



AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS MINISTRIES

Strong Aboriginal Churches



Paul and Luwanna McGrady from Central Coast NSW at Preaching Workshop
see page 3

Tea-towel Fundraiser

by Carolyn Letcher

Last year a class of Year 10 Geography students watched a video on the NT community of Utopia as part of their course. The students were impacted by the video and immediately wanted to do something to change the situation. There was much discussion about how this could be done in an appropriate way that gave Indigenous people dignity, power, and a hand-up rather than a handout which does nothing for their dignity or self-empowerment.

The students were from Mountains Christian College in Blackheath in NSW, at the top of the Blue Mountains. It is a small school with around 200 students from Kindergarten to Year 12. A group of students from the Year 10 class decided to act on their desire to make a difference and along with their teacher *Matt Bunton*, they set out to do something. Through another teacher they had contact with *Tim Letcher* who was living in the community of Epenarra in the NT with his wife and family as part of the *Scripture in Use* program of Scripture Union.

Epenarra is a small community of about 150 people, 210km south-east of Tennant Creek.

There is a small number of Christians in Epenarra who meet several times a week. Tim spoke to the members of the church about what they might need help to do, and they shared their idea of having a speaker from Queensland come to the Easter Convention which they were hosting this year. The convention is a big event for the Alyawarr people in various communities around the south eastern part of NT. The students decided that they would fundraise to get the airfare for the speaker to attend the convention.

The students wanted the people of Epenarra to be involved in the fundraising so it was decided to ask them to draw a design that could be put on tea-towels to sell. *Annette Nangala* designed the drawing and after it was digitally formatted it



was sent off to be printed onto the tea-towels. The resulting tea-towels looked great and were sold both through the school and the churches that the students and staff attended. The fundraiser was highly successful and met the expressed need for the convention.

It was estimated that around 400–500 people came to Easter Convention from surrounding communities. They enjoyed the fellowship around meals and heard from the speaker *Graham Sercombe*. Graham and his wife *Andrea* had flown from Brisbane to Mt Isa where the Baptist Church had generously hired a car for them to travel to Epenarra. Graham spoke from Genesis Chapters 1–3 at the sessions over the Easter weekend and many people were impacted by his message.



Due to health concerns, Tim and Jane Letcher and family have had to leave Epenarra after several years of effective ministry. Please pray for them as they adjust to life in Perth and find God's way forward. Please pray for the Christians in Epenarra that they will know God's presence and care and will walk faithfully with Jesus. (ed.)

Preaching Workshop

by Cliff Letcher

Some years ago I had a conversation with *Rick Manton*, pastor of the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church. He was bemoaning the quality of preaching in the Aboriginal church with the loss of those who had trained at Singleton Bible College. There were many good preachers who had come out of that College but in more recent times there have been limited opportunities for such training. Rick asked me to help him organise some preacher training in the NSW area.

Around that time I also had a conversation with *Wendy Toulmin* who was, at that time, CEO of Langham Partnership Australia. Wendy and her husband spent many years in Africa with CMS. In the providence of our God, Wendy asked me about establishing the Langham Preaching workshops in Australia for the Aboriginal church.

Langham Partnership is a ministry that was set up by *John Stott*, a highly respected Bible teacher and pastor who had been the minister of All Souls Anglican Church in Langham Place in London. His deep concern for the church in the 'Majority World' (the non-western world) led him to establish this ministry to help provide sound Biblical training and resources for the church in places where little training and resources are available. His vision was the development of Christian leaders and pastors who, within their own cultural context, would be enabled to develop appropriate resources that were suitable for their situation and not have to rely solely on western theological resources.

While John Stott is now with his Lord, the ministry has continued and has a threefold focus:

- Training key leaders to Ph.D. level so they can provide high level theological training in their own countries
- Assisting in the training of pastors and leaders for local church ministry
- Fostering the writing of Christian literature written for specific cultural context



The Langham preaching workshops are part of the training of pastors and leaders. Around the world it is estimated that 80% of churches are led by people who have had little or no training. Sound Biblical preaching is key to the development of churches and to prevent the distortion of the Gospel into sects and cults.

For a variety of reasons the discussions with Rick and Wendy took many years to come to fruition. In 2019 the first of the workshops was finally held at Bimbadeen in Cootamundra. They are structured to be done in three separate workshops with the first one covering the general principles of how to look at a Bible passage and draw out an appropriate message from it, then to structure it into a sermon in a way that brings clarity and understanding to the hearers. The second one looks at preaching from the New Testament while the third one deals with preaching from the Old Testament. One aspect of the workshops is to foster the idea of the participants continuing to work together to strengthen each other in their preaching.

