIL director it was decided to produce portions of the Bible in appropriate English for the more southern readers - from Borroloola to Alice Springs. The books of the PEV 'Barkly Edition' that we are working on are Genesis, Exodus (portions), Ruth, Esther, Mark, John and Hebrews.

some thoughts

3. People have asked us if we are struggling with the isolation from church, family and social gatherings. The truth is that, in a way, we are used to being isolated, though when we lived in community we had plenty of 'family' drop in for a chat.

We have missed face to face contact with church family here in Coota, and other supporting churches that we visit, but have been encouraged and challenged by some excellent sermons streamed online. We have also been able to have Zoom conferences with our home church and attend their weekly Bible study/Community group.

Recently it was great to meet up and have a Zoom chat with the team from Sydney Missionary and Bible College that were going to visit Canteen Creek this year. In September we are supposed to be living in at SMBC as Missionaries of the Week and giving a presentation. Instead the

presentation will be done by Zoom conferencing. How technology helps us at times!

Like everyone else, we grieve that we cannot visit our sons and their families in Darwin, Alice Springs and New Zealand but we look forward to a time when we are able to do that. We are in pretty constant contact with them all, via telephone and social media. Seeing the funny things the grandchildren get up to and being able to read a storybook to them by video link is a lot of fun.

We are constantly praising God that Covid 19 hasn't impacted the Aboriginal communities in the NT. Please join with us to pray God's continuing protection for them. Please also pray that people would abide by the Government laws and recommendations.

Please continue to pray for AIM, that the Council would be led and guided by the Holy Spirit as to how to help and guide the AIM churches as they seek to minister to their people.

Passing of Judy Kuss

It was with sadness we received the news of former worker *Judy Kuss* passing into the presence of her Lord 12th August. '*Judy always took some time to come sit with us and see how we were at conferences*' recalled an Aboriginal lady. She had a faithful ministry especially among the women where she and Maurice served with AIM from 1982-2005 — Inala, Rockhampton, then Camooweal and the large outreach area from there. Countless children heard about Jesus through her years of Sunday school and RI teaching as well.

Judy travelled with *Maurice* and complemented his work and ministry while he was area then field superintendent. Her hospitality was extended to all who called in to see them, whether it was for a cuppa, a meal, or an overnight stay.

Jono and Grace Wright who followed them in the Camooweal ministry shared the following:

'Hello, Maurice speaking ... I'll just get Judy.' And so begins another of many phone conversations that *Judy* had with women from Camooweal and remote communities. This was the ministry we stepped into when the *Kusses* retired. Both *Maurice* and *Judy* mentored us into that role, introducing us to people

in Camooweal and communities down the Plenty Highway, sharing their wisdom and experience of indigenous ministry gathered over many years.

Judy's prayer and counselling ministry in person and over the phone had a great impact across a wide area, particularly among the ladies. So it was with great sadness that we heard of Judy passing into glory. How wonderful it must be for Judy to be reunited now with so many of those she loved and served.

The sympathy and prayers of the AIM family are extended to *Maurice* as he begins to adjust to life without her.



Newspots

Health

Vincent Charlie was flown into Darwin in late July for medical attention. While in hospital he also suffered a stroke. We are grateful that he has been making good progress towards a full recovery. Please continue to pray for him and for the Borroloola Church with the ongoing need of other church leadership to be raised up and involved in serving Jesus in this area.



Please pray for *John Keane* who was making daily progress from the radiation and chemotherapy treatments, then suffered a setback in mid-July. He contracted a rare virus which attacks the nerves, leaving him with numbness and unable to use his legs. He is currently in Westmead Hospital for rehab and Rita shared: *It will be a long road to get the nerves repaired but he was recently able to walk 10 metres with a frame. He is in lockdown (due to Covid-19 restrictions) so I can only see him through the door. It is with the Lord's strength we face each day. We value your prayers.'*

Sympathy

It was with sadness we received the news of the tragic passing of *Jo Mihalic* who died in a house fire 12th May. She had been a school teacher in Walgett NSW for many years, was involved in fostering, and was a tremendous support to the church and Christians in that area. Jo carried on the Sunday school ministry at Ginghi and Namoi when the older aboriginal ladies could no longer do it, would take the Christian session on the local radio station, and supported and encouraged wherever possible.

Following her retirement in 2004 she visited Borroloola and then went back in 2006 and spent nearly a year there doing a variety of things. She helped home school the then missionaries kids, helped with Christian local radio sessions, running kids nights and sleep overs and even got involved



in the community by joining the Fire, Emergency and Rural Services — manning the phone, making sandwiches, etc.

She served the Lord with gladness and faithfulness and will be greatly missed, especially in the Walgett and Lightning Ridge areas.



The AIM extends sympathy to *Bob and Lucy Quinn* and family following the death of his father 23rd June — his 85th birthday. Bob and other family members had enjoyed speaking with him on the day. They were grateful to the Lord that despite Covid-19 restrictions, they were able to travel up to Queensland and attend his service, and have some important time together with family.

Alice Springs

Every Wednesday morning from 5:30-7, a group is gathering at the AIM building in Alice Springs. They are praying for God's work among the Aboriginal people in and around the Alice Springs area, and across the AIM field. A kids club for aboriginal youth is held in another church on Tuesdays and ladies Bible study is held on Sunday afternoons. Pray that those involved will have the health and strength to do their secular work as well as continue on in these important ministries.

Award

Katherine Church leader *Lisa Mumbin* has been awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for 'service to the Indigenous community of the Northern Territory.' While to her it came as a surprise, it seems well deserved. She not only has been serving as a church leader for many years, but has been chair of the Jawoyn Association in two stints for about 18 years, is a member of the Northern Land Council, chairs the Wurli Wurlinjang Health Service, the Nitmiluk Parks Board and is a director of the Godinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Culture Centre.



Please pray for strength, health, and wisdom for Lisa in using her time and abilities for serving God and her community.

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