



AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Strong Aboriginal Churches



Death of a Leader

Page 2

Death of a Leader

A cloud of sadness swept across the AIM field as news was shared that *Richard Driver* had passed away on March 18th. He was one of the respected leaders of the Tennant Creek AIM Church.

His early years saw him growing up in Phillip Creek, north of Tennant Creek, then, along with the others, moved to Ali Curung at a young age. There he learned about Jesus from the Baptist missionary in Sunday School and Christian Endeavour while learning about hunting and cultural ways from the Aboriginal people. He went to school until he was 14, then worked as a drover on various stations, and sometimes worked for the army in Darwin.

Richard often shared about beginning to drink then becoming an alcoholic when Aboriginal people became citizens in 1967. Despite knowing it was wrong and wanting to quit, he couldn't give it up in his own strength.

After a drinking session in 1984, he was attacked by a known assailant who stabbed him in the neck. The doctors told him he was lucky to be alive, for if the knife had gone just a few centimetres deeper he would have been killed. This frightened him as he knew he was not ready to face the Lord. He began remembering what he had learned in Sunday School.

When he left hospital and returned to Tennant Creek it was time for the opening of the AIM Church building. As part of the celebration, an Aboriginal leader from Borroloola spoke at an open-air meeting in the church yard. It was then Richard surrendered his life to Jesus.

Tragedy struck two years later when a tumor caused him to go blind. He wondered what he could do now — how could he serve the Lord if he could not see to read and write sermon notes? But God had a marvelous plan for him. He was given the Bible on cassettes, and Richard not only listened to them, but discovered he had a gift for memorising scripture — whole chapters at a time. He found that serving the Lord was still possible in spite of his blindness and he went on from strength to strength in his ministry of preaching and teaching.

He became a strong and respected leader in the AIM Church. Richard also spoke at Katherine Convention



one year, brought the message at the community Carols by Candlelight service in Tennant Creek, and conducted countless funerals in and around the Tennant area. His service to the Indigenous church was recognised in 2001 when he was named 'Tennant Creek Citizen of the Year'.

But in all those things, he never allowed pride to take hold in his life. He had said that he could actually thank the Lord for his blindness. It kept him from becoming proud and kept him dependent on the Lord. He would sincerely pray before preaching every message, *'Lord, take any proudness from me.'*

His daughter Barbara said of him, *"God made an ordinary man into an extraordinary man to do God's work of preaching and telling others about Jesus. His advice always started with 'this is what God says'. Then he would share words from the Bible for the situation or question. Dad always brought Jesus into conversations with me and my children. Even when he was telling us history stories, he always brought God into it.'*

He was so grateful to God for his salvation, and for the strength and grace he experienced day by day. And several times he said, *'I thank the Lord for the whitefellas coming to Australia. If they had not come, we would not have heard about Jesus.'*

Richard was a faithful and respected leader, humble in spirit, gracious and respectful to all he met, whose spiritual eyes were firmly fixed on Christ His Lord. Our hearts have been sad and burdened for his family and the Tennant Creek Church at his passing. But we do rejoice that he is not only with Jesus but can now **see** his Lord face to face.

'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

From the Mission Coordinator

Yane Damanik

In today's fast-paced world of digital connections, I find myself at the forefront answering questions that come my way through phone calls, emails, or Zoom chats. *Could you tell me what you do as a mission organisation? What are the needs in the field? What opportunities are there for us to be involved? Do you do short mission trips? What is your political stance on such and such issues?* etc, etc.

Whether I'm picking up the phone, tapping out an email, or jumping on a Zoom call, it's all about connecting with people, individuals or church groups who want to know more about what AIM is up to. For me, it's not just about giving answers — it's about opening up a conversation, sharing stories, and hopefully sparking inspiration along the way to join (link into) the work that God is doing in our Indigenous communities.

Halfway through the beginning of the year, I had the opportunity to fly to Canberra to attend a seminar conducted by YWAM (Youth with a Mission) in which AIM missionaries, *Richard and Sue Davies* were the speakers. It was a lovely and productive time of fellowship with YWAM. It was also good to hear the work of AIM through the various ministries that the Davies has been involved in. It was an encouragement to hear of God's work in and through His people, particularly in the Barkly region of the NT. Please pray for the Davies as they continue the translation work of the Barkly Bible, which is hard work but totally worthwhile.

My next trip was attending the 125th anniversary of Glenorie Mission Church on April 7th with my husband *Roni*. Glenorie Mission Church has had a very long association with AIM and it was a privilege to celebrate this milestone with them. *Huon Hoogesteger*, one of the church members, is also on the AIM Council. It was good to briefly catch up with *Arthur and Betty Nicolson*, members of the Glenorie Mission Church. Arthur was on the AIM Council for several decades — and his father had been on Council as well. It was also a nice surprise to meet and chat with *Helen Lear*, daughter of *Egerton Long* and granddaughter of *Retta Dixon Long*, the founder of AIM. Richard and Sue Davies together with their

son *Paul* and his family were also in attendance. This was a nice time to catch up with friends, AIM prayer partners and just have fellowship with each other.

