

December 2023 – February 2024



AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Strong Aboriginal Churches



**Cliff and Carolyn Letcher
see Reflections**

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A Welcome Addition

The AIM Council is pleased to introduce their newest member — *Andrew Billing*. He has been married to *Mona* for 17 years and is the father of *Joshua* (15) and *Ariella* (11).

While he has a Bachelor of Aeronautical Engineering, it's not rocket science to realise that it was his 25 years of experience in banking and finance that made him a very welcome member to Council, especially when the position of treasurer suddenly became vacant. He has experience in Customer Service, managerial, lending, complaint resolution and compliance and governance. Andrew also served as a NSW Property Trust member of Churches of Christ for 18 years, so brings a lot of good experience and skills to AIM Council. He has already proven valuable to the Council with his patience and in helping us go through several changeover processes. He will be supporting AIM in governance matters, organisation requirements as required under legislation, and doing the financial reporting.

He has been a member of St Matts Botany for seven years where he leads a weekly Bible study, is part of the welcoming team, serves as a worship leader, and is a community garden member. He is also a member of the Eastern Suburbs Dolphins Baseball Committee and serves as coach for the Legal Age 17 group (LA17s).

Andrew shares the following:

I've had the pleasure of knowing Christ as my Saviour for over 35 years. In my younger years I heard about Jesus in scripture and Sunday school — I thought he was a nice guy that helped people out. I would often ask Jesus to help me get out of trouble but then forget about him. This happened many times until God called me out one morning when I was walking to school. Quite clearly He said, 'enough! You're either for me or against me.' God is merciful and full of grace and

didn't deserve the way I was treating Him. I decided to follow Him and that means with everything I have.

In my university years I had the pleasure of beginning my service in Christ with Peter and Karen Dixon in Marrickville for 20+ years. They taught me much about being a disciple of Christ and those years remain some of the most valuable and memorable of my life. Peter even presided over Mona's and my wedding. That God would choose me to serve Him is truly remarkable yet what an absolute privilege.

I was able to grow further in my relationship with God, from one of just being forgiven, to understanding that God has made good works for us to do. We must be involved in the good news seeing it taken to the lost. This is especially important as one previously lost but found by my shepherd.

God has continued to show much patience towards me as I journey with Him, slowly learning and growing into a deeper more mature relationship.

We thank God for bringing Andrew onto the Council and look forward to his contribution to AIM as we work towards the goal of seeing Strong Aboriginal Churches and aim to biblically disciple Aboriginal believers and develop their leadership for gospel ministry.



Tennant Creek Update

The Bushfire season has unfortunately begun across Australia. A blaze which began 6th September in the Barkly NT region was still burning in early November. At one point it was four times the size of the ACT. Communities of Epenarra and Canteen Creek had come under threat as did the township of Tennant Creek during this time.

Smoke loomed as a problem. The highway north and south was closed at times due to fire and smoke. Trucks transporting goods further north experienced long delays. Bus services from across Qld via the Barkly Hwy, also to and from Alice Springs were often delayed by many hours. This made things difficult and caused some anxiety for those who were needing to travel to Alice Springs for appointments and airline connections. The Barkly Hwy linking Qld and NT was closed to all road traffic for three days as emergency services worked to bring the huge blaze under control.

Newspaper photos showed this outback town at night nearly surrounded by a brilliant orange glow from the fires. I thought of the numerous ones from across that region who are followers of Jesus and have been saved from the fire of hell and prayed that many others would allow this threatening situation to awaken their spiritual need of trusting in Jesus and becoming His follower.

It was in the midst of these threats that it was time for *Peter and Karen Dixon* to set off to attend their daughter's wedding in Canada. Some family members required special prayer because of flight cancellations, but in the end they all arrived there to share in the joy of the wedding, then returned safely and relatively on time in Australia.

Some news from Peter Dixon:

The congregation had great blessing

in celebrating the 39th anniversary of the opening of the church building, known as 'The Birthday Weekend' which commenced on Friday evening September 22nd. *Mr Michael Jones* shared the messages of encouragement and Christian challenge in both the morning meetings (Saturday and Sunday) as *Richard Driver* was not well. The evening town camp meetings were very well attended, and the local communities were challenged by their family members who shared testimonies and also teaching from their paintings.

Everyone enjoyed the birthday cake brought up from Alice Springs. We thank God that the threat of fires had subsided at that point. The leaders are considering having the 40th Birthday Weekend earlier in 2024.

The church has been deeply saddened by the deaths of two men important in our life. Firstly, *Kevin Morrison*, husband of *Annie Jones* (Michael Jones daughter) after years of ill health. Then in October the Lord took our leader, *Mr Geoffrey Shannon*. He had often testified how God had saved him from alcoholism during major heart surgery in Adelaide. He was a shining light and also an important community leader. During his last stay in hospital with pneumonia as he was not allowed to go to church he would read the Bible to nursing staff and anyone else who came by.



