

September – November 2021



AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Strong Aboriginal Churches



Henry from Canteen Creek
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'If the Lord Wants'

by Cliff Letcher

In June, a few days prior to setting out for the Northern Territory, we sent out a prayer letter with our plans for our final trip on behalf of AIM. It was to provide pastoral care and be a formal farewell from my various roles within AIM over many years. The letter began with the verses from James 4:13-15. *Some of you say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money. But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away. So you should say, 'If the Lord wants, we will live and do this or that'."*

Yes, we made our plans, worked out our itinerary, left our home with the Covid cases mainly in eastern Sydney suburbs, only to find as we arrived in the NT that the whole of greater Sydney (including the Blue Mountains) was placed in lockdown. It did not matter that we left there before the lockdown. We were still required to undertake hotel quarantine in Alice Springs. Fortunately, our days travelling after leaving home were counted so it meant only nine days in quarantine, but that changed our planned itinerary dramatically.

'If the Lord wants'... The reality was that we both needed some quiet time to relax and be refreshed after a great deal of busyness. We both had some work to do on our computers and we were able to take time to be quiet and rest. I wonder how you see all the changes to your plans as Covid again interrupts our lives preventing us achieving our



Cliff with Raymond Dixon from Marlinja NT

plans, preventing us from visiting family and friends, even for some preventing them working.

Despite the revised itinerary I have still managed to visit all the places we intended visiting but will be arriving home later than originally expected. Sadly, *Carolyn* had to miss visiting some of these places due to her need to fly home for work.

So, what is my response to this trip? I first visited our AIM work back in 1994 as the 'new boy' seeking to learn about AIM, its history, its work and most of all its people. At one level it's a challenge to see people who were young and vibrant back then now showing the limitations of age; the grey hair, the frail bodies, along with the gaps left by those who have gone to be with their Lord.

It's also a challenge to see many of the social problems and health issues continuing to plague Aboriginal people. It's also disheartening to see the AIM workforce diminished in numbers. There is still the need for the right sort of people who can come



Pray that God will fill the many empty seats in Borroloola with new followers of Jesus

and sit alongside Aboriginal people and be a source of encouragement and connection to resources. We continue to ask you to *'pray to the Lord of the harvest to push out workers into His harvest field'*.

The age of the leadership in many of the churches is a challenge, as it is in many churches around the country. We long to see many younger people turning to the Lord and growing to maturity, taking up the challenge of using their gifts in the work of God's Kingdom.

In the middle of these disheartening things there are encouragements, such as finding many people who have remained close to our Lord, walking consistently as witnesses for Him in difficult and challenging places. This morning, as I shared time with just a couple of faithful Christians in Camooweal, I heard how much a believing man was valued as a member of a road gang camped some distance from town. He is there as one of the work team but it is evident that he is like a chaplain providing others with support and help.

Clearly, property maintenance is an ongoing demand on AIM resources. In the harsh outback climate property maintenance is a constant challenge. We were certainly grateful that former council member *Neil Bootes* made two trips from Sydney to Walgett

(before covid lockdown of course!) to get that property back up to a good standard.

Covid has brought a great deal of fear to many Aboriginal communities. No doubt that if it gets into any of these communities it will cause a great deal of havoc due to the already challenging health issues faced by many. Unfortunately, there have been those (some in the name of Christ) who promote the anti-vaccination fear. Large numbers of Aboriginal people have heard these false rumours that have created a real fear of vaccination. This has made the job of providing community protection so much harder. Again, it has been encouraging to find a number of our Aboriginal Christian leaders have been at the forefront of promoting the need and the value as well as the safety of having the vaccine.

While, once again, I have moved into retirement, the AIM Council have asked me to remain on the Council for the time being so I will be continuing to take an active interest and involvement in the work of AIM. Having family in the NT we are anticipating being able to visit many of the places in future while health remains. But these visits will be as a friend not as an AIM worker. But of course those dreams or plans must always be tempered by the realisation that they will only happen **'if the Lord wants'**.



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Strong Aboriginal Churches

After many special meetings and with heavy hearts, in agreement with Lloyd Ollerenshaw, the AIM Council came to the following decision:

We are in mutual agreement with Lloyd (Ollerenshaw) that his being in the General Director role is not a good fit for either of us at this time.

We therefore release Lloyd (and Clara) from that role so that his God-given gifts and abilities can be used in service as God so directs.

We do so with thanks for his gifts, energy and abilities, with thanks for his contributions to us, but also with sadness that this has happened at this time.

Please ask God to lead AIM forward in His wisdom and provide for us in His grace.

Tennant Creek News

from Peter Dixon

We give great thanks that God has protected the Barkly from COVID-19 cases so far, but travel restrictions and supply issues have effects on staffing in the schools, the hospital and medical services and for the re-building of the supermarket.

