



A CRY FOR HELP INDIGENOUS RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

The 31st Annual Meeting of the Northern Synod was held in Darwin in October 2007. Of great concern to members are the effects from the Federal Government's Intervention in Indigenous Communities in the Northern Territory on members, their families and their communities. As a result of hearing the expressions of pain and confusion from Indigenous members the Synod released this statement:

"We are now under three laws - our own Aboriginal Law, Australian Law for all Australians and this new white man's law for Aboriginal People in the Northern Territory" - An Arnhem Land Church Leader

Through our partnerships as Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Northern Synod we share a sense of pain, loss, confusion and sadness generated by the Federal Government's Intervention in Northern Territory Indigenous communities. Our Synod members from Anangu Lands in South Australia and from the Kimberley in Western Australia are also very concerned.

At our annual Synod meeting held 30

September to 3 October 2007 we heard many cries for help and expressions of concern with comments such as:

- "Is there a war between black and white people?" (a child from Galiwin'ku.)
- "We heard they are coming to take away our children." (a woman from Ramingining)
- "There are so many voices; it is all crazy, leaving us with a feeling of hopelessness." (a man from Galiwin'ku)

We share a strong sense of betrayal concerning the Federal Government's lack of consideration and incorporation of the recommendations from the 'Little Children are Sacred' Report into its legislative response.

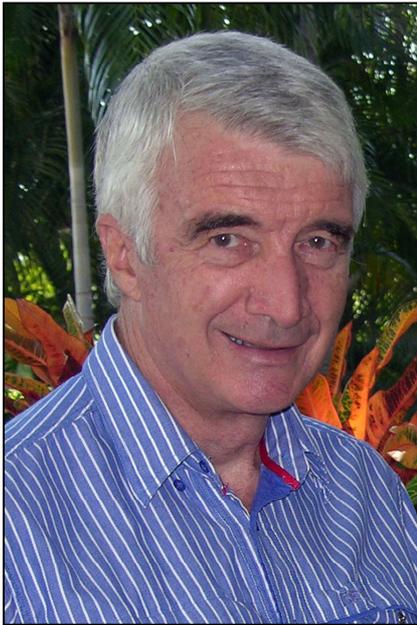
While the Northern Synod welcomes government action in seeking to address sexual abuse and also supports initiatives that will keep our communities safe, this Synod condemns the current legislative response as abusive, intrusive and

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Members of the 31st Annual Meeting of the Northern Synod
October 2007 at Kormilda College, Darwin

From the Moderator



At our Synod meeting in October we spent a lot of time listening to our Indigenous members describe their feelings about the Federal Government Intervention in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. I thought that the comments of our brothers and sisters were very responsible and controlled, given the way they are being treated.

The response from the Synod as a whole has been to issue a statement which calls for the repeal of the NT Emergency Response Act 2007 and a fresh start in addressing the recommendations of the “*Little Children are Sacred*” report. It also calls upon Uniting Church congregations to build and

strengthen partnerships with Indigenous people affected by the legislation.

Clearly there are many problems facing Indigenous people all over Australia. None of us can deal with all the issues in every community but we can make a difference in some places. At Casuarina we are trying to work out how our congregation can best help the communities in Arnhem Land we are partnered with through our Presbytery. We are linked with the people at Galiwin’ku and Gapuwiyak.

Our first commitment should be to pray. Some of us have lived at Galiwin’ku and have visited Gapuwiyak quite often. We know something of the life of those communities and we know many of the leaders of the churches there. We can pray for those people individually and for the people in the community generally.

Secondly, we can go and visit those communities and offer our personal support. I am inspired by the story of Jonathan, son of Saul, who went out and found David in the desert of Ziph. David was a fugitive from Saul who was trying to kill him but

Jonathan went out and helped David “find strength in God”. (1 Samuel 23:16). We can help our friends find strength in God by making the effort to visit them in their communities.

Thirdly, we can promote the opportunity for skilled Christian people to work in Indigenous communities. In the Mission days, when resources were scarce, many innovative projects for meaningful employment of Indigenous people were developed. There is no reason why sawmilling, fishing, gardening, dress-making and other local enterprises

cannot be run today as they were in the 1970’s. What is needed is energy, motivation and commitment for a long-term solution to the dependency and apathy that characterizes so many communities today.

My hope is that we will take seriously the theme of our Synod this year: “Christ came to give life life in all its fullness”, and do our part to see that the Indigenous people of our Synod area share in that abundant life.

Wendell Flentje
Moderator

...we can promote the opportunity for skilled Christian people to work in Indigenous communities

Beulah Lowe and the Yolngu People

‘One of the biggest barriers between races is the language barrier.’ Beulah Lowe Notes 1964

In promoting the new book by Betsy Wearing, *‘Beulah Lowe and the Yolngu People’* at this year’s Synod meeting, General Secretary Kevin Davis paid tribute to the work that Beulah Lowe carried out in Milingimbi as a teacher, interpreter, linguist, missionary.

Members of Synod who worked with and remembered Beulah spoke warmly of her dedication to the Yolngu people and of her genius in working with the Gupapuyngu language.

