



March – May 2021

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Planting – Partnering – Participating

God IS at Work!

See article pages 2-3



What on Earth ...?

by acting General Director Cliff Letcher

“What on earth is God doing?” Have you ever asked this question? I have for much of 2020, and that’s without thinking about Covid. I was asked to help AIM as acting General Director back in September 2019, while a new General Director was found. *‘Just a few months!’* I thought. As those few months dragged out and no provision of a GD was evident I began to ask myself (and our God) *‘Is God wanting to close AIM down and do something totally different in Indigenous ministry?’*

During this time many challenges arose and reinforced my question. I’m not naturally gifted in administration so that increased the challenge. The Federal Government asked us to join the National Redress Scheme. This Scheme had come out of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse which had brought out evidence of abuse in the Retta Dixon Home (closed in 1980). Last year a court case also began against AIM from a victim of sexual abuse, and this was followed later in the year by another potential case.

The sins of some in past generations continue to challenge the ability of AIM to continue its ministry today. AIM paid out compensation in an earlier court case, and it seemed likely we were going to be pushed to fund further compensation. Following the earlier compensation payout most of our assets are found in church properties where Indigenous churches meet and worship. AIM has long understood those properties belonged to those churches. We simply act as trustees for the purpose of handling titles. There seemed to be great potential for further tensions to arise with people in AIM churches feeling threatened by the thought of the loss of their property.

Thankfully, after a lot of hard work with the National Redress Scheme personnel, AIM has been declared to not have the financial resources to service the potential claims against us through that scheme. However, the potential for the current court case and future cases still exist. The way the court may rule in regard to the church properties remains a legal nightmare.

The NRS and existing court case has involved considerable research by me of records now held

in the State Library of NSW. The court required evidence that could only be found in our records and it was our responsibility to provide it. It was tempting to say, *‘Would it be easier to just not defend the case?’* However our solicitor pointed out that not defending would mean automatic admission of liability which meant the court would be likely set a penalty way above our capacity to pay. The way in which the plaintiff has presented his case is very complicated and has already cost us a lot in legal fees. We are expecting some clarity about this case in a hearing around the time of writing.

So again the question, **‘What is God doing?’** ... That has weighed heavily on my mind and heart. I’m grateful that the AIM Council has maintained the belief that we are to continue to push on in Indigenous ministry. The need and opportunities are great. AIM has a long history and while that history has become tainted by a few, especially in the minds of some people, there has been much that has honoured our Lord. Many have been brought into the Kingdom of God despite the human failures.

So if AIM is to continue, **what is the way forward?** While it has been challenging trying to determine this and being forced to use only video conferencing for much of the year, the Council has been working to reassess our vision and purpose as an organisation.

Before Covid we gathered in Canberra with a consultant who helped us look at our structure and challenged us to re-examine our reason for existence. Despite all the distractions and challenges mentioned above we have made some progress. Having gained some clarity in why our Lord wants us to continue, we will need the personnel on council and the field to move forward to achieve our purpose. And the need of a new General Director became increasingly clear.



‘What is God doing?’ While I was struggling with His apparent delay, God has been working. We are finally able to announce the appointment of a new General Director from the 15th February. **Lloyd Ollerenshaw** will be joining our team in this capacity. With some existing commitments the initial phase will be part time.

Lloyd spent much of his early years on an apple orchard in NSW, where he attended Sunday school run by *Audrey and Jim Davey* who had been AIM missionaries at Philip Creek and Newcastle Waters in the NT. They were spiritual parents to Lloyd. Through them he began his journey of awareness of the needs for ministry amongst Indigenous Australians so that, from the age of eleven, he had a sense of call to this work.

After the death of Lloyd’s father the family moved to Canberra where he was to meet his wife *Clara*. She grew up in Coolamon in a large but dysfunctional family. Sunday school was a time when Clara was influenced towards mission work from the age of seven or eight by a missionary lady who had served on Elcho Island. Even in those difficult early years Clara felt the covering of God upon her.

Eventually Lloyd trained as a teacher and Clara a pre-school teacher. Because of their scholarships they were obligated to serve in the NT and did so in various Aboriginal communities. After marriage they found themselves teaching in some of the communities where Baptist mission work was carried out. Eventually this led to Lloyd training at the Baptist College in Queensland where they gained some pastoral experience then joined the Baptist mission serving in the NT for eighteen years. This was followed by a return to NSW and service at the Shellharbour Baptist Church for nineteen years.