Covid hindered the follow-up workshops planned for 2020 and 2021 so it was not until March this year that we were able to hold the second one. The Bimbadeen property is no longer available so this one was held at Bethshan in Wyee. While the numbers of participants was smaller than hoped for, the interest expressed by those who could not get to this workshop, indicates that we need to take them to regional and interstate venues.

We would value prayer that this quality training can be developed and provide a very helpful resource for the Aboriginal church as it has done in many other countries.

Call of the MOOK MOOK

by Rosemary Bardley — written in 1985 when an AIM worker on Palm Island. Though different birds may carry the “message” in other places, the story and prayer needs are a reality across the field today.

Darkness comes gently as the sun falls behind the western islands. The moon lays a path of silver on the sea. Palm leaves whisper to the breeze. Land, seas and sky proclaim God’s peace.

Then comes the call.

Peaceful. But alarming.

Soft. But snatching attention.

‘Mook-mook! Mook-mook!’

The peace is shattered.

‘Mook-mook. Mook-mook!’

Fear supplants it.

Who told you, brown owl? Who made you the harbinger of death? Small creature of my Father, the superstitions of the people have made you an omen. Little they know that you, with the rest of creation, long for the day when death shall be no more; when life shall be truly life. Yet, well you might call, night upon night, if you will. For death surrounds us here. There is life, yes. The hearts beat. The systems function. But death reigns.

Hopelessness. Alienation. Despair. Futility. Aloneness. These are the features of death traced in the faces of our neighbours.

Can light ever penetrate this darkness?

Can life ever pierce through and regenerate the spirit?

Can the power of Christ’s call every draw these people out of the web of death in which Satan holds them fast?

I recall the word of Jeremiah: *‘Death has come in through our windows and entered our palaces; it has cut down the children in the streets and the young men in the market places.’*

Dead bodies are scattered everywhere, like piles of manure on the fields, like corn cut and left behind by the reapers, corn that no one gathers.’ Jer 9:21-22.

And I remember that other terrible word: *‘...do not pray for these people. Do not cry or pray on their behalf; do not plead with me for I will not listen to you.’* Jer 7:16

And I wonder...is it perhaps too late? Too late, for a people who have heard the word of Jesus, the Light of the world, and have chosen darkness rather than light?

But then I remember the other word: *‘He led me all around the valley and I could see that there were very many bones and that they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal man, can these bones come back to life?” I replied, “Sovereign Lord, only you can answer that!”’* Ezekiel 37:2-3

Then, into that ultimate barrenness of death, life came!

Pray for us, that we do not lose hope for these people; that we do not forget that the gospel is **‘God’s power to save all who believe’** (Romans 1:16).

Pray also for the Aboriginal people *‘who do not believe, because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light that comes from the Good News...’* (2 Cor. 4:4).

Pray that God will open their understanding **‘so that they may turn away from darkness to the light, away from the power of Satan and to God. Then their sins can be forgiven, and they can have a place with those people who have been made holy by believing in Christ.’** Acts 26:18



Western NSW Ministry

Each week *Henry and Maria Louie* make the 180km drive north from Gilgandra to Pilliga for Sunday service. They are encouraged to have a regular group coming along for services and were thrilled to see the little church filled on Easter Sunday with locals and some tourists as well. The locals had enjoyed having *Isaac Gordon* there for a pre-Rivers Convention just before Easter.

A change of plans saw Baradine Kids Club (70kms south of Pilliga) taking place during the second rather than the first week of the April school holidays. A group of enthusiastic young people from the Korean Presbyterian Church in Strathfield again conducted the Club. They were all encouraged with the good number of kids that participated each day.

On the banks of the Castlereagh River just 45kms NW of Gilgandra, sits the small town of Gulargambone. About half the population of 400 is indigenous. A group from the Korean Presbyterian Church in Lidcombe (sister church to the Strathfield church) will travel there during the June School holidays to conduct a Kids Club. This provides a great opportunity to share God's love and message in another small outback town, and gives Henry and Maria further good contact with people in this community. Pray that lasting spiritual fruit might develop from these times.

This year a new door has opened for Henry. Once a week he travels the 92kms west to Warren where he spends time discipling a couple who have come to Christ. He is hoping to help them link up with a local church for worship and fellowship.