Dixon's enjoying time at Niagara Falls with their children Jon, Ben and Beth



Reflections

by Cliff Letcher

We often hear of people coming out of retirement from necessity. All sorts of reasons can be involved. I officially retired from AIM in 2013 around the time I turned 65. It was in the latter stages of Sue's failing health and I had been on extended leave, so it was not a major consideration for me to make that decision.

Some twelve months later the AIM Council asked me to come back in the role of providing pastoral care and support for the workers in the NT. After my marriage to *Carolyn*, we enjoyed many trips to the NT in this capacity meeting with the AIM workers and church leaders. Being able once again to spend time with the churches in various places was a rich blessing for us.

However, late 2019 brought a very different role that stretched me well out of my comfort zone. The resignation of *Roy Hadfield* as General Director and some other personnel changes in the Council prompted a phone call to me, *'Would you be willing to step into the role of Acting General Director for a short time while we look for a new General Director?'*

The few months that I envisaged it would take to find a new GD turned into several years with me only stepping down from the role in June 2022. While I had a general understanding of AIM's administrative needs because I had been based in the office for a long time, I found that it is one thing to know about

what goes on, it's another thing to actually have to do it.

It has been pointed out to me that, from a human perspective, an organisation often needs to go through a crisis period to stimulate a renewal process. Under the gracious hand of our Lord, I believe that that is what has happened for AIM.

Now ten years on from my original retirement I can reflect back and see the hand of our Lord is still on AIM. We saw how He opened the door for us to receive professional help in the process of assessing where we were as an organisation. With that came guidance in regard to the ongoing purpose of our organisation, and how to move forward. Having had a false start in appointing a new GD we were also given advice that has led to our restructuring so that we now have a Mission Coordinator rather than a General Director. It had been suggested that instead of looking for someone outside of AIM we should look for leadership from within as that would provide leadership from someone who was already committed to our work.

In June last year as I stepped down as Acting GD *Yane Damanik* was appointed our Mission Coordinator. Yane comes from Indonesia and grew up in a missionary family. She has also worked in mission work in that country. Yane and her husband *Roni* joined AIM around 2011 and spent some years working in the Humpty Doo area. One of the challenges faced in taking up this role is they have been relying on work outside AIM to meet their family needs. Please pray with us that our Lord will raise up a faithful team of supporters to enable them

to fulfil this role free from the restriction of needing additional work.

Another provision from our Lord was the appointment of *Paul Badman* to the Council. He took on the role of Treasurer and greatly assisted the Council in understanding our financial situation. He developed a budgeting process and worked towards a sound financial policy. Paul found it necessary to resign at the end of July and here again we saw the Lord's provision of a replacement who was already being considered for a position on the Council. *Andrew Billing* comes to us in this role having recently stepped down from a role of Trustee for the Churches of Christ and is now our Treasurer.

Another addition to the Council in recent times has been *Roni Parlindungan* who has stepped up to the role of oversight for our Safe Ministry requirements. He has also been working on seeing our website revised and updated. *Huon Hoogesteger* came on board last year and is ably filling the role of property manager and is helping in the difficult area of insurance — property and liability. In God's grace the insurance broker he has for his business is the same one AIM has.

At the end of July *Peter Smith*, our long time and faithful Office Manager, retired from this role. Here again, at just the right time our Lord provided *Anne Darragh*, who was looking for part-time work. She has considerable administrative experience and skills to come on board in this role. It has been a big challenge for her learning the ropes particularly as our Auditor advised us to change our accounting system. In doing this we are very grateful for the assistance of *Rod Bishop* from the European Christian Mission Office.

It has become increasingly complex to meet governance requirements for organisation in our modern world. At times it looked like AIM would cease to exist. As I reflect back on what was probably the hardest ministry period of my life because this is an area that I had very limited understanding about, I am no longer fearful for the future.

Covid was an added burden we all faced and often made the future look bleak. Now, as I retire from any formal role in AIM, I recognise that the guidance, oversight, and provisions that our Lord has given us has strengthened my belief that there is an ongoing

need for the work of AIM. At the human level we all have a role to play but it is the Lord's work to build His church and bring His reign and rule into this world.



Thank You Cliff...

for your willingness to step into a variety of roles, even those out of your comfort zone. Thank you for always bringing the strengths of faithfulness to personal spiritual growth, willingness to listen and learn from others, honesty, integrity, and confidentiality to each role you filled. You have been a valued member of the AIM Council for many years and your insight and godly approach have been deeply appreciated and will be greatly missed. May you and Carolyn know the guiding hand and blessing of our Lord as you retire from the Council.