Copies of the book are available from the Synod Office - cost \$40. A review of Betsy Wearing’s book can be found on page 16.

Annual Synod Meeting

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damaging. Of particular concern is the removal of the permit system for entry into Aboriginal Land and the lack of consultation with Indigenous people on this matter and on other major reforms contained within the various legislative changes that have been enacted.

The Northern Synod calls on the Australian Government to enter into a real partnership with Indigenous people in the Northern Territory by enacting legislation that upholds human rights, affirms self-determination and enhances the capacity of individuals and communities to contribute to solving issues of concern within their own lives.

Therefore we believe that the Government should:

- a. repeal the NT Emergency Response Act 2007; and
- b. start afresh through consultative processes to develop a range of responses that directly address the recommendations of the 'Little Children are Sacred' Report.

We encourage all governments to build on successful community development projects that have involved Aboriginal consultation and decision-making, as demonstrated by Aboriginal Resource and Development Services and the Arnhemland Progress Association.

This Synod resolves to:

- release this statement to media agencies;
- request the Assembly to incorporate this statement within an election strategy that addresses

the Federal Intervention within a wider human rights framework for all Australians;

- encourage all members of the Uniting Church to place these issues of concern before their local candidate and seek their endorsement;
- encourage Uniting Church congregations to build and strengthen partnerships with Indigenous people affected by the legislation and participate in local public actions in line with this statement; and
- affirm the commitment of the Synod and all its members (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to live in partnership and solidarity with all Indigenous people.

Editor's Note:

This statement was released by the Moderator on 15 October 2007 to the National Assembly, Assembly Agencies, congregations and ministers across the Northern Synod, Church and commercial media outlets and community groups.

Since its release, the statement has appeared on media websites such as ABC OnLine and the Age Newspaper. It has been circulated to 'grass roots' protest movements.

Letters of support and of dissatisfaction for the Synod's stance have been published in the media and received by the Moderator.

Members of the Pilgrim Presbytery have proposed ways in which support can be expressed in their local contexts. Please see pages 6 and 7 for further articles on the Synod's response to the Intervention.

Education - for what?

The Synod hosted the public forum, *Aboriginal Education - Education for what?* as part of its Annual Meeting. Members of the forum panel included: Mr Malcolm Pritchard, Principal, Kormilda College; Mrs Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, Principal, St. Francis Xavier School, Daly River; Rev Dr

Djiniyini Gondarra and Mr Richard Trudgen, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services; Ms Raymattja Marika, linguist and member of Yirrkala community; Hon Paul Henderson, Northern Territory Minister for Education. The forum was facilitated by Rev Dr Chris Budden.

Each speaker shared their experi-

ences, dreams and hopes for the future in Indigenous education. While no answer was formulated out of the forum, speakers held up to the audience a vision of education that would bring Aboriginal people liberation, empowerment, choice, opportunity, employment and the ability to manage their own affairs and control their own lives.

Installation of new Moderator



Outgoing Moderator, Rev Steve Orme, with Rev Wendell Flentje during the Service of Installation

The installation of Rev Wendell Flentje as Moderator of the Northern Synod took place at the opening service of worship of the 31st Annual Meeting of the Northern Synod at Casuarina Uniting Church on Sunday 30 September 2007.

Indigenous members of the Synod escorted the Moderator-Elect into the service with a traditional Djambarrpuynu song. When he began work at Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island in 1973, Wendell was adopted into a family of the Djambarrpuynu clan. Wendell was presented with a banner made by the women from Galiwin'ku. The banner reflects the theme for the meeting of Synod "Christ came to

give life...Life in all its fullness".

A new item has been added to those things which act as symbols of the Northern Synod. At the commencement of the service General Secretary, Kevin Davis, placed on the communion table a set of headphones symbolising the commitment of the Synod to the use of translation technology during Synod meetings. The use of this equipment allows Indigenous members of the Synod to participate fully in the business of the church.

Other symbols that represent the life of the Synod include a message stick and a set of bibles in languages used within the Synod.

The candle placed on the table not only symbolised the light of

Christ, but was this year coloured in blue and white stripes - a small tribute to the new Moderator's excitement that Geelong had won the AFL Grand Final this year.

Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) Chairperson, Rev Mawunydjil Garawirrtja presented Wendell with a Congress stole as a symbol of the covenant relationship between the Synod and NRCC.

Among the highlights of the service, members of the Casuarina congregation's choir shared their gift of song. The multi-cultural flavour of the congregation was reflected not only by the choir but also by the excellent meal which was provided for members and guests.



Ecumenical guests Bishop Greg Thompson and Fr Stephen Hackett with the new Moderator

Rev Wendell Flentje will serve as Moderator of the Northern Synod for two years. The responsibilities of Moderator are undertaken in addition to Wendell's placement as minister of the Casuarina congregation.

Please support Wendell as he seeks to give leadership to the church in the Northern Synod.

Annual Synod Meeting

Daily Bible Studies at the Synod meeting were led by Rev Dr Tim Bose. Tim has developed a series of studies on the Old Testament Book of Ruth and, in partnership with Rev Rronang Garrawurra, has shared these studies in a series of retreats with ministers, pastors and lay leaders from congregations and communities across the Synod.

