



Uniting Church in Australia

NORTHERN SYNOD

Rev Walter Allen Fejo

8 June 1939 – 9 January 2012

Walter Allen Fejo was born on 8th June 1939. Wali's family consisted of his father Juma (Jimmy Fejo), mother Kitty Fejo, and five brothers and two sisters. He spent much of his early years as a hospital patient and he moved from the Retta Dixon Home (Bagot) to Police Paddock and then to Darwin Hospital children's home in Darwin.

At the age of 17, Wali became a laundryman apprentice at Darwin Hospital and was later a carer for small boys in the Children's Ward at the hospital. From 1954 to 1958, he studied at Bible College in Singleton, where he completed a Certificate of Church History, Missions, Music, Theology, Evangelism, Public Speaking, Pastoral Care and Wholistic Ministry. His gumleaf and ukulele playing was always popular when the students shared at various meetings.

In 1960 Wali joined the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) and was an Assistant Pastor of the Home Church. In 1964 he served six months at Darwin Community Church and married former RDH girl and Singleton graduate Beryl Hotlze on 27 July 1964. Together they served at a number of AIM centres including congregations in Elliott, Beetaloo, and Newcastle Waters cattle station, where he served for eight years. After that he moved to Delisaville (now called Belyuen) where he served as a Community Minister for five years. While in Katherine, Wali was also working with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and was well known and respected by his work colleagues.

Wali returned to Darwin in 1970 and was a Community Worker at the Bagot Community until 1974. From 1974 to 1977 Wali was the Pastor of the AIM Church in Katherine and in 1978 moved to Adelaide where he was the Manager of the Young Offenders' Hostel.

The last link of ministry Wali had with AIM was pastoring the Dubbo Church and it was here that Beryl died in July 1982. After some time back in Darwin, Wali and his three children (Daniel, Andrew and Lynette) then went to Sydney where he pastored churches with the Anglican Church and AEF and serviced for some time at Bimbadeen Bible College.

Wali then went to Sydney to work in NSW prisons. He then returned to Darwin as candidate for ministry in the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) of the Uniting Church and he studied at Nungalinga College. He completed his studies and was Ordained in 1990.

Wali then served as the Associate Executive of the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) in Darwin. He became Principal of Nungalinga College in 1996 and served there until he went on study leave NSW in 2002. He then worked for the NSW Board of Mission with UAICC as the NSW Development Officer.

In 2005 Wali supposedly retired, and moved to Port Augusta where he worked as a Mentor of the Young Fathers Program for four months before handing over those responsibilities to the young fathers. He later took up a placement with Frontier Services in South Australia in the Mobile Aboriginal Patrol covering areas such as Roxby Downs, Coober Pedy, Oodnadatta, Maree, Hawker, Quorn and Port Augusta. He concluded with the Patrol in December 2011. Still in active retirement, Wali was in conversation with Nungalinga and Kormilda Colleges in Darwin about future ministry possibilities when he passed away on 9th January 2012 in Adelaide.

Wali not only provided Christianity leadership in Australia but also internationally. He was an Australian representative on the World council of churches, Life Member of the congress South Australia, a Foundation Member of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and a Uniting church Minister. He also sat on many Boards and committees that advocated for human rights and the disadvantaged and was a well sought after speaker. His work even took him to the prisons in New South Wales, whilst working for World Vision.

Wali was an active sportsperson; he played football for Darwin Buffaloes and Wanderers Football Clubs. Whilst serving as Pastor for AIM in Katherine he, along with Norman Rosas, started the Bethel bombers Baseball Team – this later became known as the Bombers Baseball Club. He also played basketball for RDH and Katherine. Other sporting activities included table tennis and the latest was playing lawn bowls at the Port Augusta Bowls Club where he was a member. He played regularly and his team won the Night Owls competition on three occasions. He was well thought of and respected by all members of the Club.

When Wali and family lived at Belyuen, his traditional country, family and friends would often go over and he would often go over and he would take them fishing, hunting, goose shooting and camping.

Wali also had other creative and artistic talents. He named Danila Dilba Health Service and designed their logo and appropriately gave the Health Service its Larrakia name. This was a fitting recognition, as a Larrakia elder and leader to share and promote his family's story with the wider community.

In June 2011, Wali shared in a class at Nungalinga College about his early years in the Retta Dixon homes in Darwin. He spoke of the pain that he still carried and spoke of how it was very hard to only be able to talk to his mother through a wire fence.

Wali also recalled his brother who was six years old when he was sent to South Australia. Wali didn't see him for another seven years. When he went to visit him he had to fill in forms to get permission to see his brother and take him out. They speared some fish and sat and had a barbeque. Wali also recalled that his other younger brother was taken when he was still crawling.

His family was always a major part of Wali's life. In the class at Nungalinya Wali shared about slipping out under the fence to go out to visit his uncles. He said when he got caught he was punished, he sometimes got a beating. He remembered having to stand in and clean an oil grill as punishment. He faithfully attended weekend discipleship classes lead each month by Jocelyn (Gadd) Bridges and he never wavered in his commitment. She shared: 'It was a thrill to watch him grow and develop in his Christian life'.

The Rev Wali Fejo lived in hard times. A Larrakia Elder, he was part of the Stolen Generations and had a great Christian faith. Wali devoted his Christianity to not only his family but to the broader community. He presided over many funerals and weddings for the Aboriginal community nationwide. He made grieving a positive experience for many families. His dedicated service to the church in the Northern Territory, South Australia and New South Wales was what he did as he lived out his call in Christian service.

We give thanks to God for Wali and the life he lived. We are comforted that he now rests in peace.

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