ABORIGINAL EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP AUSTRALIA

A Celebration of God’s Faithfulness

AEF History, Testimonials, Indigenous Theology, Sermons and Bible Studies

OCCUPY TILL I COME

Editors: Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches and Monica Short
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Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Testimonial Convention

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All photos in this work have been used with permission.

Disclaimer: Many people have contributed to this book and we are extremely grateful, however, they do not necessarily represent the views of AEF, the partners and other contributors.

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this book contains testimonies, images and references of deceased persons.
Welcome to Barngarla Yarta (Country), by Maureen Atkinson

I am honoured to have the privilege of welcoming you to my country, my traditional Barngarla Yarta (country). My name is Maureen Atkinson (née Dare). My mother was Edna Dare (née Davis). In later years, mum was known by my family as the Barngarla Queen. Mum’s grandfather, my great-grandfather, was Arthur Davis and he was known as the King of Barngarla and Port Augusta. My great-grandfather was a senior, and much respected, tribal man and it was part of his role to meet and welcome people moving into yarta (country). If I were to greet you in those days, I would have said, ‘Ninna Yoowa?’ Meaning ‘Are you good?’ So, Ninna Yoowa?

We lived with my grandfather when I was a child. I remember people coming to him and asking for his permission to stay in Port Augusta for various reasons (e.g., medical). Grandfather would say, ‘You’re welcome to stay, but after this you need to go back to your own yarta’. This is why I find it such an honour that I would be asked to welcome you to traditional Barngarla Yarta. As a descendant of the tribal King Arthur Davis it gives me great joy to welcome you, on behalf of my Barngarla people past, present and future to Barngarla country, our traditional country. I do hope you enjoy some of the beauty of my Barngarla Yarta. May God bless you all.
Acknowledgements

The AEF and the editors sincerely thank the Australian Research Theology Foundation for its generous grant for this publication. Without this grant, this book would have not been written or published. The editors thank the AEF Federal Council for its generous contribution to writing this project. Thank you, also, to the forward-thinking Reverend Dr Andrew Cameron for his encouragement and for informing us about the grant.

The editors wish to deeply thank all the wonderful people who were involved in organising the 2016 AEF Testimonial Convention including:

- Community Liaison: Trevor Altman
- Counselling: Gerald and Jacqueline Eades
- Prayer Coordinators: Ossie Cruse and Tom Slockee
- Children’s Ministry: Andrew McDonough
- Youth Ministry: OneHeart team and St Mark’s Anglican Church
- Ladies Ministry: Maxine Lawrence and the AEF National Women’s Council
- Worship Coordinator: Gerald Eades
- Sing-along Coordinator: Jarred Dimer
- Music Coordinator: Neville Naden
- Minya’s Crèche: Kathryn Naden
- Catering: Maxine Knapp
- Toilets/Rubbish Coordinators: Jim Lawrence and Herbie Edwards
- Security Coordinator: Tom Sloane
- Events Coordinator: Leon Hayward
- Choir Coordinator: Max Wright
The editors and contributors are grateful to all who have worked on this publication. Many volunteers and organisations assisted. A debt of gratitude is particularly owed to the following people and groups. May God richly bless you. Thank you.

AEF Federal Council and membership (and families) Perdita Herbert
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Dr Maxine Knapp Melinda Law
Dr Lynelle Osburn Greg Bridge
The Reverend Dr Ed Byford Concilia / Australians Together
Dr Lynelle Osburn Doug Orr
The Reverend Dr Joy Sandefur Francis Orr
Ken Kitchen Ivan Menzies
Roe Kitchen Jane Harris
Rebecca Jeavons The Reverend Dr Mark Short
Bob Huggett Fiona McGregor
Helen Joice Fred Chilton
Val Ishri Jill Chilton
Stuart Cuddie Janine Van den Tillaart
Fran Cuddie Professor Wendy Bowles
Helen Ridley Phillip Lidbetter
Jill Baxter Bruce Nicholson
Kylie Anne Good
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAEF</td>
<td>Australian Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAEM</td>
<td>Australian Aborigines Evangelical Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAMM</td>
<td>Australian Aborigines Mobile Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEF</td>
<td>Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICF</td>
<td>Aboriginal &amp; Islander Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM</td>
<td>Aboriginal Inland Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCA</td>
<td>Bush Church Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAM</td>
<td>United Aborigines Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

I am pleased to present to you this book, with its snapshot of the 2016 AEF Convention and some of the important history and stories of the AEF. The AEF remains an Aboriginal initiative that has grown to be the largest Christian work of its kind. Sharing the story of the founding members, along with a record of the sermons and testimonies delivered at the convention, offers the reader an insight into this unique and vital Australian ministry. May God bless you as you enjoy reading it.

Pastor Tony Riches
CEO, AEF, 2017

This book is powerful stuff. I think something will come out of it. This book is also controversial because there was a lot of opposition against Aboriginal people.

Pastor Bill Bird
Founding Member, AEF, 2017

AEF Convention many years ago. Photograph Neville Lilley’s Collection.
Introduction

This book introduces you to the AEF and its history. It also presents testimonials about AEF, Indigenous theology, sermons and Bible studies.

AEF was established in 1970. Today, the fellowship is being asked, ‘Is AEF changing?’ The community we live in has changed, but the human heart has not. English is now more widely spoken. Communication and technology, television, videos, games, Facebook, mobiles have all changed. Transport is easier and most Aboriginal people can now drive, or even fly, between cities. Churches across the western world are different, but the everlasting God changes not and His word is faithful, trustworthy and timeless.1 This book is a testimony to AEF, it honours the founders and all those involved with the AEF.

Purpose, by Kathryn Naden and Monica Short

The purpose of this book is to share with others the knowledge of Indigenous Christians from many nations within Australia. It recounts the call of God on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how they advocated for equality in the church. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of extraordinary Aboriginal Christian leaders began a movement through the AEF that created a national Christian platform for Indigenous people. This book tells the story of men and women, strong Christian leaders, serving God faithfully through AEF for many years—often against resistance and without support.

The book aims to respect and honour Indigenous oral and written knowledge. It honours each contributor’s Christian journey, as well as their church and community.

It attests that:

1. God’s nature is to give life and that Jesus says to all people from all nations, ‘I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10).[1]

2. God’s nature is love and He desires for all people from all nations to be in a relationship with Him and others. For example, I John 4:7–8 says, ‘Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God… for God is love’. [1] The contributors to this book testify that God has brought, and is bringing, Indigenous Christians in each nation of Australia together in love and relationship, regardless of the obstacles.

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1 This section is based on the AEF Magazine, July–October 2016, unpublished. The editors are grateful to AEF for permission to reprint sections of the magazine in this book. We encourage all to read the magazine in full. AEF has also given permission for this section to be used with associated activities and publicity of this book.
This book celebrates God’s faithfulness to all within their environments and communities. Each person’s contribution to this book is different, showing the beauty of the diversity of God’s people throughout Australia. Many of the stories shared in this book were recorded at the 2016 AEF Convention. These recordings were made for public distribution. This publication respects and maintains in each piece the personality of each contributor and their own individual perceptions about their relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1, Honouring AEF’s History, presents the origins of AEF. As Dr Maxine Knapp explains, this history is a story of ‘hope, struggle and achievement’. It shares how the early Aboriginal Christian leadership served God by advocating for equality and the Indigenous Christian voice. Their personal sacrifice, created opportunities for Indigenous Christians to lead ministry across Australia.

Chapter 2, Honouring AEF’s Past, shares how AEF remembered, recognised and honoured the founders of AEF. It recounts the testimonial dinner celebration and other activities that were undertaken during the week of the 2016 AEF Convention.

Chapter 3, Honouring the Present While Respecting the Past, outlines some of the AEF ministries, such as the AEF Women’s Ministry, AEF Youth Work, AEF Children’s Work and Hospitality. The AEF is a vibrant organisation with many ministries.

Chapter 4, Honouring God Through Personal Reflections and Sermons, people narrate their testimonies of how they became Christians and why they are members of the AEF. It also includes sermons by Indigenous ministers that challenge everyone to cross from the broad way that leads away from God to the narrow way that leads to God. Reverend Max Wright also challenges Christians to be culturally aware and sensitive when presenting the gospel, otherwise unintentional messages are portrayed. The sermons point us to God’s salvation and the importance of the church.

Chapter 5, Honouring God’s Word, points everyone to the word of God. The Reverend Dr Mark Short reminds us to walk in God’s grace, hear and receive God’s word, to keep our hand on the gospel, to be generous like God and to stay focused on our Christian mission.

Chapter 6, Honouring Indigenous Theology, reminds us that it is important to contextualise the Christian message so that all people can understand it. Reverend Neville Naden explains that contextualisation starts with the Bible and respects the audience. This section describes theologically that God is always at work and that He was at work in Australia well before colonisation.

We wish you joy, love and peace as you read this anthology of AEF’s history, testimonials, Indigenous Theology, sermons and Bible studies. We pray that your understanding of Aboriginal Christian thinking grows and that God is glorified through this book.
Chapter 1: Honouring AEF’s History

God called a group of people together from across Australia to form a national movement of Aboriginal Christians to share the gospel with Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In this chapter, Pastor Neville Lilley introduces us to the movement’s early days and its purpose. Pastor Ossie Cruse and Pastor Bill Bird share their memories of the founding of AEF and Dr Maxine Knapp provides an in-depth historical overview of the early years.

The Beginning

It is about 50 years since the AEF Constitution was drawn up (see Appendix 1) and part of the Statement of Purposes (sic) reads:

To bring together Evangelical Christian people of Aboriginal and Islander descent from various parts of Australia for united fellowship and service.[3]

Since then, God has blessed the work and ministry of the AEF in a magnificent way. There is no other organisation in the country that does what AEF does. Since AEF began, in 1970, there has never been an opportunity to honour our original foundation members. This book is a celebration of the AEF. It honours the original founders and their commitment to the Lord and the love of our people.

Brief History of AEF

When the gospel of Jesus Christ spread across Australia to Aboriginal people, part of the great commission included outreach to Aboriginal people. When Aboriginal Christians became involved in spreading the gospel to their own people, they developed a desire to know God better and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ more closely.

At the time, few Aboriginal Christians held leadership positions in the white Christian Missions that outreached to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal Christian leaders were struggling to find their own identity and where they fitted within the plan of Christian Missions. The lack of leadership opportunities became a concern. God was placing a new vision on the hearts of the Aboriginal Christian leaders across Australia.

As early as 1962, Aboriginal Christian leaders began discussing leadership issues. Over the next eight years they worked hard to bring recognition to their leaders. In January 1970, at a Convention in Port Augusta, South Australia, 70 delegates—mainly Aboriginal Christian

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2 The editors are grateful to the AEF for permission to print part of the AEF website, First AEF Federal Council 1970. We encourage you to read the web page in full at http://www.aef.org.au/about.html. AEF has also given permission for this information to be used with associated activities and publicity of this book.
leaders representing Christian missions and denominations—decided it was time to unite their efforts into one national body. This was when the AEF was formed.[4]

**The First Federal Council**

Twelve members were elected to the first Federal Council:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Kirk, NSW</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Bird, NSW</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedric Jacobs, WA</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denzil Humphries, WA</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil Grant, NSW</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter (Wali) Fejo, NT</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Mason, WA</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Braeside, WA</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronnie Williams, WA</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonny Graham, WA</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oswald (Ossie) Cruse, NSW</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyle Browning, NSW</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Overview of AEF, by Pastor Neville Lilley

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The National Aboriginal Christian leaders conference was held in Port Augusta South Australia from 14 to 17 January 1970. The delegates attending were from the Methodist Church of Perth, WA; the Church of Christ Mission, Norsman, WA; the Church of Christ, Victoria; the Aboriginal Church of Christ, Victoria; the Carnarvon Church of Christ, WA; the Church of Christ Grafton, NSW; Wellington Bethel Church, NSW; Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM), NSW; Fellowship Church Fingal AIM Church, Griffith, NSW; the Cherbourg People’s Church AIM, Queensland; the People’s Church Kalgoorlie, WA; the United Aborigines Mission (UAM), WA; the Australian Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AAEF), Newcastle, NSW; Newcastle Waters People’s Church, NT; South Coast Evangelical Fellowship (Aboriginal), NSW; Noongar Church, Perth, WA; Esperance People’s Church, WA; Wongutha Mission, Esperance, WA; UAM Church, Fitzroy Crossing, WA; UAM Peoples Church, La Perouse, NSW; UAM Church Cosmo Newbury, WA; United Brighton Gardens Church of Christ, South Australia (SA); the Anglican Board of Missions, NSW; South Coma Baptist Church, Perth, WA; Umeewarra Mission, SA; the AEF, Sydney, NSW; Wreck Bay Aboriginal Mission and observers came from other churches apart from these mentioned above3.

Apologies were received from Pastor Don Brady (a great leader), Central Methodist Mission, Brisbane, Queensland; Reverend L. Reece, Baptist Home Mission, Central Australia, NT; Reverend Graham Paulson, Baptist Church, Darwin, NT; Wilf Douglas UAM, Kalgoorlie, WA; Victor Shaw, Wellington, NSW; Bert Groves, Sydney, NSW; the Minister for Native Affairs, WA and Russett Mitchel, Cosmo Newbury, WA. It was moved by Pastor Bird and seconded by Pastor Cedric Jacobs that the apologies be accepted and they were unanimously carried4.