The studies contain powerful messages of partnership, faithfulness and covenant. “We have sensed that these studies are particularly relevant for all of us - Balanda and Yolngu - in the Northern Synod as Pilgrim Presbytery (PPNA) and NRCC try to work together as partners”, says Tim.

The importance of using appropriate translation in the Synod meeting was highlighted again with these studies as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members heard the story told using names for peo-

ple and places translated from the Hebrew text. “Ruth is an extended parable in which the Hebrew names of the characters describe the kind of people they are”, explains Tim.

Hence the Book of Companion-ship (*Ruth*) tells us the story of Companion (*Ruth*), My Delight (*Naomi*), the famine in Breadville (*Bethlehem*) and Pillar-of-strength (*Boaz*).

“Ruth challenges us, as we live in a secular society in an age of climate change to rediscover how our faith is relevant to both the natural world we have been commissioned to care for and the problems we face as a nation struggling with inequities between our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.”

Centre for Support of Indigenous Scriptures

NRCC Resource Worker, Howard Amery presented to the Synod a blueprint for establish-

ing the Centre for Support of Indigenous Scriptures. Howard outlined the background to this blueprint.

A concept proposal by the Djambarrpuynu Bible Translation Team to establish a Centre for Indigenous Scriptures was approved by the 2006 Synod.

A working group consisting of the Synod Secretary, NRCC Resource Worker and a representative of the Bible Translation Team at Galiwin'ku has refined the proposal to recognise that the primary need is creation of a service to support the efforts of Indigenous Translators and Scripture-in-Use workers within the Synod, with the Synod and NRCC acknowledged as joint owners of the Centre.

Key aspects of the proposal include:

- basing the centre at Nungalinya College
- Establishing regional centres or annexes
- Developing independent Indigenous scripture units
- Establishing a Reference Committee with responsibility to establish an operational budget and recruit staff

There is still more work to be done on the blueprint. While the Synod meeting did not formally establish the Centre at this meeting, it is anticipated that the final proposal will be presented to the Synod Standing Committee in 2008.



Rev Dr Tim Bose with Synod General Secretary Kevin Davis

A Cry for Help

In response to the Federal Government's Intervention in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, the Synod dedicated a full session of its meeting to allow NRCC members to share with the Synod how the Intervention legislation is being received.

Members from a number of Arnhem Land communities described what their communities have been through since the announcement of the Intervention in June this year. They shared their concerns as Christians and as members of the Uniting Church.

"We are surprised about this Intervention and cannot understand why it has happened to us."

Rev Mawunydjil Garawirtja, Chairperson of Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) recalled the changes in communities when the Government brought in self-determination. "The Church set up a Commission which produced a report called *Free to Decide*. I was on the Commission and heard the people say we want to self govern ourselves. Now because they are changing the law we have become children again."

Mr Maratja Dhamarrandji is a member of the Bible Translation team on Elcho Island. Maratja expressed concern about the way things are being communicated: "Fortunately for some, Aboriginal Resource Development Services radio (Yolngu Radio) is broadcasting in language and giving us very important information."

"There are so many voices and much of the message is crazy and mixed up. It is difficult to express or understand what is going on."

"When the assessment teams came they said they would give us education, health etc., everything we have already, so you can see how confused we are."

The Synod heard expressions of deep pain at the effect of the Intervention on families. Again and again members commented that many stories are circulating around communities - stories that "they" (the Intervention Taskforce) are coming to take away the children. There is pain and fear in the life of children also. The children of Elcho Island are asking: "Is there a war between black people and white people?"

"The children of Elcho Island are asking: "Is there a war between black people and white people?"

Rev Mawunydjil Garawirtja reminded the Synod of its commitment to covenant between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Uniting Church.

This covenant relationship binds members together. "We have covenant in our church. We want a strong partnership going hand in hand, because we are one in the body in Christ. We need you to walk hand in hand and, if necessary, go to gaol with us to fight this Intervention, like Noonkanbah."

A very strong plea was made by members for the Synod to support Indigenous communities, "We need people who can feel our pain, share our despair," said Maratja Dhamarrandji, "We need God and the Church's response."

"We are weighed down by this Intervention."

Members expressed their deep faith in God and in the power of prayer as a vital part of their response to this situation: "God knows our pain and we should be focusing on Him."

"The Government is showing Aboriginal people no respect."

"Many of us already do the right things, we are working hard, we have jobs and our Council is working very hard for the people."

How can we answer the cry?

Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA), at its October meeting, gave some attention to sections of the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (the legislation governing the Federal Government Intervention in Indigenous Communities in the Northern Territory).

While there was a measure of support for the argument that ‘something had to be done’ regarding the welfare and safety of children in Indigenous communities, it was felt that the legislation and the Intervention is the wrong approach.

Members were of the view that the Intervention is a step back for Indigenous people - a return to the ‘old days’ of paternalism. Many are disappointed that while the original intention of the Government’s announcement was a response to the ‘*Little Children are Sacred*’ Report, the resulting action seems to take no account of the recommendations of that report.