Following a time of rest and renewal, Lloyd began to seek what God would have him do next as he still



Lloyd and Clara Ollerenshaw

had a burning desire to continue in service for the Lord. While Lloyd and Clara knew the work of AIM he never considered working with us until an AIM prayer supporter in Perth rang and asked him to apply for the position of General Director. Lloyd was not keen to do so, but after further communication from this faithful supporter — and the faithful prayers of so many others — Lloyd applied and has been accepted by the AIM Council.

‘Oh you of little faith Cliff!’ **God IS at work!** I thank you for your ongoing interest and support of AIM. In particular I want to thank you for praying for *Carolyn* and myself as we have endeavoured to keep the ‘nuts and bolts’ of AIM working. In our modern world there is so much necessary administrative work. The responsibility for this belongs to the General Director. Please pray that the Lord will provide an administrative assistant who can help Lloyd, allowing him to work with the AIM Council to develop the vision they have for the future. **A Commissioning Service for the Ollerenshaws will be held at Wagga Wagga Baptist Church 18th April.**



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Covid, Canberra, The Creek

by Peter Dixon

Those with family and friends in other parts of the world intimately know how blessed Australia has been in the Covid-19 pandemic. Most blessed has been the Northern Territory — largely through the warnings from Aboriginal Medical Services which, thanks be to God, also alerted the rest of Australia.

In spite of potential outbreaks, *Karen* and I did want to meet with family in Sydney and Newcastle over the Christmas break and so made plans with enough time to allow for quarantine (if necessary) before school term started. We are thankful that we were able to change to transit through to Canberra when the Sydney area was declared a Covid 'hotspot'. There we were looked after by our second son *Tim* and his wife *Sarah*. They had been planning to meet lots of family in Sydney, too. We were so glad to spend time with grandsons *Luke* (nearly 4) and just-turned-1 *Harvey* who came to accept our laps as okay.

We were also blessed to be able to visit Peter's older brother, *Brian* in Eden. Brian regularly shares fellowship on Sunday evenings with the AEF church pastored by *Ozzie Cruse*, and also teaches Scripture with a former Church Army worker who was profoundly impacted by an AIM visit in 1990 which included *Richard Driver* and *David Duggie* who shared teaching using the iconograph pictures.

When we realised that Sydney was not going to become a 'cool spot' for the Northern Territory, we were able to get to Alice Springs earlier for a bit of rest, including fellowship at Alice Springs Baptist Church.

The first week back in Tennant Creek was a court week which included a visit from *David Moore* to get to know the local Aboriginal Interpreter Service. David was one of the Alyawarr Bible Translators and



Brian, Peter, and Karen Dixon

now with his wife *Sue* (Principal of Alice Springs Language Centre) is also involved in language work in the Alice Springs Schools. So Karen was able to have a good discussion about the Primary School Warumungu program.

Following a large turnover of staff from last year, Karen has accepted being a Senior Teacher of the Early Years for the first semester. In her immediate team are four young teachers from Victoria. The school held extra orientation for all the new teaching staff (about half the cohort), but one was heard to say that nothing said could have prepared them for the completely different reality in the classroom.

This year good discussions have been started with the Language Centre for help with the school language program. The Language Centre also runs the School Attendance Program and some of the Aboriginal attendance workers (who help kids get to school) are also now working during the day in classrooms.

The weather has been very humid with a good wet season at last. The church bus air-conditioner got repaired, but needs some adjustment — however the mechanic is not available all the time. The church leaders are wanting to get out to the town camps but the threat of rain is making that tricky.

Thank you for your prayers.



Council Member David Chambers

Interviewed by Yane Damanik

David Chambers is an Indigenous leader of the AIM Rockhampton Church. He is also the CEO of the AIM Queensland Church Council and a member of the AIM Council. He and his wife Fay have 4 adult children.

Tell us a bit about yourself. My parents are from Cherbourg and left there at separate times. They married in Brisbane and raised their 5 children there. We went to Sunday school until we started in sports which were played on Sundays. We spent many holidays visiting family in Cherbourg and my nana was a member of the AIM church there. I became a Christian in 1993. I was a trained tradesman and worked as a tradie, then a bus driver, and a groundsman at a school in Brisbane. When I moved to Rockhampton, I trained and worked as a school chaplain. Rockhampton AIM is my home church. I served there for 12 years before moving to Inala for 5 years. I heard God's call to return to the Rockhampton Church, so I have been here for the last 13 years.

What has helped you as a leader? I had a good mentor, *Stan Werner*. He always encouraged me to get up and do things. I felt shame at first. We Murri fellas always feel shame. But Stan would make us get up and share a verse. Because of that I became more confident each time I did get up.