The Federal Council of the AEF first came into being in 1970. The Council members elected were Bill Bird, Jack Braeside, Ron (Ronnie) Williams, Cedric Jacobs, Ossie Cruse, Ben Mason, David Kirk, Sonny Graham, Denzil Humphries, Wali Fejo, Cecil Grant and Lyle Browning. Pastor Denzil Humphries, Ronnie, Shirley and others in Kalgoorlie drew up the AEF Shield.

3 This information comes from the delegates’ minutes of The National Aboriginal Christian leader’s conference which was held in Port Augusta South Australia from 14 to 17 January 1970 (title unclear and unpublished).

4 Ibid.
The AEF Constitution, amended in 1973, was printed by Mission Publications of Australia. The objective was to bring together evangelical Christian people of Aboriginal and Islander descent. It supported taking the gospel of Christ to all Australians. The Constitution particularly emphasised the AEF vision of evangelical outreach to Aborigines by Aborigines. It also encouraged the establishment and development of local evangelical churches whose membership would be mainly Aboriginal and whose outreach would be directed towards reaching Aboriginal people. Our Statement of Faith is similar to that of the Baptist Church in Australia.

The AEF story unfolded. The newly elected council then took the message of this new and exciting vision to Australia. David Kirk travelled to the centre of Australia where he met with many people and made tremendous progress. Pastor Ronnie Williams grabbed his Bible and his guitar, filled up his car with fuel and travelled across Australia sharing the message of the AEF. David Kirk, Ben Mason and Ossie Cruse met with Kinyin McKenzie which opened up a lot of doors to Aboriginal communities around the centre of Australia. Pastor Jack Braeside established the Victorian State Council in 1972. Conventions were held throughout Australia, with the national convention held in Port Augusta.

In early 1980s, the national convention grew to 2000 delegates. There was no place in Port Augusta that could hold that many people, so AEF held its meetings on the football oval at Umeewarra Mission. Through the contact AEF had made with the traditional areas in the centre of Australia, it was decided to hold a convention there every Easter. These were very special times.

The AEF movement grew and two families were chosen for national evangelism: Pastor Denzil and Shirley Humphries and their family and Pastor Ben and Bernice Mason and their family. God has used these two families in amazing ways.

Throughout this period, AEF churches were being established across Australia. Pastor Albert and Dr Maxine Knapp of WA were inducted into the ministry of the AEF Church in Melbourne in 1979. Ministry to women started in many areas. The Eastern Area Ladies started meeting. They still gather every June long weekend and recently the meetings have been held at Bimbadeen, Cootamundra. Men’s ministry and conferences were also established around the country. Youth work and youth ministry gatherings were held throughout Australia, attracting about 60 to 70 young people to each event. Bible colleges were also established, with the first being the AEF Bimbadeen College, officially opened to the glory of God on 10 February 1979, at Cootamundra, NSW, by the Reverend Cedric Jacobs. Principal Pastor David Kirk read from Ephesians 4:11–12, ‘He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and some teachers for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ’. [1]

In 1980, the Bimbadeen College Advisory Council was appointed. The members were Allan Moore, the council’s lawyer from Moore’s Legal Service; Neville Mellor, Director for the UAM; Neville Anderson, Principal of the Bible College of Victoria; Gill Macarthur, World Vision
International; George Graetz from Adelaide; Max Dawson, the council’s accountant for many years and a representative from the Church of Christ.

The AEF Bible College of WA began on 2 February 1985, in a small Brethren chapel in East Victoria, Perth, WA. At its opening, the Bible reading was 2 Timothy 2:15, ‘Show yourself approved unto God’.\[1\] Pastor Albert Knapp was the first Principal at the WA college.

Pastor David Kirk was Principal and lectured at Bimbadeen, Cootamundra, NSW. He ministered for 35 years in service for the Lord. The following year, our dear brother David passed into the presence of the Lord. A memorial scholarship fund, the David F Kirk Memorial Scholarship Fund, was created on 6 December 1986 to support Bible college students.

A quick side story about David Kirk’s funeral service at Bimbadeen. At the funeral, Pastor David Naden gave me $10 and said, ‘Brother I want you put this in your pocket and see what you can do with it’.

I was grieving. There were some 700 to 800 people at the funeral and we were all grieving. I put the money in my pocket and, a couple of months later, I went to see AEF’s solicitor in Melbourne. We established the David F Kirk Memorial Scholarship Fund with that $10. The fund has now grown to about $115,000 and is still supporting Bible College students, such as Nathaniel Naden.

David Kirk and his wife Dawn equipped others to serve God. One of David’s favourite verses of scripture was Colossians 2:6, ‘As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him’.\[1\] He would leave that with every person as he led them to the Lord.

On 14 April 1994, AEF Family and Youth Services was established to meet the social and welfare needs of Aboriginal people. In 2003, the Community Chaplaincy Ministry was established. We now have about 17 Chaplains ministering in Aboriginal communities around Australia with a budget of $60,000. This is a very cost-effective ministry. We produce a national newsletter three times a year.

We have been on a journey and God has blessed us. Following is a list of all the AEF presidents and their tenures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David F Kirk</td>
<td>1970–1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsay Grant</td>
<td>1976–1978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ossie Cruse</td>
<td>1979–1982</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cedric Jacobs</td>
<td>1983</td>
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<td>Graham Paulson</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedric Jacobs</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ossie Cruse</td>
<td>1986–1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denzil Humphries</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ossie Cruse</td>
<td>1994–1997</td>
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<td>Harley Hayward</td>
<td>1998–2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clive Hayden</td>
<td>2004–2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neville Naden</td>
<td>2012–present</td>
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It is amazing to think what God has done. You are invited to join the AEF.
Introducing an AEF Founder: Pastor Ossie Cruse

Throughout all the years that I have worked for AEF, one thing has hung over us the whole time—the love of God. God is love. The scriptures make it so clear to us, God is love. When I think back over those years, it is love that brought us together, love that kept us together, love that motivated us right to this very day. Let us pray and thank God for the many years of love and fellowship through AEF. I will share a few things with you about the AEF and the essence of what we are all about.

Our Father and our God, we want to say thank you for the work you have done and not for the work we have done. You have been our motivation. Help us not to take any glory away from your Son, Jesus Christ. We know father, at the very first incidence there were terrible attitudes. Father, we know these are born out of the very essence of our nation, the attitudes of the colonial regime. Lord, we know those things that belong to the world and flesh. Father, we know they have no part in our Christian faith. Father, we ask in our current endeavours and, as we continue to work together and think in terms of the future of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia, so we commend our thoughts to you Father, our vision to you Lord and our future to you. We commend all this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Amen.

In 1962, in a little hall in La Perouse, Pastor David Kirk came and taught the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke of the second coming of our Lord. At that time, I was really down at the bottom of the ladder, drinking everything that came out of a bottle including methylated spirits. My life was a real mess and I put my lovely wife Beryl through 15 years of hell, when my children were so very young. That night, there in that little blue hall, two of us, Tom Coe and myself, made a commitment to Christ. I always call him my twin brother. We were born again at the same time. A wonderful thing happened to my life that day that was beyond my imagination. I could never have imagined that I could have such a wonderful life, but that is what happened when I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

David Kirk came from the Singleton Bible College to La Perouse and he ministered to us. From that day, David and I became very close friends in everything we did with the AEF. In 1962 and onwards, I was ministered to by Howard Miles and also by AIM through their publications. For the first two or three months after becoming a Christian, I was a Sunday school teacher. Then it was decided I could preach the gospel with the few verses that I had. So we launched out in the South Coast and it was there that we formed the South Coast Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. We ministered all over the country like nomads. We did season work and, after a day’s work, I would gather the people together around the fireside. Christian people use to come alongside us and play music. We would preach the gospel. That is the way Beryl and I
started our life as Christians. We used to go to Myponga, a little place down here where they were growing peas. In the 1960s we would come and pick peas and I would preach the gospel wherever I went.

One time, I found myself right up in Bundaberg, Queensland, cutting cane and teaching the gospel there in a little house. Around that time, I had a call from a Church of Christ minister, Lyall Morris. He said, ‘There is a big meeting down in Singleton. The Aboriginal Christian leaders are meeting there, would you like to go down?’

That was about 2090 km away and we had to be there the next day. I said, ‘Oh, yes, let’s go.’

Mate, them telegraph poles were like a picket fence. That bloke was driving 2090 km. We arrived there the next day, in Singleton.

I was in awe. Man alive, there I was with these great men of God. I had not met anyone like them before. Cedric Jacobs was there with his collar on, mate, as a Reverend. Don Brady was my roommate at that time. I could not get over it. I entered into discussions with these great men of God and I could see the wonderful vision that they had. You, reading this, should plant this in your mind. The AEF was formed by the God Almighty and not by man. It was formed by Him. It was formed by Him in a miraculous way. These men were talking about the AAEF. They were talking with passion about forming an Aboriginal ministry that would link other Christians together across denominations such as the Churches of Christ, the Baptists and the Methodists. There were Aboriginal Christians in mainstream missions. AEF was linking us all together, this is what they were talking about. They were saying, ‘Let us form a national fellowship’.

We called it the Australian Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. Without our knowing it, at the same time, the people in the west were talking about the same thing. Denzil and Shirley Humphries, and Jack Braeside and others were talking about the AEF. So, when everyone heard about each other, they decided to get together at Singleton. When Lyall and I heard about it we decided to come down from Bundaberg and go to the first meeting. The first discussion was about the potential of a national fellowship. You know, under God we saw division and attitudes. Attitudes that were sad attitudes because people thought we were breaking up the Aboriginal fellowship in this country and breaking up the ministry of Aboriginal people. We had to pray through that, we had to pray about how to work together with our brethren, for those that had brought the gospel to us in Australia, for the work of the AIM and the UAM. They really had to see the AEF vision was for Aboriginal people. They really had to see that Aboriginal people were saying, ‘We are ready, ready to lead, ready to take leadership, ready to plant churches. We are ready to do ministry’. There were a lot of hard feelings and people thought that we were stepping out too soon. They decided to come over to Brookton in the west, to see how we could further this national body. It was decided that Port Augusta would be the meeting place.

Now, I came over with David Kirk as he was my spiritual father. There were three other fellows in the little car on the way to this meeting. The only people I knew were David Kirk and Bob
Brown. The other person I knew was Yami Lester. Yami was a boy who was blind. He was raised by Mr Samuels, a missionary who was blind. Yami Lester was there and he was right up the back. It came time for the nomination for men to sit on the council. All these great men were nominated. I never thought I would be in the same boat as these guys. But Yami sang out from the back, ‘I want Ossie Cruse’.

They all looked around and said, ‘Who is Ossie Cruse? How did he get in?’

The incredible thing is the motion was seconded and I became a member on the Federal Council on the very first day. I think wonderful things happened at the council meeting because we united together from all the different areas of ministry in this country. People were there and were coming together. They were coming together in a wonderful way and they were the most beautiful people I have ever had opportunity to know. People who were missionaries at the Umeewarra Mission. It was tremendous to see the way things came into place. The Umeewarra Mission was with us from the very start. Even today, Umeewarra is still in our hearts and minds because of the wonderful things that took place there. That began the work of God through the AEF.

I always put a verse of scripture to that. ‘God is love’, we all know that. We cite this, we talk about this with our tongues. We really have to believe that God’s word has to be planted in our hearts. That God is love and He demands us to follow a new commandment: ‘A new commandment that I give unto you that you love one another’. This is a hard experience. You must have love in your hearts, you must love each other and you must even love your enemies.

The great and most wonderful evangelistic meetings I have ever been in were here at Port Augusta. A man by the name of Reverend Geoff Bingham preached. Geoff was the Principal of the Bible College in SA. He preached on love and how you should love. He was the only man that I knew who could talk like that. Why? Because he had been a prisoner of war with the Japanese. They treated our Australian soldiers terrible, horrible. Some of the stories he told outside that meeting would make your blood run cold. You know what he prayed every morning? ‘Lord help me to love the Japanese’. He was the man appropriate to preach the gospel of love to us. That is what founded the AEF of Australia. Not man’s efforts, but the love of God was in it and He still is.

I want to tell you about my little hat. When I turned 70, my little sister decided I needed a hat because my hair was falling out. She took time to find one for me. Our grandfather was an American Indian, so she made a little band to go around the hat. I wear the hat because it was made with love, hands of love. My kids and my great-grandchildren saw the hat on my head. One of my grand-kids came up and said, ‘Pop, here is a feather for your hat.’

Out of love that little one gave me that feather. I put it in the band on the hat. All the kids then wanted to go on a feather hunt for the hat. My granddaughter was driving along the road and my great-granddaughter yells, ‘Pull up, pull up, pull up Mum!’
She jammed the breaks on, ‘What is wrong?’

‘There is a feather on the road for Pop’s hat.’

You know that was all a labour of love.

Then, several years ago, I started a prison ministry with another brother. What a beautiful ministry that is. Big fellows are in prison and they are training all the time, muscles built up—they are big, strong men. Some of the men are long-termers in prison, they are in for 10 or 14 years. It is nothing for these fellows to come up and put their arm around my shoulder and say ‘I love you, Unc.’ You know that love comes out of our gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We did a monthly visit to our local prison today. One of the people in jail lovingly did a band for my hat in the colours of the Aboriginal flag. He said, ‘You put this band on your hat because I love you.’

You know, it is a wonderful ministry, the ministry of love. When you love people they know it. They can feel it. Even the wardens in the prison come up to the bars and listen when we are talking. We sing songs. The prisoners wrote a song up for me when Beryl passed away. They made a little song, a little poem. You know it is wonderful to see the love of God at work. We should never let this love slip away from our thinking. There are hurtful times, but we are to love our enemies. We are to love the people that are hurting us. We are to love them. Continue to do that. In this prison, it is nothing for them to say to me, ‘I love you, Uncle.’