News from Dubbo

by David Cox

It has now been over 22 years since Rose and I moved from Woorabinda to Dubbo, arriving early June 2001. Seems a distant memory now. Other than Dubbo, the longest I (David) had been in one place was my seven years at Cootamundra, including six at Bimbadeen. Fond memories which included: the time I was saved, met and married Rose and saw the arrival of Janelle. She is now happily married and has 2 boys — our grandsons aged 5 and 2. We are grateful to the Lord that Rose is recovering better than expected following knee replacement surgery in May.

I think it took some time to really settle into Dubbo, it is much bigger than Woorabinda and ministry is very different. One noticeable difference being the Indigenous population is pretty much integrated, something that has increasingly happened since we have been here. In some ways, Dubbo Christian Family Church is really little different to other churches here except for a good portion of members being Indigenous. There are quite a few Indigenous Christians which attend other churches in town.

Over the years we have tried different ways of training the people. The best result so far has been in using material from the Vocational Training College, something we did almost 10 years ago. In 2024 we are going to tackle a new model, something done in consultation with other churches and brethren.

We intend to do a two-year program which we are calling Saturday Bible Training. It will be held nine times a year — once a month on a Saturday morning: Feb.-Apr., Jun.-Aug., Oct.-Dec. Each morning will have teaching times of 3 hours 40 min. Students are expected to commit for the entire program and will be lectured in Systematic Theology, Church History, Biblical Studies, and some practical elements. The aim is to teach truths to believe, defend and teach. Students will be encouraged to take an active role in the life of their church according to their gifts, abilities, and roles.



A feature of our time in Dubbo has been The Day in the Word, a time of intensive preaching of 4 x 40-minute sermons followed by lunch. These have proven popular, and we hope to continue them this coming year, however the Church is yet to decide when and who will speak.

We currently have three preachers able to fill the pulpit. This lightens the load and allows us to help in surrounding towns. Since my sabbatical in 2020 I am mindful of the need to share the load and having *Mark Naden* as a fellow Elder helps enormously. Mark not only preaches occasionally, but he is also a wise counsellor who desires to glorify God in all things and gives invaluable advice and assistance.

Godly, cooperative, faithful and active Elders are much underrated and undervalued, except by the Pastors who are blessed with them.

Please pray for the work in Dubbo. Pray for the training planned for next year, for a good uptake. Pray for the young men in the congregation and others being added. Pray for wisdom for Mark and I to be able to guide these fellows into the right sphere of service. Pray that in all things we would continue serving our risen Lord with discernment, Biblical faithfulness, in a warm hearted and loving manner. Soli Deo Gloria.

THANK YOU to each of you who have supported the work and workers of AIM during this past year. Your contributions through prayer and financial support are valued beyond measure. May our Lord bless you throughout the coming new year.



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Strong Aboriginal Churches

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The requested amount of \$15 per year helps fund the printing and posting of this quarterly magazine.

With the Lord

Former field worker and Council member John Bridges

went to be with his Lord 1 August 2023. While working with QANTAS in Darwin during the 1950's he visited and helped where possible at the Retta Dixon Home. It was here he met AIM worker *Jocelyn Gadd*. They began a life of marriage and ministry together in 1957.



John reconnected with Raymond Dixon at AIM Centenary Conference. Raymond was a young boy at Newcastle Waters when John ministered there.

They were first sent to Newcastle Waters NT and began weekly visits to the developing town and nearby camp at Elliott. They saw God work in lives in both places and small groups of believers grow into churches. During their seven years there, John oversaw buildings for worship being erected in both places.

From this rather isolated outback area, they were then sent to the established town of Katherine where finally having electricity was a great bonus! Together John and Jocelyn sought to reach people both in the town as well as the numerous communities and camps scattered in various directions and distances from the town. They found the town work had its unique challenges as it still does today. During his time in Katherine, John was one of those instrumental in establishing the Katherine Christian Convention. A new church building was put up during his time there which is still used today. A brief time was spent in Cherbourg where a Sunday School hall was built onto the existing Church building.

The Bridges time serving on the field with AIM finished in 1972 when they joined with the Baptists in their Aboriginal work. They then moved into a fruitful ministry in several European churches where both he and Jocelyn were strong promoters and supporters of mission work, enthusing and encouraging people about missions, and raising much prayer and financial support for workers and ministries.

When they moved to Forster NSW, John accepted the invitation to serve on the AIM Council and did so for many years. He maintained a prayerful interest in the work and workers of AIM until his death.

We are grateful for his years of service and support of the ministry of AIM.