

The Perspective of time

The Press now and again highlights problems in Indigenous communities. Certainly there are social problems as there are in the wider Australian community, but there are good things happening too that are given less attention.

During a recent conversation with visitors from the Anglican Board of Mission-Australia, I was able to give them a 35-year perspective on ministry development in the Aboriginal churches of Cape York Peninsula (CYP). Back in 1969, when I went as Chaplain to the Lockhart River Aboriginal community, there was only one Aboriginal priest in Australia (in the Northern Territory), and a widespread dependency on white authorities in both church and community governance in Aboriginal communities. Today the communities have Shire Councils with Aboriginal mayors and councillors, and the churches have a growing band of trained lay leaders and a number of ordained leaders emerging from them. While problems remain in both spheres, a lot has been achieved and will continue to be in partnership with the right kind of skilled support (that is not paternalistic!).

None of this change has happened easily. I will attempt to reflect a little on why. (This may take several newsletter episodes.) The 1970's were years of turmoil in CYP communities, particularly the three former Anglican Missions that were taken over by the Qld government in May 1967. The policy of assimilation put intense pressure on these communities to give up traditional values and to adopt a European lifestyle.

Government policy and staff had no appreciation of the depths of traditional values and the processes

of cultural change. Change takes place naturally from within and through consensus agreements, but is more likely to be resisted when imposed from outside. The result then was social turmoil including the defiant use of alcohol, active and passive resistance and reassertion of cultural values.

In the previous Mission time, missionaries were also agents of change – some benevolent, some oppressive. Both of these approaches were tempered by the chronic underfunding of the Missions by both Church and Government. In the period that followed, there remained dependency on white authorities to maintain the community systems introduced by church and government, and a reluctance to express a differing view to the "boss".

In 1969, I came in with a new era in church relations, no longer a Mission "boss" but nevertheless now a single independent voice in the community.

I saw that firstly as a challenge to share the gospel of Christ in a way that spoke to the cultural heart of the people rather than as a white man's religion. The other challenge that soon arose was to be a person supportive of Aboriginal aspirations of what they wanted their life to be and also to be a voice prepared to challenge the excesses of the assimilation push and paternalism that was frequently evident.

Yet it took patience to overcome the white boss image. I found that the way to get church councillors to talk in a meeting was to walk out of the room!

My preparation for this role was a 9 months course at ABM's House of the Epiphany. This included sessions on anthropology and methods of mission.



This was followed by an intensive 3-months linguistic course with the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

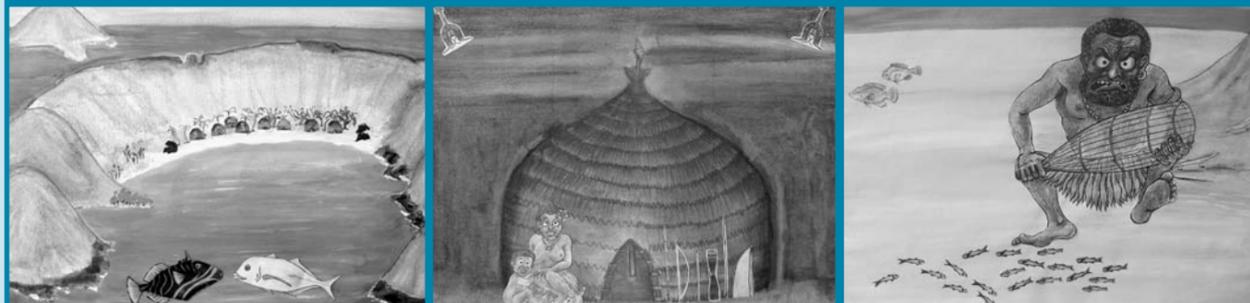
Unfortunately, there was then no effective approach to crosscultural mission among Aborigines. The thinking that was going on was in relation to Pacific peoples who are culturally different. We white Chaplains in Cape York had to feel our own way.

I tackled it firstly by becoming a learner, learning and recording a local language and learning about their cultural system, including religious values. I stumbled and made mistakes but it was productive in forming long-lasting relationships with the Aboriginal people and a greater appreciation of their spirituality and how Christian beliefs can find their home. The fruit of this developed later in two publications: *Bora is Like Church* and *Milbi Dabaar*, the latter a Resource Book for ministry among Aborigines that came out of workshops with people in the Wontulp-Bi-Buya College network.

In the 1970's, the aim of having Aboriginal clergy in the communities seemed a long way off. Through the work of Nungalingya College and Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, this is increasingly becoming a reality. David Thompson, Assistant Principal

Third book in children's series! (In colour.)

Trigger Fish and Trevally - Nagag and Geigi. The story concludes with a moral lesson, which draws a comparison to Jesus's parable about the lost sheep. \$19.95 (incl. postage)



Print Post Approved
PP424022/00956

Wontulp-Bi-Buya News

Bi-annual News for
Queensland churches & supporters

No. 22

July 2006

Graduates pay tribute to Certificate III in Theology course

A capacity crowd recently turned out to Wontulp-Bi-Buya College's training facilities at Tropicana Lodge to see four students graduate from the Cert III in Theology course.