They are tough guys. They say, ‘Thank you for coming and sharing this love with us, I love you.’

We should say this more often: ‘I love you.’

I mean that. I do mean that. I am growing to love everyone. I know that you have the same love of God. Do not let the things that have happened hurt us.

I spent almost a lifetime with David Kirk and I have seen David in full action. I believe he was one of the greatest preachers with which God has endowed this country. I have seen him preach and teach. He gave of himself 500 per cent—500 per cent. Not 100 per cent, but 500 per cent. He wore himself right to the bone and the Lord said to David, ‘Come on home, come on home.’

Do not feel bitter about David going home, do not feel bitter about that. He had to go home, he was worn out.

There is another thing I want to share. That the Lord blessed me with a beautiful wife, Beryl. I met her when I was 15. We married when she was 17 and I was 18. We celebrated our sixtieth wedding anniversary, we were together sixty-one-and-a-half years. We ended up with 53 great-grandchildren. You know the love of God has done that—not me, not anyone else—the love of God.
Returning to the AEF—you know, somewhere there is somebody who made a mistake, just a mistake, when they said the AEF was dead. How can you kill a fellowship of love? How can you kill it? It comes from God. The AEF was brought into being in churches. We did that because we did not want to become a denomination. We wanted to remain in fellowship with each other so that we can be trans-denominational. This way, we could reach over to the Churches of Christ, to the Baptists and all the other churches in this land. We could also reach over in fellowship and share together the gospel and spread it throughout this land. That is what the AEF is. It is just coming into its being, right now. When Neville Naden finishes his ministry with the Anglicans, he is not going to be cast aside by the AEF because he is an Anglican minister. He is going to be embraced as a brother. That is what the AEF is. It also embraces the sisters in ministry. It embraces brothers and sisters wherever you are. That is why we have designed it in such a way.

In our first ministry, way back there in the 1960s and 1970s, when we formed our fellowship, we had fellowship with non-Aboriginal people too. We had a Saturday fellowship meal at Eden and we invited all the Churches and they came. We did this meal for several months and then the Anglicans said, ‘Why can’t we do the next one?’

I said, ‘Why can’t you?’

Then the Uniting Church says, ‘Why can’t we?’

You know, when a minister is away from their local Church of Christ church they say to one of our fellows, ‘Can you come and take my place at church?’ That is what fellowship is about, it crosses boundaries. We in the AEF do not want to be known by a denomination. The same thing for our AEF youth camp at Jigamy Farm. Our youth camp is not only for Aboriginal people.

AEF, also started, 30 years ago, a tremendous time of fellowship for Christians who have been doing it hard all year, called the ‘Country Western Gospel Sound’. It is still going strong. Aboriginal people love to play music, they love to play the guitars and sing. You cannot kill the fellowship of love. It is here. It is alive and growing and it is going to get stronger.

We need to embrace the ministry of our churches. Pray for us. We are doing what God has intended for us to do and we will continue to do that.

When the AEF first came to Port Augusta we started visiting the prison. We would send a team into the prison, we would visit the hospital and then I would go and visit around the people in Port Augusta town. I was nominated to do the first visitation for the first Convention here. I would knock on doors, ladies would be there watering the garden and I would invite them to the meetings. They would say, ‘We got our own churches, we are not going’. You know, I saw those people in the meetings afterwards.
They built a pub in Port Augusta. When it first opened, I went to the back doors and who should come out? Ken McKenzie, dressed in his cowboy gear. He grabbed my tie and was twisting it. He was singing out, ‘What is the answer, brother, what is the answer?’

I said, ‘Sit down here and I will tell you the answer.’

We sat in the gutter there and for 40 minutes I talked with Ken about the Lord. He prayed the Sinner’s Prayer. The next day, in the hall with a white shirt and black tie on was Ken McKenzie. Man, I had the shock of my life, but I should not have done. It was beautiful to see Ken come like that.

God is still doing wonderful things. Our brethren come to Port Augusta from the north, they came from the east and west and we all gathered together and shared in the love of the glorious gospel of Christ. Thank you.


This account is the story of some of the AEF Aboriginal Christian leaders and their personal conversion to Christianity. These leaders displayed five key characteristics of Christian leadership. First, their conversion to Christ. Second, their changed lives and willingness to become actively involved in Christian ministry following their conversion. Third, a genuine love and empathy for their Aboriginal people. Fourth, to go to Bible College, to acquire knowledge of the Bible and learn how to use that knowledge. Fifth, their shared vision to establish the AEF.

The most enduring leadership trait the leaders displayed was their consistency and faithfulness in ministry. They lived through a particularly complex period of Australian social history and weathered many storms in setting up the AEF, but, in doing so, they laid a strong basis for the fellowship that they served in various capacities throughout the nation. These men were ably supported by their capable and talented wives, who shared their vision and who were equally committed to the task. It was interesting to note that these couples, the 12 leaders and

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5 This chapter was originally submitted as part of Dr Maxine Knapp’s dissertation: Knapp, M 2008, ‘The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship: a story of a dynamic Christian movement in Australia, 1970–1995’, doctoral thesis, University of Western Australia, Perth. The editors are grateful to Dr Knapp for permission to reprint here part of her thesis chapter ‘A story of hope, struggle, and achievement: laying the foundations 1960–1970’. We encourage you to read the thesis in full. Dr Knapp has also given permission for information in the chapter to be used with the associated activities and publicity of this book. Copyright of this section is held by Dr Maxine Knapp.
their wives, were drawn together from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. This combination enhanced their ministry and brought them into close contact with a wide range of people including traditional and urban Aborigines and non-Aboriginal people from many places throughout Australia.

The Early Years of Leaders from WA

Aboriginal people often speak of their traditional area as ‘My Country’. Jack Braeside was from the Marble Bar area in the Pilbara region of WA, Ben Mason was a Wongutha man who hailed from the eastern Goldfields region of WA, Denzil Humphries, Ronnie Williams and Cedric Jacobs were Noongar men from South West WA and Sonny Graham was a Ngadju man from the Balladonia region, east of Esperance, WA.

Jack Braeside

Jack Braeside (1930–2005) was born on Braeside Station, near the township of Marble Bar in the Pilbara region. Braeside remembered little of his early years, other than the traumatising experience of being removed from his family by the government to a place called Moore River Settlement. He was converted to Christianity at the age of 11, while at the Roelands Mission. After leaving the mission, he worked on a farm in Narembeen and later, joined the Army Reserve where he became a corporal. From October 1951 to December 1953, Braeside worked in the Department of Native Welfare in WA. In 1955–1956, he became the first Indigenous student to attend the Perth Bible Training Institute. This was followed by two years of study at the Institute of Evangelism in Sydney. In April 1958, his application to establish and conduct a mission, to be known as the Australian Aborigines Mobile Mission (AAMM), was approved by the Department of Native Welfare. Braeside’s missionary concern for Aboriginal people was evident in his early Christian experiences. He made it his priority to establish contact with people in isolated areas of WA, noting that the mission work of the interdenominational missions tended to be in the vicinity of the mission stations. Braeside was granted government permission to preach in all reserves and missions under the control of the Aborigines Welfare Board. He formed an evangelistic team and undertook evangelistic ministry in NSW. The objective of the AAMM was to make its work Indigenous by utilising the administrative, preaching and teaching gifts of Aboriginal Christians. In 1958, an AAMM memorandum stated that there were ample Aboriginal Christians to take full responsibility for the mission fields, but that a lack of training and administrative skills, along with missionary paternalism, led to continued dependency on non-Aboriginal missionaries. The memorandum further stated: ‘The AAMM will encourage the Aboriginal Christians to evangelise their own folk’. One such evangelistic

8 Department of Native Affairs 1958, ‘File 124/58: Proposed formation of Aborigines Mobile Mission of Australia by Mr Jack Braeside’, SROWA, Perth, WA: Ace 993
team consisted of Henry Russell, Joe Simon and Charlie Edwards from NSW, along with Jack Braeside.\(^9\) Braeside maintained an evangelistic and teaching ministry for many years and was known to be a great encourager of people. Both Ronnie Williams and Denzil Humphries acknowledged Braeside’s leadership and looked to him as a mentor and friend.\(^{10}\)

**Ben Mason**

Ben Mason, from the Laverton district of the north-eastern Goldfields, was placed in Mount Margaret Mission at an early age. He became a Christian while at the mission. After leaving the mission, Mason worked on stations in the goldfields before moving to Perth to further his education. He worked for the Western Australian Wire Netting Company and studied English and mechanics at night school.\(^{11}\) At the age of 23, after years of hard work, he trained at the AIM Bible Training Institute in Singleton, NSW, from 1954 to 1955. Mason undertook further studies under Australian evangelist John G Ridley. After his training, Mason worked as an evangelist and Bible teacher throughout Australia during the late 1950s and early 1960s.\(^{12}\) In 1958, he was the main speaker at the Easter Convention in Brookton, WA. According to Thomas Street, a UAM missionary from Gnowangerup, it was Mason’s ministry that challenged him to start a Bible college in WA. Street was also inspired by the comments of some Aboriginal people who said, ‘If he [Mason] can preach like that with Bible training, why could not some of us do the same?’ Street left the Brookton Convention, motivated and determined to make moves towards establishing a Bible Institute.\(^{13}\) In the meantime, Mason continued with his evangelistic and teaching ministry. At the beginning of 1966, he and his wife Bernice, whom he married in 1964 and who also came from the Goldfields region of WA, took over the church ministry that Cedric and Margaret Jacobs had pioneered in Perth.\(^{14}\) In 1968, the Masons resigned from their work in Perth to enable Bernice to attend the UAM Bible Training Institute in Gnowangerup.\(^{15}\) Mason worked in various jobs in Gnowangerup to support his family and continued his evangelistic and teaching ministry throughout the state.

**Denzil Humphries**

Denzil Humphries spent his early childhood years in the Pingelly and Kellerberrin region of WA. His father, a farm labourer, moved frequently to obtain employment. Humphries’ schooling was spasmodic. He attended schools at Pingelly, Shackelton and Merredin and a small school on the

10  Ronnie Williams, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Canberra.
14  Margaret Jacobs, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, 2004, Mandurah, Western Australia. See also Hart, *A story of fire*.
15  Gnowangerup Bible Training Institute, 1969, *Go Ye*. 
Djurin reserve, near Kellerberrin, run by the UAM. After leaving school, Humphries worked as a farm labourer and became skilled at farming. He first became interested in Christianity during his teenage years, when, as he stated, ‘I was looking for answers to some of life’s problems’. In 1957, at the age of 19, he became a Christian.\textsuperscript{16}

Prior to his conversion, Humphries had started drinking and he believes he would have become an alcoholic if he had continued down that road. After a drunken brawl on the Aboriginal reserve, while still drunk and overcome with desperation, he called upon the Lord to come into his life. He said that prayer while blind drunk but when he finished praying he was sober. He claims his whole life was changed through that experience. He continued to work as a farm labourer throughout the district during the week, but Sundays were always set aside for church. As a new Christian, Humphries showed his willingness to learn and teach the Bible. When Sidney Williams, the UAM missionary working in the Kellerberrin area, asked if he would like to do some Christian ministry, Humphries readily agreed. He began teaching Sunday school at the Doodlakine Aboriginal Reserve six miles from where he lived, a position he held for three years.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1958, Humphries attended the Easter Convention at Brookton. One of the main speakers was Pastor Ben Mason, and it was through his preaching ministry that Humphries was challenged to do missionary service. Humphries was part of the first intake of students accepted to undertake two years of study at the newly established UAM Bible Training Institute in Gnowangerup in 1960.\textsuperscript{18} The other two students were Ronnie Williams and Marjorie James who later married each other.\textsuperscript{19} James was from Derby in the Kimberley region and served as a missionary at Roelands Mission before going to the Gnowangerup Bible Institute.

After completing Bible college studies in March 1962, Humphries was accepted as a missionary by the Wongutha Training Farm Board in Esperance, WA. He met and married Shirley Elliot. Elliot was from Victoria and had trained as a nursing sister. She worked in Darwin before moving to Wongutha. Throughout 1963, the couple became concerned for the many isolated Aboriginal Christians scattered throughout WA who did not have much fellowship with other Christians. At the same time, the Wongutha Mission expressed the need to keep in touch with former Wongutha students—a concern the Humphries also shared. In 1966, the Humphries began ministering under the banner of the newly established Wongutha Evangelistic Outreach. This position enabled them to fulfil the mission’s goal of keeping in touch with its former students.

The Humphries’ first appointment was to pastor the Kalgoorlie church fellowship of mainly Aboriginal Christians, at the invitation of an independent Brethren missionary couple who

\textsuperscript{16} Humphries, D 2001, \textit{The AEF: the untold story, its birth and development}, information sheet.
\textsuperscript{17} Denzil Humphries, interviewed by Christin Choo, 2001, Derby, WA.
\textsuperscript{19} Humphries, ‘27 years of God’s love’, pp. 20–21.
wanted to take a short holiday. Church meetings were held in the missionaries' large garage in Kalgoorlie. During the Humphries’ time there the fellowship grew, so the church group moved to a local hall. The Humphries were asked to form an independent Aboriginal Church, in conjunction with other local Aboriginal Christians. This church became the People's Church.