“Needs of children don’t feature - none of the 98 recommendations of the ‘Little Children are Sacred’ report are in the Act”

Pilgrim Presbytery members felt strongly that the Church should have something to say on the impact of the Intervention on Indigenous people. In doing so, it would be appropriate to point out that there are some measures of the Act that are not without merit, but that the enacting of the legislation could be better handled.

What are the implications?

- *Setting aside human rights*
 - *Widened power imbalance*
 - *Loss of dignity for Indigenous people*

The Presbytery is also strongly of the view that all statements by the Synod should be made in consultation with NRCC and should take account of statements already made by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and the National Assembly.

Presbytery members discussed in regional clus-

“We share the feelings of anger, rage and despair.”

ters how congregations could express solidarity and partnership with Indigenous communities. The results of these discussions were then taken to the Synod meeting where Indigenous members could hear the response to their calls for support.

“We want to be better brothers and sisters - we need you (NRCC) to help us to be better brothers and sisters.”

Practical measures committed to by PPNA congregations include:

- strengthening relationships with congregations in remote communities
- building stronger relationships with Nungalinga College
- working ecumenically in local communities to support Indigenous organisations

“The Church needs to be visible at public events, in public discussion”

Overwhelmingly, PPNA members expressed a desire to act in partnership with NRCC, to express the covenant relationship in ways appropriate to Indigenous members. The themes of partnership, faithfulness and covenant from the Synod’s daily bible studies on the Book of Ruth became the theme of the response:

*“Your God is my God.
Your people are my people.”*

What's happening in the northern end of the Northern Synod...

School Chaplaincy in the rural area

Living Water Uniting Church congregation has been working with schools in the Litchfield Shire since 2004 providing chaplaincy services to students, staff and families in the school communities. Until recently, this service has been provided on a voluntary basis by invitation from the school principals.

These schools have successfully applied for grants from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training to fund chaplaincy programs. Living Water Chaplaincy Services has been contracted to provide services to four primary schools and to Taminmin High School. Chaplains also provide after hours and critical care support.

Living Water needs to add to the chaplaincy team of Pastors Stuart and Ros McMillan and Mr Jason Purugganan enabling a full service to be provided in each of the schools. The chaplaincy service aims to offer a range of expertise through a team thus strengthening the available service.

“This is an exciting opportunity to connect with community in a unique way” says Stuart McMillan. “Providing chaplaincy services to schools in this area meets Living Water congregation’s vision statement: *‘Connecting our community with the love of Jesus’*.”

Further information can be found at www.ns.uca.org.au and go to ‘Placement News’.

Multi faith seminars

Nightcliff Uniting Church ran four seminars each Tuesday nights culminating in a multi faith service on 23 September 2007, led by Rev Kate Fraser.

Leaders were invited to attend from the Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic communities. Dr Rajeer Sharma, Mr Don Tillekeratne and Iman Adam represented these communities respectively.

Kate Fraser, minister with Nightcliff congregation, spoke about Christianity and we sang songs between the four talks.

The children participated in a dance, each holding a multi coloured ribbon as they formed a circle, symbolizing the diversity of the faiths present.

To sum up, our youth group pressed a symbolic nail to the palm of those who wished to take part, symbolizing the sacrifice of our Lord. To conclude we sang the Jewish blessing of “Shalom.”

Many in the congregation expressed delight in the conception of the worship gathering and the expression of goodwill between the different faiths present. Our boys’ group is organizing a visit to the mosque this term as a follow up, as we endeavour to keep open communication between the many different faiths present in Darwin.

Nanette Thomas - Nightcliff Congregation



Children of Nightcliff Congregation participate in the multi faith service

The Uniting Church has a number of resources available to assist members understand other faiths, their values and their views better and help them to appreciate people who are different. Also available are Guidelines for multi-faith gatherings. Work in this area is conducted by the National Reference Group on Relations with Other Faiths. More information can be found on the Reference Group’s website: nat.uca.org.au/relations/

Casuarina young people on a mission

Fourteen young people and 4 adults from Casuarina visited the Philippines during the October school holidays. They spent most of the time in the city of Bacolod at the Youth With a Mission (YWAM) base.

Bacolod is a large city on the Island of Negros, a 45 minute flight from Manila. Known as the “City of Smiles”, Bacolod has many poor and needy people. YWAM Bacolod has a vision to reach children, families, orphans, the poor, widows, the sick and the broken hearted for Christ. They have childrens' ministries which are focussed on the poor. They have a weekly Bible Club aimed at evangelism and discipleship, a Pre-School and a small scale food program.

The highlight of the trip for Tahlia Brown was the worship run by the young people of the 13-16 Church and the worship at the YWAM Ministry House. Tahlia said she was really struck by the poverty of many of the people. She saw up to 11 people living in one room with no running water, yet the people were open and loving. She found it hard to see all the orphaned children, some of whom were left to beg.