Dorita Wilson, Yarrabah; Kelly-Anne Fourmile, Yarrabah; Patricia Murray, Woorabinda and Victor Joseph, St Pauls Community, Moa Island graduated on May 19, 2006, gaining valuable skills in how to effectively spread the word of God in their communities, as well as taking on a greater role in their churches.

Approximately 40 people attended the graduation ceremony including Assistant Bishop in the North Queensland diocese, Jim Leftwich and his wife Lala Leftwich, as well as visitors from the Anglican Board of Mission Australia. President of the Anglican Church MU, Nancy Irvin, presented the graduates with books donated by MU Australia to help in their studies.

The gathering was treated to traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gospel songs and dances performed by College students, as well as church members from Yarrabah and St Lukes Church, Cairns. The night made for strong fellowship and the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt by all present.

The graduates paid tribute to the course in developing their spiritual life. Dorita Wilson testified:

"It has been wonderful to learn more about God's word. I thank the Holy Spirit for his help in making me to understand my studies. I didn't know we could find Aboriginal culture in God's word until I commenced my studies at Wontulp-Bi-Buya College.

"I have been a Christian for 33 years and this course has really opened my eyes. I teach Bible studies



L-R - MU President Nancy Irvin, Patricia Murray, Victor Joseph, College Principal Rev. Mick Connolly, Kelly-Anne Fourmile and Dorita Wilson at the graduation.

at our church at Yarrabah and this course has helped me in my teaching of the word of God." Dorita plans to further her studies and enrol in the Diploma in Theology course.

Kelly-Anne Fourmile encouraged young people to consider undertaking the course. The 23-year-old who became a Christian six years ago, called on Indigenous youth to enrol in the course in order to make a difference in their communities.

"Don't think you're not smart enough to learn. God will fill you with his knowledge and give you the confidence to do the work. I learnt about stories from Aboriginal culture told by people a long time ago and saw how it fitted in with the Bible stories from Genesis. Scales fell from my eyes and I gained a greater understanding of the Bible," Kelly-Anne said.

Patricia Murray said the course had changed her life.

"I share about God a lot with people however this course has made me want to share even more. I want to encourage my people and see them turn to God. I didn't grow up in a Christian family. I just started going to Sunday school by myself. God turned my whole life around. I was very sick

but the Lord healed me. Just like the songs says, 'he touched me and made me whole'," Patricia said.

Rev. Victor Joseph said the course had greatly enhanced his walk with the Lord.

"When I first started the certificate course, I didn't know what to expect. I was a new kid on the block, surrounded by other brothers and sisters from other communities, all united in their quest to learn more about God through his Son Jesus Christ. It has been a humbling experience and I thank God for giving me the strength and wisdom to make it through this course. I am now able to run (no longer just walk) the race he has set before me."

Victor looks forward to starting the Diploma of Theology course in November.

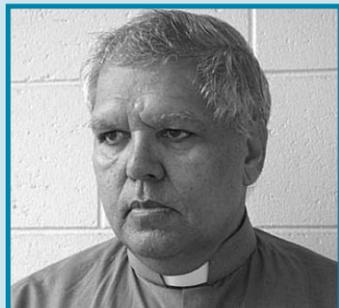


WONTULP-BI-BUYA COLLEGE Inc. Qld partner of Nungalingya College, Darwin, providing education programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander church and community leaders in Queensland. Supported by the Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and Uniting Churches. Wontulp-Bi-Buya means faith and light. PO Box 960N, North Cairns Qld 4870. Phone: 07 4041 4596. Fax: 07 4041 4597. Web site: www.wontulp.qld.edu.au

From the Principal

Hi! Everybody. God's richest blessings and strength from all of we to all of thee! Many thanks to all our supporters for their prayers and donations as we continue to obey the Lord's command to "make disciples". The College at present has one hundred and five students, doing either Community Development, Certificate III in Theology or Diploma in Theology studies, all at various stages of maturing in Christ, and getting to understand the Bible a little more each time.

As older students finish their studies, they leave the College and their places are filled with new students that have never been to the College before, but have heard about it, and want to check it out for themselves. So the Holy Spirit is speaking to the hearts of God's chosen and they



are faithfully responding to walk with the Lord and getting to know his teachings as well.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, I have heard many different views on what the Holy Spirit is like and one particular description echoes in my mind, probably because it has a distinct Australian bushies expression. This Aboriginal Christian brother, (who has gone to be with the Lord now) likened the Holy Spirit to a blue-heeler dog, whose job is to help the stockmen to round up the "scrubbies" (wild cattle).