Ronnie Williams

Ronnie Williams’ early years were far from easy. Williams grew up in ‘the hard times during the time of the Stolen Generations, when a lot of our people were taken away’. As a young man he took to drinking alcohol, became disillusioned, questioned the purpose of life and even contemplated suicide. An uncle advised him to go to church to try Christianity. Williams went to the Gnowangerup reserve at Tambellup, a small town not far from Gnowangerup, and happened to be there when the missionaries came to pick up people who wanted to go to church at the UAM. He decided to go along. He saw the ‘kindness the missionaries had’ and continued to go to church.20

In October 1958, amid the noise and gala atmosphere of the Gnowangerup Show Day, an event that was well attended by the Aboriginal people in that region, Williams sat alone under a gum tree quietly reflecting on the futility of his life. Frank Coles, a missionary at the Gnowangerup Mission, singled out Williams and talked to him about Jesus. Williams claims he was converted to Christianity during that conversation and he accepted that Jesus was the answer to his life’s problems. From that point, his whole perspective and direction in life changed. During 1959, Williams helped around the Gnowangerup Mission and, in 1960, he began studying at the Bible Institute.21

When Williams graduated from the Bible Institute in December 1961, he joined the UAM as a missionary. His first place of ministry was at Warburton Ranges in the central desert region of WA, 1600 km north-east of Perth. This was a big undertaking, as Williams was the first Aboriginal person from the South West to work as a cross-cultural missionary, particularly between different Aboriginal cultural groups. However, Williams was well accepted in the Warburton Ranges and worked there for four years. In 1965, he left to set up the Leonora Christian Centre in the Goldfields region of WA. Williams met up again with Jack Braeside and hitched a ride with him to Sandstone, Wiluna and across to Mt Magnet. During their time together, they discussed a fellowship to bring people together. Williams indicated something of the depth of those discussions when he told me, ‘We thought about church planting, then we thought about Indigenous work and being together and having something we can call our own’.22 Thus, the seed that was to form an organisation that would link Aboriginal Christians together was germinating in the minds of Braeside and Williams during that trip.

20 Ronnie Williams, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Canberra.
21 Williams, D 2001, Horizon is where heaven and earth meet a love story that crossed boundaries, -Bantam Books, Sydney, p. 55.
22 Ronnie Williams, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Canberra.
Cedric Jacobs was born late in the summer of 1943, in York, WA. He recalls he was constantly on the move with his family in his early years. His father travelled throughout the wheat belt searching for work, from the Swan Valley to as far as Merredin. Jacobs remembers that times were hard and the family lived in the bush or on reserves in makeshift humpies. Food was scarce, but the camp fire provided warmth and light at night. Jacobs recalls his ‘schooling was spasmodic. We were never able to remain in any one area long enough to make any inroads into the education system’. This was the only way of life that Jacobs knew. In 1952, at the age of nine, he was forcibly taken from his parents by an officer of the Native Welfare Department and placed in the Mogumber Children’s Mission. Jacobs was to see his parents on only one occasion before they died.

At Mogumber, Jacobs received a basic education and was taught skills to equip him for employment in adult life. From 1959 to 1961, he was a student of the Wongutha Agricultural College near Esperance. He graduated as dux of the college and worked on farms in the Esperance and Moora districts for a short time. He also worked on the railways for a while and as a timber truck driver in Perth. On 6 August 1963, in Forrest Place, Perth, Jacobs had a life-changing experience when he was approached by some young people doing evangelistic ministry. They witnessed to him about Jesus and it was there, on the street, that Jacobs decided to become a Christian.

Jacobs became involved in helping a youth group organised by Margaret Brewer. The Brewer family had come out from England in 1949 to work as Brethren missionaries in Kalgoorlie and the Goldfields area. Brewer became involved in her father’s work and helped to teach Sunday school. In the early 1960s, Brewer began her Christian work in the city of Perth working with Aboriginal families. She taught Sunday school and worked with youth who socialised on Barrack Street on Friday and Saturday nights. With the help of Florence Woods, a young Aboriginal woman, she would go to Barrack Street on those nights and invite the young people back to the old Carpenters Union House in Beaufort Street. In 1964, Jacobs married Brewer. With the help of Jeff Barkus, they organised a variety of popular activities for up to 100 young people. They developed a very extensive ministry in the East Perth area that included Sunday school, youth ministry, midweek prayer and Bible study meetings. The Jacobs started Sunday services in the Aboriginal Advancement Council Complex in Beaufort Street. This work quickly expanded. The Jacobs both worked full-time to support their extensive Christian and social ministry, as they received no external funding from either the government or churches.

In early 1966, the Jacobs were asked to return to help in the work at Mogumber Mission. An agricultural school had been established and a huge program was in place. As Jacobs

had agricultural training, he felt it was time to utilise those skills. While at Mogumber, Jacobs also pastored an Aboriginal church group established at Moora. In 1968, Jacobs undertook theological studies at the Methodist Bible College in Brisbane.

Sonny Graham

Sonny Graham is a Ngadju man who was born in 1938 on Balladonia Station on the Nullarbor in WA. In 1945, Graham’s parents placed him in the Church of Christ Mission at Norseman because they wanted him to obtain a good education. Graham proved to be a good student and became one of the first of two Aboriginal students to attend the Norseman Junior High School, where he gained his Junior Certificate. From 1958 to 1961, he attended the Churches of Christ Bible College at Glen Iris, Victoria. Graham was the first Indigenous student at this college. He did well as a student, gaining four Leaving Certificate subjects and passing the internal theological studies course to be ordained as a Church of Christ minister.

24 Margaret Jacobs, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, 2000, Mandurah, Western Australia.
25 Jacobs, Healing a divided nation, p. 6.
On completion of his theological studies, Graham spent three years as a Church of Christ pastor at Mooroopna in Victoria. In 1965, he returned to the Church of Christ Mission in Norseman. After a few years as dining room and kitchen supervisor and house parent, he became the Superintendent of the Mission, a position he held until 1982. Graham was a full-time missionary and most of his ministry was conducted within the framework of the Churches of Christ.

The Formation of the AEF in WA

The seed for an organisation that would bring together Christians living in isolated areas in WA had been germinating in the minds of Denzil and Shirley Humphries since 1963 and also in the minds of the other leaders. This vision came to the fore when the People's Church in Kalgoorlie invited Frank Johnson, an Aboriginal pastor from the Halls Creek People's Church, to speak at a convention on Australia Day weekend in 1967. Johnson was an advocate of Aboriginal churches. It was the first convention in the Goldfields that was fully organised by Aboriginal Christians and many attended this special occasion. During that weekend, Pastor Humphries told church members that the leaders were interested in forming an organisation to unite Aboriginal Christians in WA, stating:

We decided that our people were scattered like sheep without a shepherd and we needed an organisation to cater for and to provide fellowship, care and consolidation of these scattered groups to give them a sense of belonging and identity, in forming the Indigenous Church.

The Aboriginal Christians’ response was one of enthusiasm. The Humphries had very definite ideas about the need to establish Aboriginal churches. They felt strongly that Aboriginal Christians would not fully mature unless they were nurtured within the framework of an Indigenous church. It was decided that Jack Braeside would send letters to missionaries and Christian leaders to inform them of the decision made at Kalgoorlie.

During their time in Kalgoorlie, the Humphries proposed the concept of an Indigenous church. It provoked a mixed reaction among their colleagues and missionaries. However, the Humphries were clear about their vision and what was needed to develop Aboriginal Christian leadership within the Indigenous churches’ framework. They believed that Aboriginal Christians should become more outspoken in informing the non-Aboriginal Christian public of the spiritual and social needs of Aboriginal people and how to address those needs. Further inspiration to continue speaking out boldly on church and social issues came from an unlikely source—black activist Bobbi Sykes, who visited WA to talk about social justice issues.

28 Sonny Graham, resume, 2005.
29 Denzil Humphries, interviewed by Christine Choo, 2001, Derby, WA.
The Humphries had hoped the Church would support them in their endeavours to evangelise and establish churches among Aboriginal people. However, they did not receive the support they hoped for. They were unprepared for the response they received from some missionaries and non-Aboriginal leaders, some of whom labelled them as Black Power supporters, communists and racists, accusing them of wanting to create a form of apartheid. While the Humphries and other Aboriginal Christian leaders were discouraged, they were heartened by those non-Aboriginal Christians who were genuinely supportive of the new movement that was taking shape. In 1965, Humphries, Ronnie Williams and Bob Kingi, a Maori evangelist, travelled throughout South West WA, conducting evangelistic rallies.

In 1966–67, the young leaders were busy in their respective ministries. In Perth, Ben and Bernice Mason were pastoring the fellowship and developing the ministry that Cedric and Margaret Jacobs had begun. The Jacobs were ministering at Mogumber Mission, the Humphries were pastoring the People’s Church in Kalgoorlie, Sonny Graham was working at Norseman Church of Christ Mission and Jack Braeside and Ronnie Williams were travelling around the state doing evangelistic ministry. According to Shirley Humphries, it fell on Braeside’s shoulders to inform Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of this new development and, throughout 1967, he spent a great deal of time writing letters. This was substantiated by Williams, who stated:

_We had Jackie Braeside there and also Ben Mason and us young folk looked up to Jackie Braeside and Ben Mason as our leaders. We didn’t see many leaders but what they said we sort of followed. Jackie Braeside was a good secretary he wrote a lot of letters in those times… Ben was the talker and Jackie was the scribe. We thought it was wonderful to have those two men and they were great leaders for us in those early days._

In early December 1967, Braeside sent letters to Christian Aboriginal leaders and missionaries in WA, informing them of a special meeting called by the Aboriginal leaders to discuss the formation of the Aborigines Church Guidance Committee and the AEF. The meeting took place on 28 December 1967 at the Keswick Convention Centre in Orange Grove. To unanimous agreement, Keith Morgan moved that the AEF should be established first and a Church

32 Humphries & Humphries, *Brief history*.
33 Ronnie Williams, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Canberra.
Guidance Committee formed. The meeting went on to discuss the aims of the AEF and its membership. Sonny Graham moved that all those present, except non-Aboriginal missionaries, should be welcomed into full membership as founding members. Braeside was elected convener. However, no further mention was made of the Church Guidance Committee and it appears not to have been discussed again at any meeting of the AEF. The next meeting of members was planned to coincide with the Easter Convention in Brookton in 1968.34

A written statement, issued possibly in early 1968, lists those who were present at the inaugural meeting of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. They were: Ben Mason, Jack Braeside, Denzil Humphries, Bill Humphries, Ronnie Williams, Colin Green, Vincent Lambadgee, Sonny Graham, Cedric Jacobs, Joyce Trust, Loma Wilcox, Marjorie James, Shirley Humphries and Sheila Humphries and missionaries David Hammer, Keith Morgan and Sidney Williams.35 At that significant meeting the groundwork was laid for the AEF to be developed into a national organisation. Margaret Jacobs summed up the personal significance of the AEF, saying:

“It [the AEF] gave us a tremendous sense of fellowship which was lacking, we needed to have that and I think that’s what drew us together in such a way… We were really working very much by ourselves and AEF provided an incredible network of like-minded [people] you know, when you think of Sonny and Francis Graham, Denzil and Shirley Humphries, Ben and Bernice Mason who were also in their area in Western Australia doing the same thing as we were. To be able to come together and just ring each other up, and Ronnie Williams of course and Jack Braeside. We encouraged each other and AEF really provided the network or provided the umbrella for it to enable us to do that. We had no role models, we had no blue print we were really forging and making history, there was no such thing as an Indigenous church or Indigenous movement, either secular or in the church, so we were establishing a forerunner for both secular and for the Church.36

Margaret Jacobs’ statement gives a glimpse of the pioneering work in which the early Aboriginal leaders were engaged. For many years, the leaders had worked alone, carrying tremendous responsibilities and aspirations. Now, brought together in fellowship with like-minded people, they could share their vision. The first official meeting of the newly formed AEF WA was held during the Easter Convention at Brookton on 13 April 1968.

By holding the meeting during the Easter Convention, the AEF could gain greater exposure and enable the maximum number of people to attend. Items on the agenda for discussion were: the Constitution, conditions of membership, the election of office holders and setting up an advisory council. Officers elected at the meeting were: President Ben Mason, Vice President Ronnie Williams, Secretary Jack Braeside and Treasurer Colin Green. Two other members, Marjorie James and Gladys Tapim, were also elected to the committee. One of the issues raised was ‘How would the Western Australian Constitution fit in with the Constitution in the east

34 Minutes of the first meeting of the AEF, 28 December 1967, AEF National Office, Perth, WA.
35 Braeside, J no date, public circular letter, early 1968, AEF National Office, Perth, WA.
36 Margaret Jacobs, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, 2001, Mandurah, WA.
[eastern states]?’ In response, the committee stressed the uniqueness of the AEF in WA in that it was not part of any mission and was a totally independent body. The AEF helped churches and missions by recommending ideas, stating that they did not want to take over the missions.37 A report in Today magazine on the AEF meeting also noted that over 50 people were present, representing the Kimberleys, Geraldton, the Goldfields, Great Southern, Southern Wheatbelt and Perth.38

The Formation of the AEF in the Eastern States

The establishment of the AEF was a joint venture between the leaders from WA and the leaders from the eastern states. Due to this connection, this section explores the background of the AIM, and profiles five leaders from the eastern states and the events that led to the emergence of Christian leadership in the region.