Jarrah Brown’s highlight was also the worship of the children at Bacolod and the worship at the YWAM base. He discovered that God can work miracles like healing in any situation. It was brought home to him that we are so fortunate in Australia with so much food, nice houses and little air pollution. He was chal-



David Grimes helps out while visiting the Philippines with young people from Casuarina congregation

lenged to think about what we can do to help other people and bring them to the Lord.

Leah Cantrill also said that the highlight for her was the worship at all the places they visited. She was touched to see that the children had very little in the way of material things, but their hearts were not hardened and they were open to everything that was shared with them. Leah felt that her faith was strengthened through the experiences she had. She has always wanted to be a missionary and was reminded that there is the need for people everywhere to hear of God’s love.



Amy Annis-Brown (left) and Gensine Rickert (far right) and new friends

David Grimes said that the highlight of the trip was to see the kids of the 13-16 church leading worship. It really impressed him that young people can lead worship in such a way in church. He noticed how really poor many of the people are and was surprised that so many spoke good English.

Poasa Raqiyawa’s highlight was also watching how the young people worshipped God in Bacolod. He learnt that lots of people in the Philippines know about God and the visit has inspired him to consider doing some kind of missionary work in the future.

Wendell Flentje

Making connections

Rev Dr Kerry Enright was appointed as National Director of Uniting International Mission (UIM) in February 2007. Kerry has come to the position with a great deal of experience having been the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Aoteroa, New Zealand for the past ten years.

Since February, Kerry has visited each Synod of the Uniting Church saving the best until last with his visit to the Northern Synod in October 2007. He was able to get a glimpse of life in Arnhem Land through meeting with Rev Hala Tupou in Yirrkala.

A visit to the Banana Farm now run by Yirrkala Dhanbul Association gave Kerry a sense of the history of the area. Links with the past and the church are maintained by reference on the sign at the entrance to the farm that it was established by Methodist Overseas Missions.

During his stay in Darwin, Kerry visited Nungalinga College, Kormilda College, AuSil and Melaleuca Refugee Centre. Kerry was able to meet with a group of Sudanese refugees to discuss the possibilities of support for programs in their home area through the sponsorship of Nightcliff Uniting Church congregation. Kormilda College Principal, Malcolm Pritchard, also met with Kerry regarding the establishment of a partner relationship with a school in Indonesia.



Dr Chuck Grimes, Rev Salomo Bangun, Rev Dr Tim Bose and Mr Kevin Davis give Rev Dr Kerry Enright (centre) a demonstration of the Synod's translation equipment.

A morning tea at Uniting House gave Darwin-based ministers, Presbytery staff and Synod staff an opportunity to meet Kerry and hear of his vision and commitment to the work of Uniting International Mission. He stressed the need to establish and maintain partnerships highlighting that the Uniting Church in Australia is a catholic church, that is, that we are part of the universal church. This is fundamental to who we are as the Uniting Church and as individual members.

This catholicity means that we are connected with people who are very different to ourselves. This opens up to us a different world in which we can engage in mission beyond ourselves. UIM seeks to encourage congregations to develop relationships with projects whereby support, contact and information is not simply a one way process. Building partnerships requires each party to participate in the relationship in mutually beneficial ways.

UIM supports a wide range of projects through partner churches in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific, India and Africa. Information on projects can be found on the UIM website: uim.uca.org.au/uim/ and by contacting the Northern Synod Office.



Kupang Malay New Testament Dedication

In early September, a group from the Northern Synod travelled to Kupang in West Timor at the invitation of our partner church, Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT), to participate in the dedication of the Kupang Malay New Testament.

The dedication of *Tuhan Allah Pung Janji Baru* (God's New promise/covenant) was a great ecumenical celebration held in an indoor sports stadium in Kupang. Representatives of the Catholic Church, Pentecostal churches and GMIT participated in the service. Two nationally known Christian singers from Jakarta featured in the upbeat praise and worship to begin the celebration. International visitors were introduced by Dr Charles Grimes. The Moderator of GMIT, himself a translator, addressed the congregation. A message of support and encouragement from the Provincial Governor was read.

After scripture readings from the new translation, Rev S.V. Nitti preached a very engaging sermon in Kupang Malay that had the congregation in fits of laughter.

The dedication took the form of presenting the first fruit of the harvest as the scripture was brought to the stage in baskets through songs and dances from the traditional cultures that are a part of the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) in Indonesia. Church leaders, including the two Indonesian ministers from Darwin Uniting Churches, were presented with two copies of the bible. They then presented one copy to representatives of the various groups within the community such as the bemo and bus drivers, sellers



Representatives from the Northern Synod with AuSii staff and supporters ready for departure to West Timor

of vegetables, fishermen and clergy, to signify the spreading of the Word across the community. One of the enthusiastic ministers said after the celebration, "Jesus has come to Kupang." He was hearing Jesus' words in his everyday language.

In a meeting between the Moderator of GMIT and the international visitors, the Moderator spoke with passion of the formation of the UBB (Language and Culture Unit) within the GMIT Synod. Previously, the translation work had been a part of the Christian University, but Rev Dr Ranoh said it was now regarded as central to proclaiming the gospel in the community, the reason for the existence of the church. The Kupang Malay translation is seen as a bridge to translating the scriptures into Indigenous languages, a work that is already well underway.