In ending this note, I pray that as AIM workers continue in the ministry that God has for each of us to do, there will be opportunities for us to fellowship, to uplift one another, and to strengthen the bonds that tie us together. Because in ministry, it's not just about the work we do — it's about the relationships we forge and the community of faith we build along the way — all for God's glory.



Life without Strife

Sounds good doesn't it — life without strife! That was the theme of the Queensland AIM Ladies Convention hosted by Rockhampton Church over the May Day weekend.

Rocky leaders *Jandalyn Mitchell* and *Lesley Power* were thrilled to have a group of 17 come together for some fun, fellowship, and sharing from God's Word. *Denise Conlon* and *Faye Chambers* were accompanied from Brisbane by their husbands *Goma* and *David*. It was a nice 'homecoming' as both couples had previously ministered in Rocky.

There was great encouragement in having a group from Woorabinda join the fellowship. They came with a request for one of the Rocky men to travel out once a month to bring a message and lead them in communion. The Rocky Church will begin this supporting role at the end of June. Pray for a strengthening of ties between the two groups into the future.

During the two Saturday sessions, *Vanessa Conlon* and *Lesley Power* each shared teaching on the theme. The leaders had decided to take up a

missionary offering and *Tim and Melanie Downs* serving in Malawi were chosen to receive the gift. Both of their parents *Barry and Lois Downs* and (the late) *Stan and Sharon Werner* had served in the Rocky Church. It worked out wonderfully as Lesley contacted Sharon for some information and learned she had just visited Tim and Mel in Malawi. She was able to come along and share up-to-date and personal information about them and their ministry. It was a great bonus from the Lord for the weekend.

It was a surprise to all when two ladies from Gladstone showed up. *Jackie Johnson* (former Singleton Bible Institute student) and a sister heard about the gathering and drove up to join the fellowship.

Saturday night was Concert Night with each centre represented giving an item. The men were invited in to provide music for them. Lesley and Jandalyn put on a skit playing 'tug of war' to make the point of the struggle within as to whether we will be faithful in giving to the Lord or will keep all our income for ourselves.



Lesley and Jandalyn



Who won the tug-of-war?

Sunday morning Jandalyn brought the weekend teaching to completion when she spoke at the morning service on 'How Can We Stop Strife'. Her main points were as follows:

Avoid Retaliating

- There will always be someone that will rub you the wrong way.
- We cannot run away from conflict but do not retaliate when someone makes you angry.
- Walk away or keep quiet. Ask God for insight and then deal with the issue when you are calm. If you are wrong, apologise to the person quickly instead of creating excuses or defending yourself.
- It is easy to lash out, but it is better to pray.

Listen Carefully

- Listen to what the other person is saying carefully and where you don't understand, gently ask questions.
- There are moments where we misunderstand people, and there are times we think we know it all, but we don't. It's good to listen without prejudging anyone.

Acknowledge Other People's Pain

- Don't be quick to judge someone.
- Maybe they are hurting on the inside. It is not an excuse but hurting people hurt others. Instead of hating the person forgive them and pray for them.
- Forgive them even if they don't apologise.
- REMEMBER Strife opens doors for so many evil things, and it gives the devil ground over your life.
- Be careful when dealing with people and look at everyone THROUGH the eyes of grace. It is not easy, but with the help of God, you will be able to do the right thing for the honour and glory of God.

In reflection of the weekend Lesley shares: *All the ladies were blessed to have fellowship over the weekend, and all are looking forward to continuing the Ladies Convention again in 2025 with Brisbane to be the host.*



Goma Conlon, John Fonmossa, Lester Adams



Darwin Days

by Rhonda Coats

As is true in most places of ministry, there are no 'typical' days here in Darwin. Sometimes opportunities come unexpectedly. While I haven't been visiting our centres as I once did, it is always special when God brings people to Darwin so we can again share time and fellowship face to face.

'Hey — look here! How are you sister?' and warm greetings were shared



when *Raymond and Thelma Dixon* from Marlinja spotted me in the shops. They were in Darwin because of a sick relative who sadly had just passed away. It was good to sit and share with them during their time of grief.

And then there are the phone calls... It is *Lisa Mumbin*, a Katherine Church leader. They have deep concerns about the condition of their church building and the Sunday School room. Can I assist them in getting advice and possible help? We also discuss the types of Bible studies they want. I commit to working on both requests.



News is received from America. My great-nephew has unexpectedly passed away... The Pacific Ocean suddenly seems much wider... I share in my family's grief, but difficult from such a distance. Much prayer is offered for them in this devastating loss...