Overview of the AIM

The UAM and the AIM shared a historical beginning through Retta Dixon, the founder of the AIM. Dixon’s interest in missions began when she became a member of the La Perouse Aboriginal Mission Committee in April 1896 and became a full-time missionary with the organisation. Dixon proved to be a very keen and active worker and, with the support of the committee members, her missionary work extended far beyond La Perouse and quickly spread to many places throughout NSW. In 1895, Leonard W Long, who was a key person in the AIM, began his missionary work with the La Perouse Mission. He held the position of treasurer and other administrative roles. In February 1905, Dixon resigned from the La Perouse Mission and Long retired soon after.39

Dixon, with a small, but dedicated, group of friends, formed the AIM on 1 August 1905.40 Soon afterwards, she married Long and they served as co-directors of the AIM. Under the Longs’ leadership, the work developed rapidly. As the AIM name indicates, the missionaries went into the inland regions of NSW. The main thrust of the AIM’s work was to establish centres from which missionaries could work to develop churches. These churches were not established as Indigenous churches, but rather as mission-controlled churches. Within a few years, Aboriginal Christians, called ‘Native Workers’, were also serving within the AIM. The work spread to the Port Stephens area north of Newcastle, the New England district, down the Murray River into NSW and Victoria, to WA and as far as Herberton in north

37 Minutes of AEF Conference at Brookton, 13 April 1968, AEF National Office, Perth, WA.
39 Telfer, E 1939, Amongst Australian Aborigines, forty years of missionary work, Fraser & Morphet Pty. Ltd, Melbourne, Victoria, pp. 27–32.
40 Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM), no date, Highlights of AIM history, unpublished paper, AIM National Office, Sydney, NSW.
Queensland. In 1910, the mission headquarters was moved from Singleton to Sydney and mission councils were established in Brisbane and Melbourne.

After Long’s death in 1928, Dixon carried on as director of the AIM. In 1936, some of AIM’s missionaries began working in the NT, caring for part-Aboriginal children. This became a major part of AIM’s work in the NT. In 1953, Dixon’s son, Edgerton Long, took over as director and held this position until 1972.41 The Retta Dixon Children’s Homes, named after the mission’s founder, continued to operate until 1980, when, due to changes in government policies on Aboriginal issues, the Homes ceased to function.

AIM’s Bible Training Institute was a vital ministry that was established near Port Stephens in 1938 and relocated to Singleton in 1945. Many young Aboriginal men and women from the AIM and other missions were trained at Singleton. A two-year course was offered and a pastor’s course was available for students wanting to continue their studies for a third year. In 1972, the Singleton Bible Institute closed as it was unable to find another suitable location. Following the closure of the Retta Dixon Children’s Homes, the AIM Council decided to use the buildings to establish the Darwin Bible College. This college was set up to cater mainly for Aboriginal Christians in the north of Australia. In 1986, the Darwin Bible College moved to new premises at Humpty Doo, south of Darwin.

Mission Publications of Australia was another important ministry of the AIM and the UAM. In 1959, Long negotiated with the leaders of the UAM to set up a separate literature department. Mission Publications of Australia was formed as the joint literature arm of the two missions, with its own governing body. This organisation played an important role in providing Sunday school material, tracts and other easy-to-read literature that was mainly geared towards Aboriginal people. It published a small magazine, Today, with short articles from Aboriginal Christians that was widely distributed throughout Australia. Mission Publications of Australia operated for almost 40 years. In May 1997, it closed and the AIM became the sole custodian of the Mission Publications business and ministry.42

The Founding AEF Members from Eastern Australia

The Aboriginal leaders in the eastern states requested changes be made to the AIM framework. First, they wanted to see autonomous church fellowship under the directives of Aboriginal Christian leaders. Second, they wanted to see Aboriginal men with leadership qualities be given opportunities to take up executive and administrative positions in the mission. It appeared that neither of these requests was granted. The historical roots of the AIM in the eastern states and the Aboriginal people’s deep family ties and connections to the mission made it difficult for it to develop independently. The leaders in the eastern states experienced more struggles for recognition and, consequently, the AIM developed differently to WA.

41 AIM, Highlights of AIM history.
Although the backgrounds of the leaders in the eastern states were similar to their counterparts in WA, they had a variety of experiences that were unique to them. The mission context in which they were nurtured and matured as leaders was different. The AIM had a fellowship of Aboriginal churches within the mission, whereas the churches in WA were independent churches (not officially associated with missions). Five of the six eastern state leaders were interviewed by Dr Maxine Knapp and following are their stories.43

**David Kirk**

David Kirk (1935–1986) was born on the Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement, 274 km north of Brisbane, in Queensland. His involvement with the AIM began at the age of 17, when he was encouraged to go to church by an Aboriginal Christian associated with the AIM church at Cherbourg. Kirk attended and, at the service, made his decision to become a Christian. He immediately became actively involved in the AIM church at Cherbourg. In 1953, he was accepted as a student at the AIM Bible Training Institute at Singleton. Two years later, after completing his studies, Kirk joined the AIM as a missionary. His first appointment was to Moree in NSW to help complete the building of the Mission House. From Moree, Kirk went to Darwin, later joining Howard Miles as a carpenter on the AIM stations in the NT. In 1957, Kirk returned to the AIM Bible Training Institute in Singleton to undertake a pastor’s course.

During 1958–59, Kirk ran a local ministry in Armidale, NSW. He later did evangelistic work in southern Queensland and NSW. In January 1960, after marrying Dawn Dates, a fellow graduate of the Singleton AIM Bible Training Institute. David and his wife were appointed by the mission board to Caroona and then to Cherbourg. After a year at Cherbourg, the Kirks took on the pastorship of the local AIM church until the end of 1964. In 1965, Kirk accepted the role of Vice Principal of the AIM Bible Training Institute at Singleton. During their time at the Bible Institute, both David and Dawn saw the potential leadership qualities of Aboriginal Christians from throughout Australia. In 1967, they resigned from the Institute. The following year, Kirk became manager of the Kirinari Aboriginal Boys Hostel at Sylvania. He also served as chairman of the Aboriginal Foundation in NSW and chairman of the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Board. In January 1970, when the AEF was formed, Kirk was elected founding president.44

**Cecil Grant**

Cecil Grant was born on the Wiradjuri Reserve at Condobolin in central NSW. His grandfathers were initiated Wiradjuri men who taught him the traditional life values and world view of his people. Grant learnt firsthand about the effect of government policies that denigrated the Wiradjuri and led to many traumas and problems in their communities. Grant vividly recalls the effects of these policies, such as home invasions that occurred frequently on the reserve and resulted in people being arrested for the most trivial reasons.

43 The sixth founding member, Pastor Bill Bird, contributed to this book and his testimony can be read in the book section titled ‘Introducing an AEF founder: Pastor Bill Bird’.

Children were taken away, sometimes by stealth and often when the fathers were away at work. Speaking the Wiradjuri language was forbidden by school teachers, missionaries and others who had close connection with the Wiradjuri people. Grant remembers loneliness, despair and a sense of worthlessness that, at times, seemed to overwhelm him. Grant grew up struggling with those feelings. He was grateful to his elders who sent him to Sunday school, even though he was rebellious during his teenage years. In 1955, Grant married Laurel and, soon after, both became Christians. He was employed on the government rail services in NSW and also held positions as a pastor of Indigenous churches.

**Ossie Cruse**

Oswald (Ossie) Cruse was born in 1933 and lived most of his life on the South Coast, NSW. Cruse worked at numerous jobs in the fishing and building industries. In 1951, he married Beryl Henry. By Cruse’s own admission they lived a hard life. There was not much stability during the early years of their married life and the family moved from one job to another. In 1962, a change occurred when Cruse was invited to a gospel rally at La Perouse at which David Kirk was the speaker. Both Cruse and Beryl responded to the appeal to become Christians. The Cruses immediately involved themselves in Christian ministry and, in 1965, started a church fellowship called the South Coast Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. According to Cruse, he was converted at a time in history when rapid changes were occurring in Aboriginal communities. Many Aboriginal people were coming out of the old welfare system and Cruse saw that there was a dire lack of Aboriginal leadership. This realisation led him to a lifelong commitment to church work and political involvement to help his people. In 1965, Cruse became a member of the Federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. In 1969, he was elected to the NSW Aboriginal Advisory Council, a position he held for 13 years.

**Wali Fejo**

Walter (Wali) Fejo was born in Darwin into the Larrikia clan and grew up in a large, close-knit family. Fejo pays tribute to an uncle and aunt who helped him spiritually in his early life. As a young Christian, Fejo wanted to do some training and learn about the Bible as his ‘hungry mind and heart’ were searching to know more about God and His purpose for Fejo’s life. His quest to find out more about Christianity led him to the AIM Bible Training Institute in Singleton, where he studied from 1955 to 1958. This enabled Fejo to meet students from other Australian states and made him realise there were Aboriginal Christians throughout Australia. When Fejo arrived back in Darwin, he was invited to give a Bible study lesson. A major turning point occurred that caused him to recognise and appreciate his Aboriginality. He recalls that the majority of lecturers at Singleton were from the United States (US). Their influence was brought home to him while he was preparing his studies and his presentation. Fejo states:

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45 Cecil Grant, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Cowra, New South Wales.
47 Ossie Cruse, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, January 2002, Port Augusta, SA.
48 Wali Fejo, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, January 2002, Port Augusta, SA.
My brother and sister were there and they got me on tape and after they finished [taping] I said, to them ‘Well, how did I go?’ And they just switched on the tape and you know, I was shocked. I was more an American than an Aboriginal. I was rolling my Rs and almost mimicking Billy Graham and others of the evangelists from America and that was a real big shock and I had to sit down and think.49

Fejo’s family convinced him that he needed to reconnect with his culture. His uncle and aunt took him to Bethwick, an Aboriginal Land Council Reserve almost 400 miles (644 km) south of Darwin. There, they taught him to see the reality of God in his culture and in creation, to appreciate his culture and to think positively about himself. According to Fejo, ‘that education of mine continues even to this day’.

**Lyle Browning**

Lyle Browning was raised in a Christian home and became a Christian when he was about 10 years old. Four of his aunties were Christians and they had an influence on him. From an early age, Browning helped his father, a banana grower, to harvest the bananas and he eventually became a banana grower himself. His early Christian maturing was through the AIM church at Fingal Head, NSW. Browning taught Sunday school while still in his teenage years.

At the age of 26, Browning entered the Queensland Bible College. After his graduation two years later, Browning returned to Fingal Head and became actively involved in Christian ministry. In 1960, he assisted pastors Bill and Joan Bird at the AIM church at Fingal Head. Browning also assisted Pastor David Kirk and Dawn Kirk who were stationed at the AIM church in Cherbourg, Queensland. He married Fay in 1964 and, together, they provided a supportive role to the nearby pastors and Aboriginal ministries. In 2006, Browning was still a self-employed banana farmer and a pastor of a thriving church at Fingal Head.50

**Catching the Vision for Christian Leadership Development**

Aboriginal leaders grew out of the convention movement in the eastern states. Cecil Grant claims those conventions opened the eyes of all who attended to the leadership potential of Aboriginal men and women who were discovering they possessed the organisational skills needed to conduct conventions. Grant, a founding leader of the AEF, acknowledges that the convention movement in the eastern states was important in the lead-up to the eventual formation of the AEF. He names three conventions as being significant and each was organised by local Aboriginal pastors and Aboriginal Christians. The conventions appeared to have started late January and early December. The first was held at Wellington, New South Wales, in 1962–63, the second in Narrandera, New South Wales, in 1963–64 and the third at Griffith, New South Wales, in 1964–65.

49 Wali Fejo, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, January 2002, Port Augusta, SA.
Both David Kirk and Cecil Grant had high expectations for their people and believed there were Aboriginal Christians who had the ability to take on leadership roles within the AIM. Their vision was to see an Aboriginal as the director of the mission and the Principal of the Bible Training Institute at Singleton. Grant states that there were Christian Aboriginal people who had grown up within the framework of the AIM, who attended their Sunday school, were taught in their Bible college, and who worked for many years within the mission, yet were overlooked for senior positions.

In the lead-up to the Three Ways Convention at Griffith, the convention committee felt excited about the possibility that Aboriginal people would be given recognition for their leadership qualities within the AIM. In 1965, recognition came a step closer at the mission conference in Margate, Brisbane, attended by missionaries and the cream of Aboriginal leadership from the AIM. According to Grant, the Aboriginal leaders went to the conference with the idea of challenging the mission to put more Aboriginals in leadership roles. The conference at Margate turned into a confrontation. The missionaries thought that the Aboriginal leaders wanted to take over the mission. Grant states this was never the intention, but that they wanted to work together.

On one particular afternoon, when discussion had reached a stalemate, the director of the mission, Edgerton Long, requested that the Aboriginal Christians have their own meeting, then report back to the other members. The Aboriginal delegates went upstairs and had their meeting but went further than the director envisaged. They discussed the formation of a Church Guidance Committee to do two things: first, to develop Aboriginal leadership potential and second, to give full recognition to Aboriginal leaders throughout the mission, in the Bible college, on the mission board and on the Field Council. They then reported back to the meeting their plans for a Church Guidance Committee that would work within the framework of the AIM. The director of the mission accepted their proposals.

Following the Margate Conference, the leaders of the Church Guidance Committee set to work inviting AIM churches to join the Church Guidance Committee, stressing that this was not a movement outside the AIM. Throughout 1966, many joined them. Grant and Kirk excitedly related the news to Edgerton Long, who said, ‘That’s very good, but you know, your people are all over Australia, you should be thinking about some sort of coordination of Aboriginal churches right around Australia’. Thus, for Kirk and Grant, the first seed of a national body was planted.