What is challenging in your role as a church leader? The challenge for the church today is to live and operate in the way the early church in Acts 2 did. At that time, people shared together and were united. How can we do that now in our local church? We need to learn to give. There are a lot of changes now, even in the way you give financially, you can just do direct debit, you know. Things are changing and the Aboriginal church must keep up but at the same time we need to follow the model of the early church. The gospel is still the same.

How long have you served on AIM Council and why did you join? I joined in 2018 as a representative of AIM QCC. Another reason was to be an example to others so they too are willing to branch out of their comfort zone and interact with other Christians, because really we are all a big family of God, no



matter your nationality. Another reason is I hope to contribute to the work of AIM.

What is your experience as a council member? Now I know how to do zoom meetings which is really good. I also see that the council is more united. We had gone through tough times together, particularly in the last couple of years. But God was in it and we are now in the same mind going forward. It's like what Psalm 133 says *'brethren dwelling together in unity'*. I felt the time when our Council refocused and discussed our mission and vision statement was really helpful.

What is your hope for this year? The Rapture would be good!

As a church leader, I would like to develop discipleship training. We have people coming to church, but they are not discipled and so in hard times they fall away. They need discipleship. It takes time but it needs to be done. I did discipleship training and I'd like to develop this program to help our people exercise their faith and become mature in their Christian life. I also hope that we can have a ministry in Brisbane south and north. There are lots of Aboriginal people so there are big ministry opportunities.

As a council member, I hope we continue being united and move forward no matter how slow, but we should not stay still. We must stick to our vision. A lot of things can happen, but we need to keep our vision statement in mind and keep moving forward.

Returned from Rest

by David Cox, Dubbo Family Church

It was a great blessing to be able to pause in 2020 and rest. I had become tired and thought it may have been time to leave Dubbo until a friend counselled me concerning a sabbatical. This was something I had not considered but liked the idea. I contacted my friend who works at Christ College, arranged some support and the rest, as they say is history.

We arrived in Sydney late January and began college soon after. At first Rose and I stayed with a friend who was willing to have us as guests for the entire year, very generous. However, given my state of mind, I thought our own place would be better, which we had secured by the end of February.

At first, I found the social aspect of college life very challenging and was beginning to feel overwhelmed by it all, then came covid! The lock down was an inconvenience for many but timely for myself. Studies moved on-line which gave me time and space to familiarise myself with fellow students. When the face to face lectures resumed in the second semester, I was much more at ease. There was a time when the library was unable to open, which made study difficult, but it wasn't long and we were back.

The studies were challenging without being laborious and it was good for me to have something to focus my mind on. If I had taken a year off and not studied I am convinced I would have not rested as well.

So, we are back in Dubbo. I am looking forward to the year ahead. We have administrative matters



to clear up, such as updating and streamlining the church constitution. I am hoping this will be finalised by the end of February.

There is a strong possibility of mentoring a brother for a three year period. I am still working out support and a study program. I am hoping we may be able to put him through a diploma program at Christ College. We are attempting a July start date. Pray for this possibility.

When I look back over diary entries, I realise I was in quite a bad place, but, Praise the Lord, I am moving forward and glad to be serving our Master once again in this capacity. A big thank you to everyone who upheld us in prayer and continue to do so. Pray for another generation of leadership to be raised up for the Dubbo Church, which I am confident the Head of the Church will do.

Charles Sturt University has recently established a Foundation Scholarship for a continuing student in honour of the late *Robert Taylor*. Robbie had been part of the Dubbo Family Church since his early years. *David Cox* had spent many many hours discipling, counselling, and mentoring him. Robbie had attended Dubbo Christian School and served in the school representative council while working at Woolies and volunteering with Dubbo rescue squad

and St Johns ambulance. He completed his bachelor of Nursing then secured a position at Dubbo Base Hospital as a Registered Nurse, and was accepted in the Master's degree program at Charles Sturt University before his sudden and unexpected death in October 2016. It is good to know that his memory, achievements and influence are being remembered by the University through the scholarship.

Darwin Connections

by Rhonda Coats

We continue to be very grateful that we remain untouched by Covid19 here in the Territory, but I have felt its sting from half way around the world. The number of cases across the USA has been beyond comprehension. Then in January, it became personal. Suddenly it changed from numbers to a name.

Harry and my dad connected during WW2 and he became a lifelong family friend. He was a faithful godly man and generous supporter. Sadly he contracted Covid19 and passed away in January without family able to be by his side. With the overseas mail being so slow, it so happened I received his Christmas card the day he died. The message was: *This Christmas, as you consider all the awesome things that have come to you through Jesus, God's perfect gift, remember that it is but a taste of all the good things that are yet to come.* Praise God, Harry now knows all those good things!