Among the visitors were representatives of the Wycliffe Bible translators worldwide including National Directors from Jakarta, Malaysia and Australia and members of The Seed Company in America through which funding for the entire project had come. Among the visitors from the Northern Synod were two Indigenous translators from the Djambarrupungu Bible Translation Team on Elcho Island. GMIT has shown the way forward for the Northern Synod as it establishes a Centre for Indigenous Scriptures.

Steve Orme



Annual Synod Meeting

A Post-Synod Reflection from the In-coming Synod General Secretary

Having participated in Synod 2007, I have two lasting thoughts. While the excellent Bible study led by Rev Tim Bose, the Education Forum at Charles Darwin University, the catch-up conversations with those I had not recently talked with and the opportunity to meet others for the first time were highlights, my two lasting thoughts concerned:

- our Monday night session on the Australian Government Intervention in the Northern Territory; and
- the green cordial challenge.

The Intervention session really challenged me because our Aboriginal members who spoke, shared about misunderstanding, pain, hurt and sorrow – and that this had been going on, not just since the commencement of the recent Intervention, but since our church withdrew from Aboriginal communities following the “Free to Decide” consultation in 1973.

This was a shock – that the pain had been there for so long, and a special moment of connection for me because when I was interviewed for the General Secretary position in June this year, my first answer to the selection panel was about the need to re-visit “Free to Decide”. Hence I intend to raise this matter with the Standing Committee early in 2008, so we can consider how – as part of our ongoing partnership – we can address this issue.

My second lasting moment was triggered by John McLaren, Chairperson of the Synod Finance and Property Services Committee, when John spoke to the motion about forming Presbytery Property Committees. John, in dynamic style, poured a small amount of green cordial into one drink bottle. He then poured the same amount of green cordial into three other drink bottles. The result was one drink bottle that reasonably green and three other bottles that were only just green.

This very powerfully made the point that if we are to move from a centralised approach to property matters – the one property committee as is

currently done through the Finance and Property Services (FAPS) Committee, we will need to have enough people with sufficient skills and abilities to undertake the work of these new, additional Property Committees.

I support the establishment of the Presbytery committees because it creates the opportunity for more people to be involved in this part of our church’s life. However, this change also comes with the risk that property matters will not, if not enough people become involved, be attended to properly. If this was to be the case, we would need to move back to the one central property committee way of doing things.

Well, that was my Synod. I look forward to getting around our Synod, particularly to the Kimberley and Pitjantjatjara areas, as I have much to learn about what God is doing through his people through our Presbyteries and our Uniting Church agencies.

Grace and peace.
Peter Jones

Peter Jones takes up the position of General Secretary from 1 January 2008 replacing Mr Kevin Davis AM.

LIFE TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCES

‘*Kimberley Horizons*’ was launched at Broome Uniting Church in June 2007 as part of the Shinju Festival program. Written by Rev Trevor Foote ‘*Kimberley Horizons*’ tells the story of the first four years of his ministry, following ordination, with the Federal Methodist Mission West Kimberley Patrol based in Broome.

Copies of the book are available from Rev Trevor Foote by email: footearthur@dodo.com.au or phone (07) 3812 7889

Regional Retreat in Central Australia

Following on from the successful retreats held in Jabiru and in Ramingining this year, Rev Tim Bose and Rev Rronang Garrawurra took the Bible Studies on the Book of Ruth to the Ananguku Ministry Area Regional Retreat.

Ministers from Tennant Creek and Alice Springs joined with community ministers and church leaders from the Ananguku Area Ministry Council in Ernabella in October. According to Rev Elizabeth Warschauer, minister with the Tennant Creek Congregation, this was a significant time of learning as well as of building relationships with NRCC members.

Members of NRCC and PPNA concluded the Retreat with a simple service of Holy Communion at the grave site of Charles Duguid and Phyllis Duguid, just outside of Ernabella,

“With the Musgrave Ranges in the background we gathered at this sacred place to share in the remembrance of Christ’s passion



Rev Elizabeth Warschauer (back to camera), Rev Murray Muirhead, Rev Rronang Garrawurra, Mr Graham Kulyuru, Rev Tim Bose, Mr Kinyin McKenzie at the grave site of Charles and Phyllis Duguid. Rev John Flaherty, Tennant Barkly Patrol Minister is behind the camera.

and the passion of those who have gone before us,” says Rev John Flaherty.