On Australia Day weekend in January 1968, the leaders called a conference in Cherbourg, Queensland. The aim of the conference was to discuss the formation of a coordinating body, a national fellowship of Aboriginal churches. The idea was that it would be an interdenominational umbrella organisation that would not take over the work of the missions but would

51 Grant, C 1993, ‘The history and vision of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia Inc. as shared with Pastor Neville Lilley on 22 December 1993’, discussion paper, AEF National Office, Perth, WA.
52 Grant, ‘The history and vision’. 
invite all Aboriginal Christians from the denominations and the two major missions to become members. Out of those meetings at Cherbourg, the AAEF was formed. This occurred almost three weeks after the AEF had formed in Perth. Lyle Browning believes that the AAEF was formed to create a place of ministry for Aboriginal Christians within the framework of the AIM. However, it did not address the issue of leadership that the Aboriginal leaders wanted to achieve within the mission.

With the formation of the AAEF, the leaders continued to pursue their quest to have more input into the decision-making process of the mission. They believed Aboriginal leaders were still being overlooked for executive positions. Grant believed some of the Aboriginal leaders had the potential to take on executive and senior positions in the mission. When a need arose to elect a principal for the Mission Bible College, Aboriginal leaders were hoping that David Kirk, the Vice Principal, would be appointed. Kirk, like many other Aboriginal leaders, had grown up attending AIM churches and Sunday school and had been a Bible college student at the AIM Bible Training Institute. Kirk had also been a missionary and held responsible positions in the mission. The leaders used the above criteria for assessing Kirk’s credentials for the position of Principal and to express their vote of confidence in his abilities. Further, they claimed he had the heart and understanding for the ministry in the AIM. But Kirk was overlooked. According to Grant, Aboriginal Christians were devastated by this injustice as they believed that Kirk had the ability to fulfil this role. It was this experience that made the leaders realise that their leadership role within the AIM was limited. This became the catalyst for the eventual formation of the AEF.

Coming Together of Leaders From East and West

Two further meetings brought together leaders from the eastern states and WA and lead to the establishment of the AEF.

The Singleton Meeting

Pastor Cecil Grant heard the news of the newly formed AEF in WA and noted the similarities in the AEF’s goals and objectives to those of the AAEF in the eastern states. He extended an invitation to Aboriginal leaders from WA to be present as observers at the August 1968 AIM Conference in Singleton and, in the second half of the conference, to enter into discussion on the possibility of adopting an Australia-wide Aboriginal evangelical fellowship of churches. The invitation was accepted and, in late August 1968, Denzil Humphries, Ben Mason, Jack Braeside, Russett Mitchell, a Christian leader from the Goldfields region and Noel Blythe, a missionary with the UAM in WA, travelled by car to Singleton. Cedric Jacobs, who was studying in Brisbane at that time, also travelled to Singleton to attend the conference.

53 Grant, ‘The history and vision’; Letter, Cecil Grant to Jack Braeside [no date, c. early 1968, following the formation of the AAEF].
This conference was very significant in the history of the AEF, as it was the first meeting of leaders from the east and west coasts of Australia. It was also where many of the future AEF Foundation Council members and Aboriginal Christian leaders met for the first time. They used the opportunity to get to know each other and to share their vision and aspirations for future ministry among their people.

The conference aroused interest throughout Australia and was well attended by many UAM and AIM churches in NSW, Queensland and the NT. These meetings were conducted within the framework of the AIM and many non-Aboriginal missionaries stayed on to attend the AEF and AAEF meetings. The widespread and significant level of interest in the prospective amalgamation of the AEF of WA and the AAEF was illustrated by Ray Roberts, a well-respected, non-Aboriginal Church of Christ senior missionary, who stated:

During the last term recess at the Singleton Bible Training Institute there was held one of the most historical meetings ever held in the history of the Australian Missionary enterprise. Meeting together for the first time were Aboriginal Christians, pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and Christian workers, representatives of the Aboriginal population. They came from Perth, Marble Bar, Cosmo Newbury, Kalgoorlie, Norseman, and Esperance Western Australia, and there were fellow Christians from Darwin, Borroloola and mission stations from the Gulf country. Sitting with them were people from Cherbourg, Palm Island and many other parts of Queensland. The host state of New South Wales was wonderfully represented with men from Griffiths, Dubbo, Wellington, Moree etc.

In his report of the Singleton conference, Roberts commented on some of the events that took place on that historic occasion. He noted that ‘traditional cultural barriers and boundaries were broken down as these leaders embraced each other in the common bond of Christianity’. The breaking down of these cultural barriers was of real significance in opening the doors for cross-cultural ministry and strengthening the Aboriginal Church. Roberts also noted that some of the missionaries believed this pending movement was ‘a nationalistic move to oust...’

the missionary’. Other missionaries felt their ministry within the mission was being jeopardised. However, Roberts was convinced the time had arrived when God was raising up Aboriginal people to minister to their own people, and that God was calling the Church to add to its missionary responsibility and support this new initiative.59 As Roberts noted, it was remarkable that so many people came, of their own initiative, to see what was taking place with the newly developed AEF of WA and AAEF in the eastern states. Ossie Cruse’s first response to seeing so many Christians, Aboriginal leaders, pastors and evangelists gathered together in one place at the Singleton conference was ‘one of awe, especially [at] how they knew the Bible so well’.60 Cruse wondered what he had got himself into. Apart from two men, all the other people were strangers to him, yet all were talking about this vision of a national body. Cruse stated:

_I was aware of the strong opposition from the missionaries and some Aboriginal Christians to this proposed separation of ministry that appeared to be strong for Aboriginal control and leadership in Christian service. Not knowing the extent of Aboriginal Christian ties to various missions and denomination, my thoughts were probably radical in that I wondered why didn’t the Aboriginal Christians just assume their role of Christian leaders, get out there, evangelise and disciple men and women._61

After long sessions of Bible study and prayer with some of the other men, Cruse began to understand their vision. Grant62 shared a special and sacred experience that gave a glimpse of the earnestness these early AEF men had. One evening, after the conference for the day was finished and the other men had gone to bed, Kirk, Cruse and Grant prayed and wept for their people. Grant states, ‘There were pools of tears on that floor as we sought God’s guidance for this new movement that was emerging and found it in Exodus 3: “Let my people go”’. 63 The meetings at the conference were difficult and divisive. However, it was a learning time for all those in attendance and, specifically, for the leaders of the AEF and the AAEF.

The discussions were open and often quite traumatic for some of the participants. Nevertheless, they were transparent, and they needed to be, because of the enormity of what these leaders were proposing. In addition to conflict between missionaries and the Christian leaders there was an element of suspicion between the leaders of the two organisations. Jacobs remembers:

_Initially both east and west leaders were still a bit suspicious of each other until they realised they had something uniquely in common [in the organisations which they had formed]. After a time of discussion of what each other had, it was clear to us that we were moving in the right direction._64

60 Ossie Cruse, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, January 2002, Port Augusta, SA.
61 Ossie Cruse, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, January 2002, Port Augusta, SA.
62 Cecil Grant, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Cowra, NSW.
63 Cecil Grant, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, November 2000, Cowra, NSW.
64 Cedric Jacobs, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, 1999, Perth, WA.
Allowing time for discussion between the Aboriginal leaders on the new movement was crucial. Jacobs claims the non-Aboriginal Christians and missionaries who were also present had a negative attitude towards the new initiatives being presented and were very protective of their ministry. Jacobs stated:

*I know Jack Braeside, Cecil Grant, David Kirk, Ben Mason and Denzil Humphries went out of their way to explain that the mission era was the first stage. God was now moving and motivating Aboriginal Christians and these new initiatives were the next stage, but the missionaries wouldn’t let go of what they had.*

The meetings between Aboriginal Christian and non-Aboriginal missionaries at Singleton were quite emotional at times, for this discussion of a national movement was no light matter. Possibly all participants in the discussions concerning AEF and AAEF realised the ramifications such a move would have on the work of missions, particularly that of the UAM and the AIM.

Perhaps, as Cruse claimed, the leaders could have walked away from the missions and started their own movement without dialogue. However, most of the leaders, especially from the eastern states, had deep ties with missions and missionaries that went back three generations in some instances. Therefore, dialogue was seen as important. As a sign of maturity and respect, the leaders chose to consult with the missions and to share their belief that God was leading them. Nevertheless, these discussions and the struggle for freedom in ministry proved to be painful for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians as they each grappled with the many new issues confronting them.

Despite the difficulties, the Aboriginal Christian leaders remained strong in their resolve to initiate the new movement. The outcome of these meetings was the resolution that the necessary steps be taken to set up a countrywide fellowship of churches and Christian believers. A steering committee was formed, comprising Ben Mason, Jack Braeside, David Kirk, Bill Bird, Denzil Humphries and non-Aboriginal missionaries Geoff Higgins and Wesley Caddy. The committee’s role was to look into the name of the countrywide organisation, its membership, constitution, structure and ministry, a doctrinal statement, voting rights, property and affiliation with other groups. The steering committee was given clear guidelines to follow and agreed to report to a meeting to be held at Brookton, WA, on 5 April 1969.

The news about the countrywide fellowship was not well received by some missionaries and Aboriginal Christians in the AIM. However, positive changes had taken place through dialogue:

*Over the past years, a vital growth, a new awareness within the young Aboriginal Church has gradually developed into the AAEF. The growing Church just had to have a ‘voice’. New Testament teaching urges us to give ample opportunity for such growth. Some of our*

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65 Cedric Jacobs, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, 1999, Perth, WA.
workers, and even some of the members of Churches, have not found it easy to accept or appreciate the new movement. However, since the conference, many more have a clearer picture of how the Lord will use this Indigenous movement across the field. Possibly more than anything else right now, prayer is needed for this Church Fellowship. It is imperative that the young churches grow and become fully Indigenous.66 (AIM magazine, October 1968)

The remainder of 1968 and the early part of 1969 were busy months for the steering committee members, who had been elected to work on the proposed guidelines for a national movement. However, the committee worked hard and was well prepared for the Brookton meeting. There were many people involved in the discussions concerning this new movement. Denzil Humphries makes mention of Graham Paulson, a young man from Queensland and the first Aboriginal man to be ordained from the Baptist Theological College. According to Humphries, Paulson made a significant contribution to the discussion on the proposed new movement.

**The Brookton Meeting**

The second major meeting of the steering committee took place in Brookton, WA, during the Brookton Easter Convention of 1969. The convention was a highlight for Aboriginal people in WA, often drawing crowds of up to 400 people from many towns in the South West. The eastern states’ delegates to Brookton were David and Dawn Kirk, Bill Bird, Cecil Grant, Lyle Browning Senior and Geoff Higgins, editor of *Today* magazine. The public meeting with the leaders from WA and the leaders from the eastern states took place on 5 April 1969. The response from the public to the business meeting was very positive, with 50 people present. One of the key speakers was David Kirk, who explained the vision and goals of the AAEF and its possible amalgamation with the AEF. He noted that the formation of a national organisation would be a great thing for the existence of Aboriginal people, stating that ‘the AEF would be self-contained not being affiliated with another organisation... the forming must be from the people within working out for unity’67.

Kirk’s statement was important, as it showed a shift in thinking by the men from the eastern states. It indicated that they were ready to leave the control of the mission structure to follow the lead of the AEF in WA and endorse the proposed AEF of Australia as autonomous and independent of missions. Discussion then turned to the conference planned for January 1970. The major item put forward for discussion at that conference was ‘that the Western AEF and the AAEF to be made into one national fellowship’. This was to be presented at a combined national meeting planned for 14–17 January 1970 at Port Augusta in SA. Ronnie Williams was appointed Public Officer for the AEF.68

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68 Minutes of meeting in Brookton, 5 April 1969, AEF National Office, Perth, WA.
The meeting in Brookton of the AEF and the AAEF was amicable and profitable. The leaders from the eastern states, through their preaching and singing ministry, left a deep and lasting impression on the people attending the Brookton Convention. After the convention, Humphries took David and Dawn Kirk on a six-week teaching ministry throughout the southern part of WA.

The year 1969 was a busy one for AEF in WA. As one of the leaders, Humphries spent considerable time away from his home attending meetings. Ronnie Williams was so encouraged and excited about the new national movement that he made a trip around Australia to share the vision of the proposed AEF with others. Williams took with him Michael Angelo, an Aboriginal Christian worker from the Carnarvon region in the Pilbara, in North West WA. Williams and Angelo travelled around Australia in an old Land Rover visiting UAM stations throughout WA and SA, then on to AIM bases in NSW.

They then travelled to Melbourne, where they met UAM Federal Council members and missionaries. They drove to Sydney, Palm Island, Brisbane and Darwin, then to Alice Springs and many places in-between, before travelling back to WA through the Warburton Ranges. Wherever they went, they shared the vision of the AEF. Those days were difficult according to Williams: ‘We were dedicated to reaching out, but together we felt we belonged to a great spiritual thrust that God had raised up here in Australia’.

Jack Braeside was also on the move in 1969. He and Jack Ridley, from Kalgoorlie, travelled to SA to the Umeewara Brethren Mission. They were a great help during their stay at the mission, according to Allan McWilliams, the superintendent. They visited homes and families and took part in services. They also helped to shift a house to North Stirling. McWilliams said that he learnt from Braeside about his interest in seeing the Christian leaders from around Australia come together and also about his vision for a National Leaders Conference.

Braeside saw that the Umeewara Mission might be a good place for the Leaders Conference that they had planned for 1970. A relationship of cooperation was established with the Brethren Mission and, every year from 1970 until 1995, the AEF Convention was held at the Umeewara.