When leaving the Post Office I heard a familiar 'Hello friend'. It is *Anita Painter*, a Barunga Church leader. She was about to fly to America for archaeology meetings. I



sense some anxiety, so it was good to chat and try to calm some fears. I agreed with her comment, 'God brought you along at just the right time.'

Night has fallen when again the phone rings. '*Vincent (Charlie) is being flown in on Careflight.*' I promise to check on him in the morning. He is the church leader at Borroloola.

The next day I found him in the special coronary area of the Emergency Dept. He is in good spirits, and it is an encouraging visit. It seems the flu has caused his heart to race and get out of rhythm. I also visited *Jocelyn McCartney*, a church leader at Barunga. She was in pain and discomfort following surgery for a boil. It was good to encourage her with a Kriol Bible and a time of prayer.



I return home and am busy with phone calls, text messages and emails requesting prayer for *Vincent and Jocelyn*. Then I try to concentrate on materials for The Aim magazine...

Two days later Vincent is sent to a ward — but then developed symptoms similar to having had a stroke. His speech is badly affected. Two CT scans rule that out... doctors are testing to find the cause.



More phone calls, text messages, and emails are sent with the update and ongoing request for prayer. Two days later I am greeted with his usual booming voice '*Hello. Thank you for praying!*'. His voice is clear and strong again, but other problems persist.

Jocelyn rings — '*I'm in Katherine now. I'll be getting home to Barunga tonight.*'

Another late-night phone call comes. A young child from Robinson River/Borroloola area is in ICU. He is the great nephew of Thelma Dixon. Doctors are discussing switching off the machines... Yes, I will go up first thing in the morning.

An early trip to the hospital but the lady on the switchboard says there is no one listed by that name. She double checks but still finds no one... I feel a



AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES
Strong Aboriginal Churches

Mission Co-Ordinator

Yane Damanik
Email: yane.d@australianindigenousministries.org.au

Office Manager

Anne Darragh
Email: admin@australianindigenousministries.org.au

AIM Office

PO Box 9109 Wyee NSW 2259
Phone: 02 4393 6212
australianindigenousministries.org.au

The Aim Editor

Rhonda Coats
PO Box 40555 Casuarina NT 0811
New Series Volume 60 No. 1

Graphic Design & Printing

Springwood Printing Company
Phone: 02 4751 6119
Email: spc@springwoodprinting.com.au
www.springwoodprinting.com.au

AIM safe ministry policy and framework is an adaptation of resources from Creating Saver Communities (formerly Safe Ministry Resources P/L). For further information please contact AIM safe ministry helpline at 0491 624 606.

Sign up to our monthly PRAYER POINTS online:



Sign up to AIM MAGAZINE online:



Subscription

The Aim Magazine subscriptions are \$15 a year (inclusive of GST). Please send to AIM Office.

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

Family Wedding

Peter and Karen Dixon took a quick but blessed break during the only week of the NT School holidays in April. They rejoiced in the wedding of their older daughter, Elizabeth, to Benjamin Shepherd at Nowra Baptist Church on a very pleasant coastal NSW day. As well as catching up with lots of extended family members, and meeting new family, they enjoyed time with all their children and grandchildren, including their daughter Rachel from Canada. They are very thankful to God for smooth travel experiences.



Floods

Last year it was Camooweal, this year Borroloola was hit by flooding. Cyclone warnings were issued but thankfully it didn't hit the town itself, but the hundreds of mms of rain to the area brought quick and severe flooding. Military planes were used to evacuate people into Darwin, though many decided to stay in Borroloola. Thankfully the AIM Church was not affected by any flooding, and the services to the town were quickly restored. Those who had evacuated enjoyed catching up with relatives who now reside in Darwin as well as making the most of the many shops there.

Unfortunately, the rains and flooding travelled south into the Barkly region bringing about the cancellation of the Easter Convention planned for Lake Nash.

Travels

Richard and Sue Davies enjoyed trouble-free travels to Canteen Creek in early May. Thankfully the heavy wet season up north had ended, and roads were graded before they travelled out to Canteen Creek. The locals were thrilled when the road had opened again allowing food and fuel trucks to bring in their much needed supplies. The Davies learned their Barkly Bible version of Genesis was with the printer just prior to their departure from Cootamundra. They are hopeful the booklets will arrive while they are still in Canteen Creek.

Former Director, Member Care, and Council member Cliff Letcher and wife Carolyn will be on the road and visiting most northern AIM centres from the end of May until the end of June. He shared 'it is likely to be a farewell trip as far as the NT is concerned'. They also hope to spend some 'tourist time' without the pressure of ministry commitments. They will then make their way to WA and down the west coast to visit their son Tim and family in the Perth region.