

Farewell and Memorial Minutes

9.1 Memorial Minute: Rev Dr Gumana

January 18, 2017 was a typical wet season day in Arnhem Land. But a few hundred people gathered in the rain to pay tribute to Rev Dr Gumana at Gängan, the homeland that he had struggled to establish and at which he died on 19th November 2016.

Many tributes were paid to a humble man who has had a great influence on many in his homeland and across the world. He was an internationally renowned artist, the last surviving of the artists of the Yirrkala Church Panels, and first prize winner of the 19th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2002. On receiving the award, he said, "I did not make this Larrakitj (funeral pole) just for my community, but for the world, so that black and white can walk together."

He was a man of deep faith. He understood the God revealed in Jesus Christ as the God he knew through his own culture and traditional Law. This was the message he and others sought to convey through the Yirrkala Church Panels and through many inspiring conversations and art works. Dr Gumana firmly believed that God had gifted the Land, Yolngu Law and Culture to his people and fought to claim and conserve that gift.

Born on his homeland in the early 1930's, he contracted Hanson's disease as a boy. He endured his teenage years in the Channel Island leprosarium before returning to Arnhem Land as a young man to engage in the struggles of his people for their rights. He was a signatory on the ground breaking Yirrkala Bark Petition in 1963. He was at the centre of the Homelands movement in the 1970's working hard to establish Gängan on his traditional land south of Yirrkala. He chaired the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation for 14 years and helped as an interpreter to establish the first Aboriginal Land Rights Act in relation to the Nabalco mine in 1972 and 1973. In 1980 and 1981 he was chairman of the Yirrkala Community Council and also chair of the Homeland Resource Centre. In the 1980's he took Yolngu Culture to the world, touring overseas with dance troupes. In 2003, he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for making an outstanding contribution to his community and to Australia through his actions and achievements. He was at the forefront of the Blue Mud Bay High Court case that secured land and sea rights for the traditional owners in 2008.

As well as his community involvement, he had a leadership role in the church. In the early 1970's he worked in a team relationship with the Lay Pastor at Yirrkala. He served as a Lay Pastor at Ramingining for a few months in 1976 before returning to Yirrkala and his homeland. He was chairman of the Arnhem Presbytery in 1982 and 1983. From 1984, he was the Lay Pastor for the Homelands related to the Yirrkala Parish. On 15th November 1991, he was ordained as a minister of the Uniting Church

in Australia and inducted into the placement of Gängan and Homelands, where he served until his death. In later years, he was the mentor and support for his daughter Marrpalawuy as she continued that ministry. He lived to see her commissioned as a Pastor in 2014.

One of the speakers at the memorial service compared him to Nelson Mandela. Although not gaining the international recognition of Mandela, he displayed among his own people and to those he engaged with from other places, the same qualities of courage and perseverance, humility and inner strength, leadership and giftedness that few possess. He leaves a lasting legacy among the Yolŋu and an example for others to follow.

Rev Steve Orme
NRCC Resource Officer

9.2 Deaconess Lorna Nellie Stevenson

Lorna was born in Melbourne on 20 June 1922 and was the third child of Albert and Mary-Ann Stevenson. She has 2 elder sisters, Rhoda and Myra, 2 younger sisters Ailsa and Alberta and the youngest a boy Albert. All are deceased.

Lorna was from a “well to do” family, her dad was a “sort after” builder, she was also descendant from the Lighthouse Stevenson’s who designed and constructed 97 manned lighthouses around the coast of Scotland in the 1900’s. She was therefore also related to Robert Louis Stevenson who was the son of Mark of the “Lighthouse Stevenson”.

Lorna’s family experienced bad times in the recession where her Dad lost a lot of money. This was due to his insistence on paying all the money he owed to suppliers yet could not collect the large amount of money owing to him.

Lorna finished her schooling in Melbourne and took an interest in shorthand and decided to study bookkeeping and shorthand typing. Lorna commenced her working life in Sydney. When WWII ended she went to Bourke to work in the office of a general store and was well paid by her account. Lorna said she was paid well and only stayed 18 months as she had saved enough for a change.

After she left Bourke Lorna went to New Zealand with her eldest sister Rhoda. She settled in Christchurch and got a job with a Stock & Station agent.

Lorna studied to be a Deaconess at Rolland House in Melbourne. She was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the Adelaide suburb of Cowandilla on 28th January 1960.

She was originally a field officer with the Presbyterian Church in South Australia and was an elder of Scots Church in Adelaide. Lorna was also part of the Christian Education team at the Presbyterian Church Offices in Adelaide. Well before the Uniting Church in Australia was formed, the Methodists, Congregationalists and the Presbyterians started a Young Adult group called Kairos. The group held monthly meetings in the new Central Methodist Mission building and Lorna was part of the leadership team that led the group.

She started work in Northern Territory when appointed as Deaconess in the United Church team in the Darwin City Church in May 1969.

In 1972 she was in Katherine. Frontier News December 1972 says *“Deaconess Lorna Stevenson leaves us at the end of the year after tackling a magical job at Katherine. Lorna first went to the NT as Deaconess in the Darwin parish. Later she filled in in an emergency when Katherine Parish was vacant and so endeared herself that they would not let her go. Our colleagues in UCNA share our high regard for Lorna’s ministry”*.

Lorna was in Karratha in the Pilbara in WA with Frontier Services in 1973-74. Frontier Services 'Spotlight' magazine July 1974 says, "*Lorna Stevenson has had one or two more 21st birthdays than anyone else in our Karratha Kamp team. Some of the kindergarten children wonder whose grandma she is but to the group of 40 high school students, Old Deac isn't such a bad scout*". -

She would have been 52 years old then!

She was in Alice in 1976 and was a member of the Northern Synod Standing Committee, 1979 to 1982. Lorna was a Secretary of the Centre Presbytery and was a member of a Parish review of the Pitjantjatjarra Lands led by Jim Downing and there is a photograph of Lorna madly typing up the notes on her trusty typewriter resting on the bonnet of the Land rover.

Lorna had a great interest in the Uniting Church from Assembly to Synods, and to the local church. Lorna was a good think and could sum up situations well and come to conclusions that sometimes could ruffle some people, but in the end she was usually correct with her conclusions. She was a very positive person and could always see the good in situations. At the same time she was able to have a good chuckle about other situations. She was a very caring person.

After her retirement, Lorna was still very active in the life of the Church. She was in the Church Office every Friday morning and produced the weekly bulletin and was excellent at keeping all the rolls up to date. She was a great typist and administrator which was a blessing to the John Flynn Congregation. Although retired, she was still a Deaconess at heart.

Up till her recent illness she would sometimes officiate at communion in the John Flynn Church, if the minister was away, and she took an active part in the small monthly services at Old Timers.

Lorna Stevenson - a truly wonderful dedicated and committed Christian, who served her church so faithfully.