On Duguid’s tombstone are these words composed by the Anangu people:

*He called us and we became his.
So we called him here to lie in peace
in our land.*

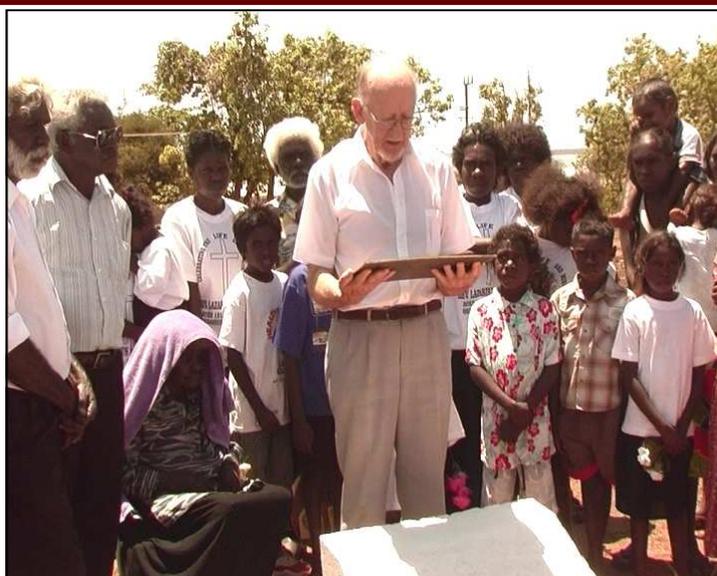
“We had spent the previous days reflecting on the story of Ruth from our different cultural perspectives. Seeing the story of Ruth with new eyes, we were enlightened to the significance of the blending of cultures and the importance of land in our heritage. It was a fitting conclusion to the retreat.”

Celebrating life and ministry

The life and ministry of Rev Lazarus Lamilami was celebrated at Minjilang in October. Lazarus was the first Aboriginal man ordained by the Methodist Church.

Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) and Minjilang Uniting Church hosted traditional celebrations to acknowledge 30 years since Rev Lamilami’s passing.

A church service and evening of fellowship celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination.



Rev Jack Goodluck and NRCC members with family and friends of Rev Lazarus Lamilami at Minjilang

Reflections of a Retiring General Secretary



In 2005 I started working as the Interim General Secretary for a period of one year. The one year stretched into three years. Those three years have been very enjoyable and exciting years. I give praise to God for the opportunity of being able to serve the church in this way. I have certainly gained a great deal of knowledge of how our church works and through the stimulating worship and bible study my Christian experience has grown greatly.

The task before me in 2005 was to implement the review of the Synod carried out prior to my arrival. The office was reorganized and communications within the office began to dramatically improve. This I believe was helped by adding a staff meeting to the weekly devotions.

The role of the Synod and the Pilgrim Presbytery were clarified. Resources were made available to the Presbytery to assist them to operate as a Presbytery. The Rev Felicity Amery and her supporters have done a marvellous job in

getting the Presbytery to function efficiently and give real spiritual and moral support to the congregations.

There was a need to clarify the roles of the Moderator and the General Secretary. This task was easy to achieve and helped by the fact that as General Secretary I was a lay person. It is quite clear that the Moderator is the head of the Church in the Synod and would officiate at all official ceremonies, public occasions and speak on behalf of the Church. The Moderator also has an important role as the spiritual head of the Synod.

The relationship between the Synod and NRCC was not clear. Also I found interesting that NRCC and Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS), whilst different organisations, had one governing body. That caused confusion in the minds of people in the Anangu Lands and the Kimberley. They saw a massive amount of money being spent in Arnhem Land and little in their areas. As ARDS began reworking their constitution it gave an opportunity to explore the separation of ARDS, being the welfare and community organisation, and the role of NRCC as the

supporter of congregations. That model was similar to Somerville Community Services and the Pilgrim Presbytery. Our Aboriginal folk began to see the distinction between the roles of presbytery and the roles of an agency. The two are now quite separate and NRCC funds, whilst fairly evenly distributed, are now perceived to be evenly distributed.

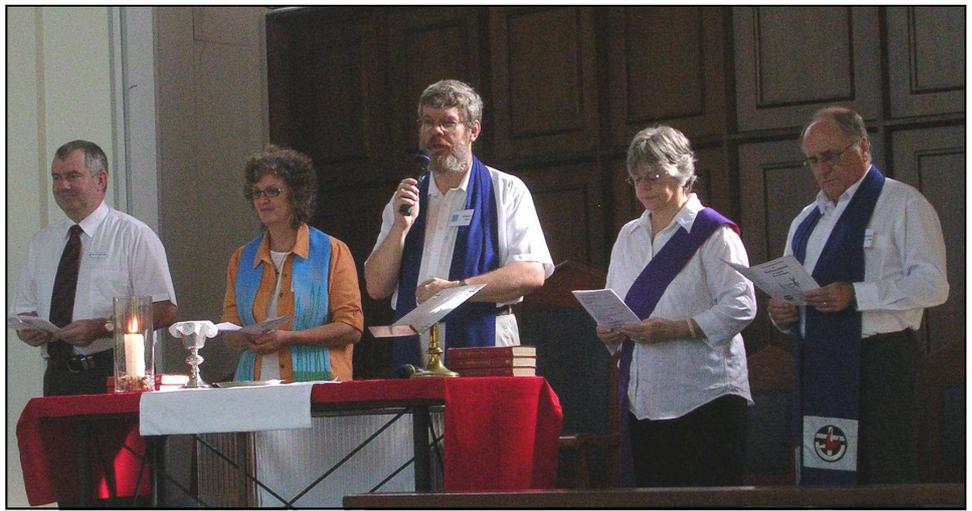
My first Synod in 2005 caused me great concern with respect to how we communicated with the Aboriginal members of the Synod. Interpreting services tended to be for one group only and so I set about trying to rectify that problem. As a result at the 2006 Synod, which was held in Alice Springs, headsets were introduced to allow three language groups to hear what was happening in their own language. Those languages were Djambarrpuynu, Pitjantjatjarra and Indonesian. This was very successful and it was wonderful to see, particularly the Anangu people, empowered to understand and to make comment about Synod business. The 2007 Synod also utilised this technology and I am confident the technology and translation