70 Humphries, D & Humphries, S 1969, Newsletter to prayer supporters, June, AEF National Office, Perth, WA.
71 Ronnie Williams, audiotaped history of AEF, sent to Maxine Knapp, 1999.
72 Allan McWilliams, interviewed by Maxine Knapp, 2002, Port Augusta, SA.
Aboriginal Christian Leadership: Movement Towards Greater Autonomy

After years of preparation, and three years of planning and working together on the amalgamation of the AEF and the AAEF, the leaders of these two bodies held a Leaders Conference at Port Augusta, from 14 to 17 January 1970. This was an historic occasion for two reasons. First, it led to the founding of the AEF. Second, over 70 Aboriginal Christian delegates and many interested non-Aboriginal church and mission leaders attended from evangelical missions and denominations throughout Australia.

The conference was officially opened by The Reverend Geoffrey Bingham of the Adelaide Bible Training Institute. His opening words were: ‘This week of Conference, as you, Aboriginal Christian leaders, meet together is church history in the making’. It was a momentous occasion as the leaders engaged in public dialogue to discuss the formation of the national AEF and to consider the agenda and recommendations put forward by the steering committee.

The items on the agenda were based on the steering committee’s findings. These were, in turn, based on the guidelines drawn up at the Singleton conference in August 1968. All the key points from the agenda were discussed and the decisions made at that time formed the basis of the Constitution of the newly developed AEF. In 1973, the Constitution was modified and endorsed by the incoming Federal Council members of the AEF. The most significant outcome of the conference was the amalgamation of the AEF of WA and the AAEF from the eastern states into a national fellowship. The amalgamation of these organisations occurred when it was ‘recommended that the name AEF be adopted as the official body’. It was moved and seconded that the recommendation be accepted with the addition of the words ‘of Australia’ and unanimously carried. Thus, the AEF of Australia was born.

The words ‘of Australia’ encapsulated the essence of this new organisation as being a national organisation. Through the initiatives of the AEF and AAEF leaders at the state level, the conference in Singleton, in August 1968, the AEF meeting in Brookton in April 1969 and the efforts of the steering committee, thousands of Aboriginal people from all parts of Australia were able to play a part in shaping the new organisation. It was significant that, of the 12 founding Federal Council members elected, six were from WA and six were from the eastern states. It was also very fitting that the 12 men elected to the Federal Council had a history of working together in the formative years of the AEF of WA and the AAEF. According to Lyle Browning:

*These were exciting times especially for men in the east, who in Christian ministry were never free to rise to the full potential of their calling. Aboriginal men became president,*


secretary and treasurer of their own evangelical body. Never before in the history of Aboriginal Christian work, were 12 men able to exercise leadership under a national Christian body in effective ministry.75

Jack Braeside, looking back on that Leaders Conference in 1970, said that it positioned the AEF in a world perspective. He drew attention to the fact that the Canadian Indian Evangelical Fellowship was established in 1970 and, in that year, there was also a revival in the Solomon Islands. He noted that the Maori Evangelical Fellowship began in New Zealand in 1959. He observed that ‘other fellowships all over the world were springing up, while we in Australia thought we were the only ones’76.

Introducing an AEF Founder: Pastor Bill Bird

This book is controversial, because it covers the great deal of opposition against Aboriginals back in the 1960s and 1970s. When I was 16 years old, I became a Christian through the missionary movement. I was living on the Cherbourg Mission and the missionaries taught me about Jesus. I became a missionary with the AIM and so did my cousin, David Kirk. AIM took us out of the mission and put us into Singleton Bible Training Institute. The denominations were selecting Aboriginal people like me to go to Bible colleges to become a reverend or a pastor and that was giving Aboriginal people standing. The denominations were interested in us because we had a voice, an Aboriginal voice.

Around about that time, the UAM and the AIM were falling apart because they were not actually reaching our people with their concept of an Aboriginal Church. They went against everything we put up and wanted to do, such as Aboriginal Christians being independent. At the time, Aboriginal Affairs was popular in general Australian society and the churches got in on it. A lot of finances were being poured into Aboriginal work (not just for Christian work). There were land rights and other things happening. People thought supporting Aboriginals would give them a footing in Australia. Leaders in Australia were selling us out. The money was not only coming from Australia—it was coming from America and England as well. All the denominations were also throwing money around.

Around that time, Aboriginal Christians were asking for independence. The missionary organisations were blocking us because they would not allow Aboriginal leadership in their organisation. There were people and bodies and denominations (non-Indigenous) who wanted to get the kudos for the Aboriginal work. There was a lot of fighting and whispering about leadership, you know. Some of the leaders in the AEF suffered badly because they were too strong. We did not want to become a part of a denomination, we wanted our own body. We wanted self-dependence. We were looked on by the established Church as radicals who were going astray. We were regarded as being against the missionary movement. We were not against them, we were for the movement, but we wanted to establish ourselves as inter-denominational. A lot of money was going into organisations. When AEF was getting going we tried to get some money and this was when the denominations started to worry. We had to be radical to move forward and they looked down on us. When AEF became more well known, people were sending their money to us. We were getting strong and were able to
put Indigenous leaders on the road and organise meetings in different places. We started the national convention, but there was friction between missionaries and the leadership over this.

Things became hard, but I stayed on with the AEF and became involved in social activities. Eventually, I became a Liaison Officer for the then-prime minister Malcolm Fraser. At the time, the government was losing its grip on Aboriginal Affairs. Malcolm Fraser appointed me to the leadership position of Administrator of Aboriginal Affairs and things blew up then about Aboriginal Affairs in Australian society.
Honouring the past can bring a deeper understanding about the opportunities that exist for sharing the gospel in the present and in the future. Neville Naden explains that the reason for remembering AEF’s past is so we can thank the founders for what they have done for the movement. Remembering provided an opportunity for people to share their stories, prayers and poems about the heroes of the past. A candle ceremony and dinner was held in honour of the founders and their extraordinary vision, passion and dedication that pulled the AEF through so many struggles, trials and tribulations. Activities of remembrance are listed in this chapter.

Why Remember Our Founders With a Meal?
by Reverend Neville Naden

You may ask, why should we remember the AEF history and the founders? A while back, I received a call: ‘Neville, we want to work on a program where we honour our Indigenous Christian leaders around the country. Many of them have worked tirelessly for little or no reward this side of heaven, so we want to honour them’.

And I said, ‘Brother! Are you going to call all of the Indigenous Christian leaders from across the country together, at a big dinner, and honour them?’ I asked, ‘What happens if you leave someone out? Mate, who is going to bear the brunt of that?’ I said, ‘I’m not getting involved, I’m staying right away from it.’

That call planted a seed and so we began to think about how this could happen without causing offence. Many of our past AEF leaders have gone home to glory, basking in His presence, with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But wouldn’t it be wonderful for us to get the remaining AEF Federal Council members who are still with us, the Foundational AEF Council, and bring them together and honour them at a dinner? The current AEF Federal Council all said in unison: ‘We should do it. It is long overdue. We should have done it ages ago.’
So, this is the reason for this book and the 2016 testimonial dinner—to thank our original Foundational Council men. For it was they who had the vision many years ago to establish a body that would proclaim the gospel to our Aboriginal people, when the other churches were neglecting their responsibility by not acknowledging Indigenous leadership. We thank the Foundational Council for their courage and leadership in establishing the AEF. We also thank their wives who were just as instrumental in establishing the AEF.

We give thanks to God for His work through the original Foundational Council men and their families. AEF would not be the organisation that it is, if it wasn’t for our past visionaries. All glory to God!

*To God’s servants we honour you.*
Prayer for the Foundational Council, by Reverend Max Wright

God, you are the creator of all things. You have created us in your own image. We acknowledge that you are the God who created the universe. Created the land. Created mankind after yourself.

As we look back over years of ministry and, as we acknowledge the founding members of the AEF, we acknowledge that you have been, from the beginning, at the centre of all we have done together. And so we pray that you accept our thanks for your faithfulness to us.

As we look to the future, as we look ahead and see what you have for us in store, we acknowledge the leadership of the Holy Spirit within our lives, within our communities and within our families. So that all the things we say and do from this day forward may be to your honour, glory and expansion of your kingdom. Father, we pray and praise your name with thankfulness. In the name of Jesus. Amen!
‘Ronnie’s Poem’, by Reverend Sonny Graham

Verse 1:

To Pastor Gooda Williams
Here’s to Ronnie Williams whose great name will forever stand,
May it always be remembered, throughout all the land,
He was brave, strong and fearless, but gentle as can be
And for those who knew him, the memories remain.
Born into the Noongar nation in the South West, was he
A part of Western Australia where he liked to be
Ron found a loving Saviour, the Shepherd’s lamb was he
His life changed forever and that’s how it would always be.

Candle Lighting Ceremony Commemoration,
by Reverend Ray Minniecon

Pastor Albert Knapp Candle Lighting Ceremony at the 2016 Convention.
Photograph Neville Lilley’s Collection.
Reverend Ray Minniecon led a candle lighting ceremony to honour our uncles, pastors and elders at the 2016 AEF Convention.

The first candle was for one of our great AEF leaders who had extraordinary vision and passion and dedication and who pulled AEF through so many struggles and trials and tribulations. It was for Pastor David Kirk and it was lit by Aunty Jean Phillips.

The second candle was lit for our uncle, Pastor Cecil Grant, another one of our great leaders who led us and dragged us through much mud and we climbed over many mountains together. The candle was lit by Pastor Geoff Higgins. One of Uncle Cecil’s brothers Stan, has revived the Wiradjuri language and they are now teaching this at the university in Canberra. What a great family, a great tradition, what a great leader and a great inspiration.

The next candle was for one of those quiet achievers who made a lot of noise: Reverend Wali Fejo. He travelled around this great country, started so many things and was involved in so many denominations. He served his master so well and he has entered into His rest. This candle was lit by Pastor Albert Knapp.

We honour our Pastor Ben Mason, one of the greatest evangelists to come out of this country, among so many other evangelists. He came from a little place called Mount Margaret and taught us how to preach the gospel. Mount Margaret is one of the most amazing, awesome and beautiful places on the planet—look what it has produced. Reverend Max Wright lit the fourth candle in honour of this old uncle.

The next uncle honoured was also one of the quiet achievers who made a loud noise—Pastor Jack Braeside. His dear wife Marilyn lit the candle. There are so many wonderful stories about Uncle Jack and their travels.

The final candle lit was for Pastor Ronnie Williams. He was one of my great mentors and I remember travelling with him to so many places. Bill Manning lit this last candle.

After the sixth candle was lit, all were invited to join in a minute’s silence in remembrance of these great men and to pray the following prayer:

Dear Father, we thank you that we can remember these men, these great men of God, your servants, who we know have now entered into their rest. We thank you for the vision they have left us, the responsibilities they have left us, the legacy they have left us. We just pray that as we continue on with our Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, which the founders created through you, that we continue on with the vision. In Jesus’s name, Amen!

**Introducing an AEF Founder: Pastor Lyle Browning**

I used to get quite emotional, but then sometimes emotions take you away from reality. I don’t know if you understand what I am saying. That is, somehow, if you get emotional, you kind of get, in one respect, kind of a ‘human up’. But then, reality is in total - a peacefulness that comes from the Almighty, from the spirit of God.

The AEF means a lot to me, even though we had sound teaching from the AIM in which I spent most of my early Christian life. I became a Christian when I was about 10 years old. My mum and dad loved the Lord and they brought us up as Christians. Dad even taught us Sunday school, just the family. The AIM was a sound doctrinal mission and I grew up under that.
AIM actually said they wanted to bring young Aboriginal men and women to a place of maturity in Christ, a spiritual knowledge of the Bible. When that occurred in the lives of these young Aboriginal men, it meant that AIM would withdraw and let the young Aboriginal man or woman minister in relation to the maturity of the gospel, not only to Aboriginal men and women, but to whoever was a Christian.

Then, when these men came through to maturity, they knew that the Constitution said that they were to be put behind a pulpit. A pulpit didn’t mean much to them, but they were the ones who were to take the gospel to their own folk. There was that feeling within the young men that, ‘This is what we’ve trained for, this is what we are all about, this is what the Constitution says’.

There was a point when they were ready to go, they felt under the Lord that their calling that they were able to fulfil what the Constitution said. But, sadly, because people are human, sometimes they changed the Constitution a bit and they did, the Constitution of AIM. Not all of it. Because a lot of those folk who were in those mission stations, a missionary and his wife would come for five years and would then be moved on and another would come. You see, you could understand that this was their life, too, under the Lord.

For the young Aboriginal men and women who were trained, it was a bit hard for them to give up what they believed the Lord had called them to do. So what they tried to do, they tried to bring in some way where they could accommodate the two—the missionaries and the young people who came in. They put in place various structures to try to help, such as the Pastor’s Guidance Committee, because they were trying to get the young men into a place where they can utilise what God had given them to do. But it didn’t work.

I had a house I built on the seafront. We called it ‘New Brighton’, it was only a stone’s throw from Brunswick Heads. There was a group that went to Cherbourg, Queensland—David Kirk, Tommy Coe and a few others. I didn’t go, but when they came back from Cherbourg they were pretty well drained, drained, drained and they stayed with me there in that house. I was not long married. I had young children and I think our family grew to 12, just like that. They told me we have formed the Australian AEF. In total, God was moving, God was doing it. He was calling the west and the east together. And it happened.

It started because there was correspondence between the east and the west. I had a call from David Kirk who was in Newcastle. We had just bought a 1966 Valiant. He said, ‘Could you take us over to Brookton? They are going to have an Easter Convention there.’

I said, ‘Sure, no worries.’

We had a farm, we had a part in a shipping business transporting things. I had two other brothers. I said, ‘Dad, will you take them?’

He said, ‘Yes, I will.’
They met in Brookton in 1968 and there was a flow, there was a flow, there was a flow. And the flow was the spirit of God.

I travelled, I was on the road; they said, ‘When you get worn out, take it easy’.