This is putting extra pressure on all the staff at the Primary School, several of whom, like *Karen*, have had to step into higher roles.

Church leader *Michael Jones*, after listening carefully to the medical advice, was pleased to lend his name as a community leader to encourage people to get vaccinated, and has received his two vaccine injections.

Richard Driver got good reports on his additional medication from his endocrinologist on her recent

visit to town, and he together with the *Dixons* are booked for their second vaccinations in the last week of August.



It was very disappointing that the church bus was not able to travel to the Katherine Christian Convention in May. Repairs since then have not proved lasting and the final diagnosis was the need for the clutch master cylinder to be replaced. When the part arrived the mechanic had been hospitalised, so the bus is sadly still out of action and no definite rescheduled repair date has been set.

Since the men's Bible Study group has finished studying the books of Samuel we have commenced watching (together with the ladies) the inspiring and challenging talks that *Jono Wright* gave from his room of isolation for the Katherine Convention.

We were really looking forward to visits from family in the July school holidays and were able to get a VW Multivan to fit in grandchildren. Those visits were cancelled due to Covid outbreaks down south, but the van, now that *Peter* understands better how to manage the Diesel Particulate Filter, is proving helpful for church meetings and transporting the leaders to Elliott and Ali Curung for funerals.

We are now looking forward to The Birthday Weekend (Church building anniversary) on the last weekend in September when *David Blackman* (Alywarr Bible translator) will come as speaker from Alice Springs as he was planning to last year. As well as the two teaching mornings in the church three evenings of sharing are planned for the camp areas.



The Church bus is used in many ways!

Interest, Concern, Problem, Provision

Isn't it good when you see God bringing interest, concern, problems and provision together? In many ways, that is what has happened in Gilgandra among the ladies at the AIM Church.

Over the years they have been known for their interest in craft and sewing. Various craft groups have been run by *Kathy Bird and Phyllis Morgan* as a way of outreach here as well in other places they and their late husbands (*Ben and Abel*) have ministered. Recently, their interest in sewing and concern for their community in the Covid situation came together.

Several problems were in the way, but then God worked them out and provision began to come. Through the 'Empowering Our Community' program they received the funding to help with some of the problems. These included getting new floor coverings to make their old church hall safer to work in, the purchase of two sewing machines and improvements to building security.

When the COVID situation first started they couldn't find masks so they had to start making some for themselves. With the ongoing problem of the pandemic they have banded together to combine their interest in sewing and concern to help others through the making of washable, reusable – and very fashionable masks! Orders started coming mainly through word of mouth, and that word has been spreading! They have had orders from all over Australia, and sometimes find it difficult to stay on top of the requests.

After selling a couple thousand masks the ladies have been able to purchase more materials and now have the ability to update things around the church. They also make and sell microwave bowl holders, neckties, and scrunchies.

Lois Towney shared, 'We have enjoyed ourselves and are just happy that we can do our bit during this pandemic. God has blessed us immensely and He continues to bless our fellowship.' The invitation to join them continues to be extended to others in the community. Pray that many will come along when lockdowns are over and will not only find enjoyment and friendship, but will also find God's love and forgiveness for their lives.



Karen Roff



Phyllis Morgan

From the Davies Diary

April

We have been offered accommodation in a partially renovated house in Canteen Creek, and we have somewhere to leave the caravan in Tennant. We are aiming to leave Cootamundra around the 25th.

28th Received news the house in Canteen Creek is no longer available. We are going to borrow/buy a tent and head out anyway. We started married life in a tent 46 years ago. We will see how we cope with the wind, heat/cold and dust, donkeys and dogs visiting.



Marlene and Sue

May

We have arrived in CC after picking up a loaned camper trailer in Epenarra. It has a great mattress and gets us up off the ground. We have set up camp in the church yard with access to power, toilet and a cold shower, though a family has kindly made their external hot water shower and toilet available to us.

So many funerals all around the Barkly Tablelands means many people are away, but we have received a very warm welcome from those still here.

Sue and I have been putting final touches to our draft of Mark's Gospel in Barkly appropriate English, and we will start community checking next Monday. It has been so windy that we work sitting in our car.

As we walked around the community we met a young man who seemed to want to talk. He is the grandson of *Sunny Curtis*, one of our mentors in Tennant Creek days. He wants to come and talk to us about his life. Pray that we can help him find his significance in Jesus.



Richard and Harry

June

We have settled into a steady routine — as steady as is possible living in the middle of the community.

People walk past in various directions, going to the clinic, store, office and the school, so there is a steady stream of people calling out or calling in for a chat. Sadly the young man has not been for more talks apart from coming to tell us that he was reconciled with his grandfather.