With the change of dates to the Baradine Kids Club, Henry was unable to join a number of the Rivers Convention meetings as planned. He was eventually able to get to the final meetings at Dubbo where he enjoyed the fellowship and messages shared at the Open Air meeting followed by one at the Civic Centre that night.

Henry and Maria would love to have like-minded committed helpers join in the ministry to these areas in Western NSW.

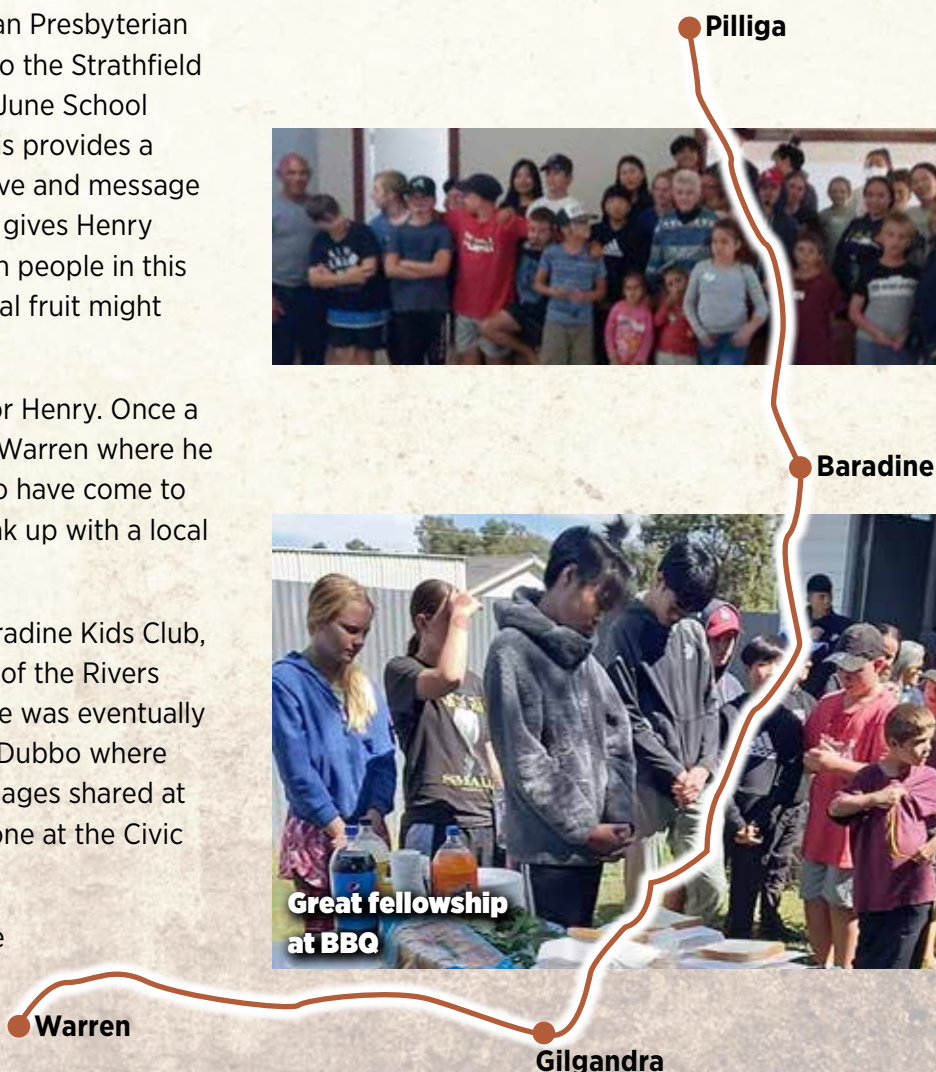


Maria (2nd from left) with some Pilliga friends

Pray that God might speak to the right people who could work alongside this brother and sister to see God's Word shared and take root in many lives.



Great fellowship at BBQ



Newspots

Health

Phyllis Morgan (nee *Naden*) of *Gilgandra* broke her arm in mid-April. She has been in care receiving the help necessary as she waits for the break to heal. Keep praying that the believers here will continue to make the love and message of God clear to those in the community.

Remember *Martin and Rose Ebel*. No news of the MRI conducted in early May has been received. Thankfully the previous tests showed no growth of the tumour. Ask God to guide and provide for he and *Rose* into the future. Remember the spiritual needs of the people in *Woorabinda*.

Tennant Creek

The church bus was off the road for many weeks awaiting registration. One of the two inspectors was on extended leave and unknown why the other couldn't do it. It was finally scheduled for inspection May 12th.