Kevin Davis (centre) with Northern Synod representatives to the Uniting Church National Assembly in 2006.

services are here to stay. I pay tribute to the translators who have to work hard and concentrate. I particularly pay tribute to the members of the Synod who patiently wait while the translations take place.

In 2005 I was very concerned to discover that Nungalinga College seemed to be deserted by the Uniting Church. We were still a member of the College and we had members attending board meetings, but the Uniting Church gave no other support to Nungalinga College. No Uniting Church Aboriginal members had studied Theological courses for a number of years. I felt it was necessary to bring this matter to a head and at the Alice Springs Synod a paper entitled "To Stay or Not to Stay" was discussed at great length. I was pleased to see that our Aboriginal folk gave their full support to re-engaging with Nungalinga College. That re-engagement is already paying off and the Rev Jovilisi Ragata is our theological lecturer at Nungalinga. This year a number of NRCC folk have been to the College for short courses with Jovilisi following them up at home.



Kevin Davis (far right) participates in the Induction Service for Rev Peter Richer as new Chaplain of Kormilda College in March 2007. L to R: Malcolm Pritchard - Principal; Felicity Amery - Chairperson PPNA, Steve Orme - Moderator, Annette Bailey - Anglican Chaplain

Another challenge was to attempt to come to grips with the matter of Indigenous scriptures. The Djambarrpuynu Bible Translation Project at Elcho Island has worked on translating the New Testament for nearly 30 years. It is wonderful that the work is now at the printer. Much of their work has been done with little support from the church. A concept proposal was presented to the 2006 Synod suggesting that we should explore how we might support and help the translation of the scriptures into other languages. New technologies have appeared and, with support from organisa-

tions such as Australia Society of Indigenous Scriptures (AuSIL), it is possible that much more can be done to support the translation of the scriptures and the development of bible study materials. Next year we hope to start the Centre of Support for Indigenous Scriptures (CSIS) based at Nungalinga College.

Finally one of the most satisfactory observations I make of what has transpired in the last three years is the serious development of partnerships between Indigenous Christians and non-Indigenous Christians. At our last Synod I believe there was a real movement of the Spirit to challenge both the Pilgrim Presbytery and NRCC to work together in developing strong partnerships. A number of Pilgrim Presbytery congregations are making a commitment to link and develop sister-church relationships with congregations in Aboriginal communities. Our Aboriginal Christian friends need all the help and the support they can get from the non-Indigenous Christians as together and in partnership we struggle with their development and especially in the changing circumstances they find themselves in.

Again I give thanks to God for the opportunity to serve as the General Secretary during the last three years.



Kevin revives one of his previous occupations as conductor of the Elcho Island Choir. The singing was part of the celebrations on the retirement of Rev Ron Brandt at the October 2005 Synod Meeting

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BOOK REVIEW - JULIE WATTS

*Beulah Lowe and the Yolngu People
Betsy Wearing, 2007*

As the title suggests this book is the story of Beulah Lowe and her life's work with the Yolngu people of northeast Arnhemland and in particular the people of Milingimbi.

The information for the book is gathered from Beulah's many letters to family and friends, her diaries and interviews with people who lived and worked with Beulah.

The book is a tribute to Beulah's dedication and commitment to the task she set for herself in fulfilling the call on her life, at the age of 23, to be a missionary. The story unfolds the events of her life and discoveries she made along the way as her knowledge of, and friendship with the Yolngu deepened mainly due to her giftedness and talent as a linguist. Beulah arrived in Milingimbi dearly wanting the Yolngu to come to know and accept Christ as their Saviour as she had. She left with her theological understandings broadened, a richer person, as she realised the importance of language for the survival of Yolngu culture and also

the deep spiritual connection the people had with the land.

Beulah's work on the Aboriginal languages enabling the language to be in written form is still to this day used as the basis for course work in Aboriginal studies at Charles Darwin University.

The story of her life with the Yolngu is told very much from the Balanda viewpoint – there is very little from the Yolngu perspective yet the story tracks the changes that occurred for the Yolngu as the Balanda culture is introduced into their lives. Not all for the good. The question it raises for me is – has the view of the Balanda changed in all these years? Given the current debates and issues surrounding Aboriginal communities, I think not. Despite the work of Beulah and others the message has not sunk in with the decision makers of the region and this country, nor with the majority of the dominant culture, to bring about true reconciliation.

I recommend the book for its ability to give an insight into the life of the Aboriginal people and the impact of the Balanda culture on traditional culture and the speed with which the changes, for them, have taken place.