Borroloola, Barunga, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Marlinja. It has been so good to connect with friends from these places who visited Darwin over recent months. The Borroloola mob usually sit in the same place in the shopping centre. I call it the Borroloola land claim.



One day I became aware of two people standing in front of our table. What a great surprise to see *Raymond and Thelma Dixon* from Marlinja! It had been a very long time since we had connected. It was

good having them share about the recent loss of his brother, then we thanked the Lord together that he had been walking with Jesus and is now with Him. And now, until their mobile gets lost, permanently borrowed or broken, it is good to be connected through calls again!

Jocelyn McCartney from Barunga was in hospital and it was good to connect in person rather than through our usual phone calls.

It was heart wrenching to be called into ICU to support the family of a 38 year old man who had suffered a heart attack after dialysis in late January. I have had connections with several generations of this family. Sadly he passed away the next morning leaving behind his wife of 17 years, and their 3 young teens.



When I walked out of ICU that day I found friends from the Katherine Church. Late last year *Lisa Mumbin* had lost a sister, and now the family was here for another sister. The situation was especially difficult for *Gary* who had been married to the deceased sister. The doctor asked if they wanted the hospital chaplain to come. Lisa told him they had 'our Christian friend' in Darwin, but that she and Noel were leaders in their church, and they felt they were able to handle the situation at that time. **How good is that!!** I was over the moon with that confidence, and responsibility!!

An email from *Peter Dixon* saw me tracking down a young lady from Tennant in ICU. Knowing her mother, grandmother, and aunties brought me immediate connection. It was good to share with *Paulina* and her husband. At the time of writing she was still in hospital hoping to resume cancer treatments soon. It is good to be connected with fellow workers as well as the patients during these times.

It was a shock to have a call that *Vincent Charlie* had been flown back into hospital in early February. Thankfully there was nothing sinister and he was flown home after a few days.

It has been good to connect with fellow members during our ZOOM Council meetings. We trust the way will be clear this year allowing us to re-connect in person without fear of Covid or the need to quarantine.

Pray that I will stay well connected to Jesus, and will help others be well connected with Him too.

Brewarrina Reflections

by **Becky Thompson, SMBC student**

We all have a covid story to tell. Mine included a call from AIM telling me of an opportunity to go out to Brewarrina to observe and learn from my Aboriginal brothers and sisters in Christ.

I am a student at Sydney Missionary Bible College (SMBC) in my final year of studies. I have always wanted to go overseas to do cross-cultural mission long-term, but with many missionaries having to return to their home country and teams no longer together because of Covid, I started to explore other options for ministry in Australia. Having heard a couple from AIM speak at a SMBC event, I was encouraged to explore the possibility of serving amongst an Aboriginal community, using my Primary teaching background. The only thing was that I have not had any experience working amongst an Aboriginal community and so I contacted AIM to see if there was a place I could learn from. After contacting AIM, they connected me with *Ike Gordon* who has been faithfully serving the Christian community in Brewarrina for many years.

Not knowing anyone in town, except via a phone call, I set out on the long road trip to spend two weeks living amongst this community. During the

day I spent my time at the local pool where *Ike's* daughter *Julie* works, observing the community, listening to people's stories and helping *Julie* in the kitchen cooking hot chips. I also attended the women's Bible study and local church

services. It was such a privilege sharing life with the Gordons and the Christian community in Brewarrina. I especially enjoyed living and working with *Julie*. Learning from her story and example of faith in the different seasons of life was a real honour.

It is my prayer this year that I would not only have open eyes, but an open and willing heart to trust and obey God – not out of obligation, but because I love my Heavenly Father. I believe this trip to Brewarrina was certainly one of the many ways God is answering this prayer. There are many people in this town with incredible stories to tell, whose love for God permeates everything they do. I hope to follow in their example as I walk by faith in whatever place God leads me to serve after College.



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The Pilliga town hall has been booked for the weekend of 27th-28th March. *Isaac (Ike) Gordon* is planning to hold meetings and support the ministry of *Henry Louie* there. They trust this will be a great time of sharing God's Word to open hearts the weekend before the Rivers Convention gets underway.

Some of those who will be supporting *Ike* during the Rivers Convention are *Henry Louie*, *Across the Divide* team led by *Rob Alley*, *Paul and Erin Strahan* from Moree along with others from Sydney and Gosford.

The Convention will conclude with three days of meetings in Dubbo where the group will be teaming up with well-known evangelist *Bill Newman*.

Please follow the Convention and the leaders with your prayers.

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