At the local school there has been a constant turnover of teachers and staff testing Covid positive – including the principal. Relieving staff were being sent down from Darwin, and *Karen Dixon* enjoyed consulting with one who is a specialist in bilingual education.

The language program is progressing. *Rosemary Plummer*, one of the main local indigenous helpers, has returned to working at the Language Centre. They were able to finalise a translation of the National Anthem into Warumungu which the Primary School choir sang at the two schools and at the town mid-morning Anzac service. This led to ABC Radio Alice Springs travelling to Tennant to broadcast the students singing it live later in the week.

Please pray for the young mothers to resume their Sunday school story-telling, and for wisdom in getting the Bible Translation back underway.

Deaths

Palm Island recently lost one of great significance to the Community and Church. *Peena Gaia* went to be with the Lord in early April. Please pray that the memory of her strong Christian witness will continue to challenge people about their need to follow Jesus.



The mother of *Isaac Gordon* went to be with her Lord in late February. We join him in thanking God for her long and faithful life.

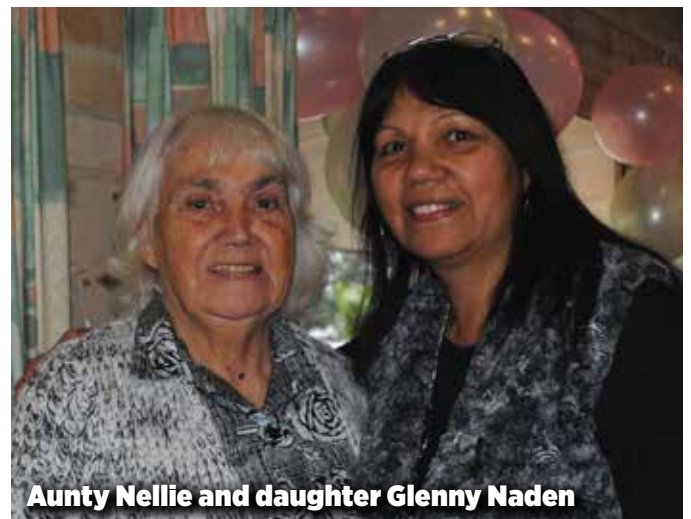
Lucy Quinn cared for her ill brother before he was called home to his Lord in April. Pray for a renewal of emotional and physical strength for her after giving care and now going through the grief of loss.

In April the brother-in-law of *Cliff Letcher* passed away. He and *Carolyn* were able to travel to *Alice Springs* to be with his sister for the funeral service. *Tim Letcher* and his family were able to adjust their departure from *Epenarra* to be with *Cliff* and the other family members at that time.

Convention

Cherbourg Church was bursting at the seams at their Easter Convention. They averaged 100 people at each meeting, and overflowed with 160 one night. The speakers who shared from God's Word were *Rod Bird, John Tonga, Goma Conlon and David Chambers*.

Local leader *Max Conlon* reports the church now has 30-40 believers. Pray they will be active and faithful in their witness and service for Christ in and around *Cherbourg*.



Aunty Nellie and daughter Glenny Naden

Birthday

Aunty Nellie O'Chin reached the milestone birthday of 90 in April. Most members of her very large family gathered around her in *Coffs Harbour* to celebrate the occasion with this special lady. The AIM family remembers with deep gratitude her service for Christ in *Cherbourg, Woorabinda and Inala*, and 'thank God upon every remembrance of her'. Please pray she and those who help her will know God's grace, strength and peace each day.



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New Ministry

In mid-April *David and Fay Chambers* had their last Sunday at the Rockhampton AIM Church. They have moved to the north Brisbane area and will be engaging in a new ministry with Fay's brother *Goma Conlon*. They will remain members of the Rocky fellowship who prayerfully stand with them and have sent them out with their blessing.

Jandalyn Mitchell from the Rocky Church shares the following:

David and Fay's faithfulness to the Rocky church and churches around Qld has seen God bless them with a new venture in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. We have been so blessed to be a part of their journey and have seen them grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, love for the community, and church family.

They have been such a tremendous help here and in the surrounding communities like Woorabinda, helping with leading, giving pastoral care, conducting weddings, funerals, speaking at conventions, Religious Instructions in schools, youth, hospitality, home groups and visiting. They will be greatly missed but it will be exciting as we watch and pray as they continue their journey with the Lord in north Brisbane.

Psalms 40:4 How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood.

Pray for the Rockhampton Church as they seek the Lords will and guidance for the future.