The stockmen are any Christians who are on an evangelist mission, and the wild cattle are people who have gone their own way, living life according to their own human (wild cattle?) nature. (Gal 5:16-17 GNB). The "ticks" and other destructive or irritating "bush mites" that need to be cleansed from the bush cattle comes from this human nature and are outlined in Galatians 5:19-21. GNB.

Well, I hear whistling and the whips are a-crackin' so we at the College must go now and do our bit in helping to replace these destructive ticks with the fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22-26. Jesus is Lord

Rev. Michael Connolly



Top: Melissa Bann, who replaced Judith Hathaway as Registrar in May. Left L-R Daniella Crowe and Beth Tabuai.

The new Administrative Assistant, Daniella Crowe, brings to the role a wealth of experience in administration and has worked for another registered training provider. She has also worked for Centrelink and other government organisations.

Daniella's family hails from the Torres Strait with connections to the Eastern, Central and Western islands. She has resided and worked previously in the Torres Strait.

Daniella was a former member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance troupe, Kunjal.

We wish Judith and Bethalia all the best and thank them for all their hard work and effort on behalf of the College. We welcome Melissa and Daniella to the Wontulp family and hope they will find working for the college a rewarding experience.

Changing of the guard at Wontulp family



Like most organisations, changes in staff are inevitable. After faithful service in the administration of Wontulp-Bi-Buya College for a number of years Judith Hathaway (Registrar - 3 years) and Bethalia Tabuai (Administrative Assistant - 5 years) have moved on to other life adventures!

Working at the College, rekindled a love for teaching for former teacher Judith and she took up an employment opportunity in June teaching two children on a remote cattle station in the Northern Territory.

Beth developed strong business administration skills during her time at the college, leading to her

completing a Diploma in Business Management at the Australian Catholic University last year. She has moved since to Ballarat, Victoria for family reasons and is currently undertaking an Associate Degree in Business Management.

Melissa Bann has replaced Judith as the Registrar. Melissa would be well known to Torres Strait students, as former Office Manager for the Hon Warren Entsch, Federal Member for Leichhardt and Journalist with Torres News. A variety of administration roles also brought her into contact with Aboriginal people from New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory.

New members of the Management Committee



Two new members of the College Management Committee were elected at the Annual General Meeting on the 19th June 2006. (Pictured at left: Rev. Des Rumble - Anglican Church, and right: Ailsa Waibo - Lutheran Church.) Each of our partner churches - Lutheran, Anglican, Catholic and Uniting - have three representatives on the committee. We welcome them!



Certificate III in Theology students pictured singing at their break-up concert following a study block in May 2006.

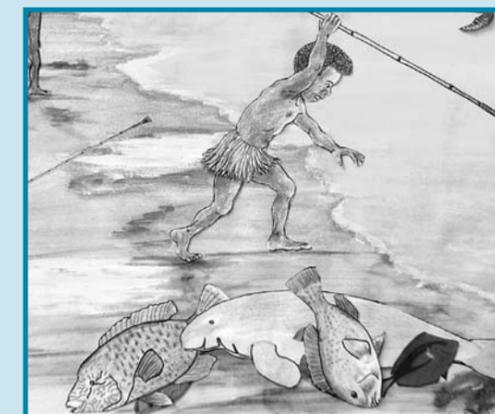
Pictured L-R: Josephine Murgha, Elizabeth Norman, Elthia Nai, Coleen Saveka and Gertrude Levi.

New children's book to be released shortly

Avid readers of our Indigenous children's book range will be thrilled to learn that we have just completed a new children's book based on a traditional Mer Island story. The story was told to Janine Paterson by one of our Diploma students and local Anglican Priest, Rev. Stephen Tabo.

Called 'Trigger Fish and Trevally' - Nagag and Geiga, it is an engaging story suitable for primary school age children to read. The story concludes with a moral lesson, which draws comparison to Jesus's parable about the Lost Sheep.

The book will be available for sale from Wontulp-Bi-Buya College in July for \$19.95 posted. Two other children's books are still available and also the Resource Book for Aboriginal Theology and Ministry: Milbi Dabaar.



Help Wontulp-Bi-Buya College Grow

Please send me ___ copies of Trigger Fish and Trevally - Nagag and Geigi at \$19.95 posted

Please send me ___ copies of The Peacemaker at \$16.95 posted / ___ copies of Milbi Dabaar at \$25.00 posted

Please send me ___ copies of How Kangaroo Found His Tail at \$16.95 posted

Please accept my gift of: \$25 \$50 \$100 \$

for: Staff and programs Building Fund (tax deductible) Library Fund (tax deductible)

Credit card donations may also be made by calling 1800 065 607 in Qld or (07) 4041 4596.

I enclose my cheque/money order OR please debit my Bankcard Visa Mastercard

Credit Card Number - CREDIT CARD AUTHORISATION - Expiry Date/.....

Signature

..... Title First name/initials Family name Phone

..... Street/PO Box Suburb/Town State Postcode

Forward gifts to: Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, PO Box 960N, North Cairns Qld 4870
Please advise change of address. Enclose mailing label if possible.