There have been other very deep discussions with various people and it is amazing to be reminded how much we are accepted as being part of this community. There are a lot of children that were too young to know us when we were here last, two years ago, but now they visit most days to play, do a colouring-in or ask a question.

The donkeys sometimes come and stand outside the church yard and in the middle of the night, honk very loudly right next to our camper — we jump a mile. Of course the dogs chase them and there is much confusion. The semi-wild horses come in for water and the dogs try to chase them. The difference is that the donkeys just run but the horses turn and chase the dogs, often kicking them. Much yelping when they connect. Last night someone left the gate to the church yard open and we had to evict four young donkeys, much to the delight of the four dogs that have befriended us.

We were wondering if we would be able to get much checking done, as our main checker isn't here and looks like not returning, but then *Harry Rubuntja* came along. He is very astute with an enquiring mind. He tells us whether or not people with limited English would know a word we have used, or if the sentence is too hard to understand.

Most mornings and evenings we hear Christian music and messages wafting through the community per favour of *Henry*, the oldest man here. He turns up the amp so that many can hear, and no-one objects. It blesses us!

July

With various people coming back to community the numbers attending church meetings has increased. Several are preparing items to share with the group at night meetings.

28th We left CC with lumps in our throats today. Will we ever return? Only the Lord knows. We make our plans but we know His plans are the better ones.

We were able to check all the five Plain English Version (Barkly) books that we had prepared and we are so very grateful to God for enabling Harry to keep working with us for the whole time. He was excited about what he was learning and would go home and say to his wife, *'You'll never believe what I heard today!'*

Tonight, we go to the Wednesday night meeting in Tennant Creek to say

good bye to our church family there. Then Friday we will travel to Elliott and see *Harold Dalywaters*.

August

We had hoped to do checking with Harold but he had his first Covid vaccine and wasn't feeling too well then had an engagement in Tennant to play Gospel music. The time was not wasted as *Cliff Letcher* also arrived on his NT visit. It was good to catch up with him before we go onto Darwin to see our son *Josh*.

16th Back in Elliott. We thought we were on our way home when we found out today that the South Australia border is closed to anyone who was in Darwin when a man flew in from Canberra and tested positive to Covid. Yes...that's when we were there!

So it's back to Alice Springs to Ben's place, and after having a test, will now isolate waiting for results. We have to have another test in four and 13 days time before being allowed to travel through SA. But then anything might change...

23rd And it did change! The Covid tests were negative and the restrictions on being in Darwin were lifted. We reapplied for border passes, they were granted and tonight we are parked at Marla SA. The car is refuelled and ready to leave first light for Pt. Pirie and then Lord willing we'll be home by the 25/26.

It has been an amazing roller-coaster ride, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Has it been worth it? You bet! Will we do it again next year? Lord willing, yes! There are a lot of variables that will have to align for that to happen.



Newspots

Health

Thank God that the August tests *Martin Ebel* underwent showed no regrowth of the brain cancer. He will begin a regime of one week of chemotherapy per month in Brisbane for the next six months as of 14th September. Your ongoing prayers for Martin, Rose, and the Woorabinda Church are much appreciated.



MPA Stock

A big thank you goes to *Paul Badman and Cliff Letcher* who spent a weekend in late May loading the many boxes of MPA books at Head Office and moving them to Wyee. We are very grateful to Bethshan for making space available for storing these materials — and for the help of *Roni and Yane Damanik* when the boxes arrived!

Back To School

Raymond Dixon from Marlinja NT has gone back to school — but not as a student. He is working at the Elliott and Newcastle Waters schools teaching the children to speak Mudburra, one of the local languages. He is looking to translate parts of scripture so that they can not only learn the language but learn God's message too. Thank God for this opportunity to share His Word with the next generation.



Special Anniversary

Congratulations to former workers *Norm and Lola Wall* who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary August 26th. The Walls served for many years at the Retta Dixon Home and then in Alice Springs with AIM. During their retirement years they settled in Elizabeth SA where they continue to reside. May God bless them as they live for Jesus there.

Death

It was with sadness we learned of the death of *Kevin Naden* in early August. He grew up in Gilgandra where he was a much respected youth leader and member of the Truth to Youth group that ministered in the Central West for many years. His work with TAFE took him and his family to Moree where he gave good leadership in the Koori fellowship. He was later promoted and moved to Coffs Harbour. Here he served as a deacon at Boambee Community Baptist Church and was instrumental in the regular outreach ministry to the Wongala Estate with his wife *Glenny* and mother in law *Nellie O'Chin* for many years. Our sympathy and prayers are extended to Glenny and family.

Long Service

Congratulations to *Noel McDonald*, one of the Church leaders in Katherine. He was recognised in June for his 40 years of employment with the Kalano Community Association where he continues to work. What a tremendous role model to the whole community and especially to the large Aboriginal population in the area.