I’ve been worn out several times.

They came from the west to Port Augusta, because it was central.

We talk about honouring. I’ve got to honour some wonderful men and the name that came to me was ‘Smoker’. Smoker was not Aboriginal in makeup, in birth, but he was oneness with us in Jesus Christ and that was all that mattered. And there was another, David Lewin. You had these men who were in total, 100 per cent, if you could say, ‘our way’. They saw things through our eyes, as it were and they helped us.

These men helped us—mainly Smoker. He helped us to put together the Statement of Faith and he was the one who helped us all the way through. All these other men came into that arena with us they wanted to actually join east and west together in what they called Aboriginal leadership under Jesus Christ, but Jesus’s the main leader. They wanted six men from the west and six men from the east. I was privileged to be one of the six from the east. I met up with folk, a lot of folk.

I would say, Jesus said, ‘Follow my example’.

What was Jesus’s example? He was humble. I pass onto the young people to be humble, ‘Humble yourselves unto the hand of the Almighty God and he will lift you up’.

In coming to Port Augusta at this time, others have said to me, ‘You are important’.

I said, ‘No, everybody is important.’

I think if we can instil that into the young people to say, ‘The Lord calls you to serve one another, serve one another, serve one another.’

He says, ‘Even as I have served you’.

I think that’s the greatest blessing that can be instilled in young people—to serve the living God, the living Christ and serve one another.

Comments by the Founders

In the late 1960s and early 1970s God brought together Aboriginal people from the east and the west of Australia. AEF was established by some very special people and this book honours
them. The following comments are what some founders said about being honoured by the AEF through a testimonial dinner.

**Pastor Denzil and Shirley Humphries**

*I thought it was a tremendous thing, I think it was a thing we were thinking about, and talking about how we would go about it... It was tremendous to see God’s faithfulness in all of us.*

**Pastor Ossie Cruse**

*Here we are, like forgetting about all our denominations and having this fellowship meal together. The major part of this thing is for fellowship. So wonderful to be here together and having beautiful fellowship.*

**Reverend Sonny and Frances Graham**

*That’s how it was tremendous, that today brought back memories particularly as we honoured our good friends who have passed over to the other side—they were great people. As Western Australians, you know, I can understand we are always behind the east—the wise men come from the east, so... that’s really good. They were all so nice and did a good job. I was tremendously blessed.*

**Reverend Cedric and Margaret Jacobs**

*It was a tremendous event. Not many times in life I am honoured in some way. Not that we seek it, but recognition is very few and far between. But we realise and it brought home, the impact of what we have done, last night and the significance of it, right across the nation.*

**Pastor Lyle Browning**

*When they talked about a three-course meal, I said, ‘Two would have done me’, and it was wonderful.*

*Yea, in 1968 we have now formed the AAEF, God was moving and God was doing it. He was calling the west and the east together and it happened.*
All the founders worked for little or no reward and this book honours them and their hard work. This book demonstrates that the AEF cares about them and think that they are exceptional.

Jean Philips’ Testimony

For me, the testimonial dinner was a very emotional evening. David Kirk and I grew up in Cherbourg together, we lived in the homes together, we were part of a family and we trained together. Most of you don’t know what it cost the two of us when we first started talking about the vision of AEF. It is too upsetting. I miss my brother, he taught me a lot of things. He said to me, ‘Sister you move ahead, don’t let anyone stop you and don’t keep your mouth shut’.

My mouth has been open ever since. My brother Cedric, he and Margaret have been great supporters of AEF, and also Cecil Grant—thank you. We were kicked out of our church in Cherbourg because we supported AEF. There is some healing that needs to be done, please pray about that.

Thank you for bringing me down here this evening, I want to share my part sometime in the future and I have got a whole lot of young people around me, both black and white young people, in Brisbane that can help to move ahead with this. I want to start by writing an introduction about AEF because some of our people, Pastor Henry Collins who came to the very first AEF meeting, paid a big price. He is up in the glory land now. There have been people like that, and Bill Bird was there with us, but it was David who was the cheeky one and pushed us forward. You know, I believe all of us as Christians, and particularly the AEF, have a responsibility for our pastors’ families, especially the children. I ask that you pray and care for them. Thank you.

A Testimonial Dinner Celebration for the Founders,
by Reverend Neville Naden

Neil Smith cooked the AEF testimonial dinner for the founders. AEF is all about unity in diversity. It is about our Aboriginal people in fellowship across denominational structures. We want to encourage our Aboriginal people. We want to love them. We want them to come not only to be Christians, but we want them to grow in their relationship with the Lord.
Honouring Through Food, by Neil Smith

I grew up in a huge family in Liverpool, England. Hospitality and feeding family, friends and strangers, was a regular event. True mob-style. I left school at 16 and followed my path into a chef role, then managed my first business when I was 18. I have had various food-orientated businesses and restaurants ever since. I now live with my family in Sydney.

Until a few years ago, I had never had any contact with the Aboriginal Indigenous community before and what I did know about Indigenous culture had been influenced by the negative media I had seen. Then, one day, the much-loved Reverend Neville Naden turned up at church to announce a partnership with our church and his church. His work and his wife’s work caught my attention.

Nev thought it would be a great idea for me to cook at the AEF Convention and I said, ‘Yes’, immediately thinking, ‘No problem, I’ll whip up a huge chilli beef or curry’. Then the details emerged that I was cooking in Port Augusta, a long way for an Englishman living in Sydney. I was cooking for up to 200 guests and it was to be held on 2 January which meant missing New Year’s Eve in Sydney. I realised a pot of chilli beef was not going to do it. This event was a lot more special than that, it was a three-course sit down celebration dinner for many members of the AEF, including the elders.

From my past businesses, I am very used to cooking for large numbers. The challenge would be finding suppliers and organising the delivery of food, as it was on Saturday 2 January. I always like to use local suppliers—it is a great witness for non-Christians to hear that, for any events, we do use local suppliers. The local suppliers of Port Augusta did us proud and were quite amazed by so many Aboriginal communities coming from all around Australia for this event.

The next problem was serving the meal. I knew I could plan, prepare and cook the three-course meal, but how could we serve it? I would usually use at least 20 wait staff for such an event and also have a few workers in the kitchen. Then there would be a big clean up to organise. At this stage it was me, my wife and two boys who could be very helpful at times, but they were only three and six years old.
Closer to the date, we were praying for guidance on serving the meal and then Nev coolly added, ‘By the way we have had 18 members of the OneHeart church offer to come and help you serve the food’. This was an amazing answer to prayer. The next hurdle was organising the cooking equipment. I adapted the menu to accommodate limited facilities, but was rewarded with a great facility with all the equipment we needed including air conditioning.

It was an amazing night. The hard work the AEF had done to put this celebration together to honour the founders was truly showcased and the venue looked beautiful. The food was great and, thanks to the OneHeart team, the service worked perfectly. It was such an honour and privilege to be involved in this event. We also enjoyed the convention, the sermons, the worship, the daily devotions by The Reverend Dr Mark Short and hearing the testimonies. Everything was extremely well organised and heartfelt, all put together to glorify God and to honour the great work of the AEF. I was overwhelmed to hear some of the testimonies, worship in Aboriginal languages and learn about the AEF and their amazing history and the culture of the Aboriginal and Torres Islander people.

I really feel that our amazing God put me in touch with Nev for great reasons. I have a huge admiration and respect for the history, culture and the past and modern lives of our amazing brothers and sisters. To have the opportunity to come together to worship and share the gospel with Aboriginal communities from all around Australia has been a blessing on our lives. I always come away from mission trips with so much more than I think, but one of the main things that always sticks with me after spending time with the ‘mob’ is that we are all the same to our great God. It does not matter how broken we are, where we are in the world, what we have or what we do not have. If we have a privileged relationship with our great father then we are all the same under Him and totally in His hands. When we totally trust him with our lives, how can we worry?

I would encourage you to pray, constantly pray for others. Pray for God to guide us and put people in our lives that we can connect with others. More importantly listen, stop and listen to what God is telling you and serve. It does not matter how busy we are, what we have or do not have. We can all serve in some way. Our churches are not just run by ministers, we are the church. Whether serving is a phone call or text when you feel somebody needs it, or turning up to somebody’s house with a lasagne or casserole, a bag of groceries or cooking a three-course meal for 180 people for AEF—when you realise that God has used you to bless somebody else through serving it is one of the biggest blessings you will ever receive. The Aboriginal people we served are our brothers and sisters in Christ! Part of our church family and that is exactly what I felt at the AEF in Port Augusta. To walk into a theatre and hear a sermon with hundreds and hundreds of strangers from Indigenous communities around Australia, we felt we were with family—our ‘mob’.
Chapter 3: Honouring the Present While Recognising the Past

All AEF ministries honour God first. This section provides a brief insight into some of these ministries. The chapter begins the women’s ministry with Maxine Lawrence and Jackie Eades, followed by Rose Cox’s message. Next, is an introduction to the youth and children’s ministries that were held at the 2016 Convention. Pastor Jarred Dimmer shares his testimony and youth sermon, in which he reminds us all to be like Noah and have faith in God. Dr Maxine Knapp and Margaret Jacobs discuss the importance of sharing food together and being hospitable. This section is dedicated to all AEF ministries and honours everyone’s work—those who are mentioned in this chapter and the many who are not mentioned.

Honouring AEF Women’s Ministry

Thanking God for Women’s Ministry, by Maxine Lawrence
(Chairperson, AEF National Women’s Council, 2015)

What would AEF be without the women? It’s a real privilege and a blessing and an honour to celebrate something so special in all our lives. All of the founders have been great mentors to me in my life. First, I want to just thank God for them.

Second, I want to say there are lots of things that are happening throughout this beautiful country of ours in regards to women ministering. We are honouring some of our women. I know that, throughout the years, our aunties Jackie Eades and Anna Dann would head-up safaris to the Kimberleys. Women who have stood and ministered beside their husbands.

I think I was 17 years old when I took up my first position as secretary to the AEF’s Eastern Area Ladies Council. I was only young. I really thank the Lord that he gave me the skills and ability to do the job that I had to do. I do not have a date for when the ladies ministry began in WA. The AEF Eastern Area Ladies Council, or ministry, started around 1972. Its first convention was held at Nanima Mission in Wellington, NSW. Aunty Ruth Naden was born there. The National AEF Ladies Council also began around the same time. Throughout the years, our national women’s conferences have been part of our ministries, helping us to minister from a holistic point of view in our communities. We really thank the Lord that, as women, God has used us abundantly to serve him. We also thank the Lord for those of our men who stood beside us in our AEF Women’s Ministry. We know they have stayed behind and looked after kids and things
like that. We want to thank them for that. We want to bless the Lord and honour the Lord through it. I would like also to acknowledge Melissa Lilley for her hard work (e.g., artwork and table decorations and so on).

The AEF National Convention Ladies Meeting, by Jacqueline Eades  
(Chairperson, AEF Ladies National Council, 2016)

There were so many women at the 2016 AEF Convention. Our leaders have provided such great encouragement to the women. The women have played a very strong part and provided support for the men at the convention. God has blessed us in so many special ways in the many different roles we have all played in our conventions. The business and elections would be over and done, then we had a blessing, singing testimonies and reading and listening to God’s precious word. Maxine Lawrence did a wonderful job and every Convention has been such a blessing.

The ladies ministries have been a great part of AEF’s national programs and it was very special to have so many of our older ladies there with us. Some of the wives that attended were from the foundational membership and to have them there was God’s faithfulness to us.

The group was blessed to have all the ladies with us. Some of the ladies had lost loved ones during the year, so it was a special time to be alongside them. They included women from WA, Queensland, Victoria, NT, NSW and, of course, SA. I interviewed the wives of the foundation leaders and it was a special time, it was a blessing, as they told everyone of their marriage, Bible college, ministries and missionary work.

Those who were interviewed were Margaret Jacobs, Shirley Humphries and Frances Graham. Afterwards, there was a time of laughter and joy because these ladies stood alongside their husbands to have their vision fulfilled. Praise God for their testimony. Our older women at the meeting were an encouragement to us all. We give God the glory for all that has been done, we wait patiently to the future and are so thankful that women throughout Australia can come and join us in a special blessing at our AEF National Convention.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)[1]

Rose Cox’s Message: Can God Be Trusted?

Lamentations 3:22–23:

Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.  
23 They are new every morning;  
Great is Your faithfulness. [6]
Our theme for this ladies’ meeting is the faithfulness of God. In considering the topic, I want to pose a question. Can God be trusted?

Simply put, ‘Yes, He can’.

I want to start by talking about, and reminding us, of who God is. First, I am listing some of the attributes of God or God’s character. We know that faithfulness is one of them. I don’t know about you, but I think that, in this present age, there is a tendency to forget about Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, the great ‘I am’. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of the Bible.

**God Is Not Like Us**

**God is spirit.** For we are told, in John 4:24, ‘We must worship Him in spirit and in truth’. [6] He doesn’t have a body like us and, because of this, He is not subject to the same stresses, needs and threats. He isn’t subject to anyone. There is no-one above Him, nor is He accountable to anyone. If you have a job, you are accountable to your boss, as is husband to wife, wife to husband, and children to parents. God is not accountable to anyone.

**God doesn’t change.** Malachi 3:6 says, ‘I am the Lord, I do not change’. What God was in eternity past, remains the same now and into the future. He remains merciful, kind, tender, loving, just. Not like us—we change. Who reading this has changed? Wrinkles? Body shape? Moods? Sickness? For us, it depends on how our day is going.

**God is creator.** Job 38:4, explains that God speaks to Job telling how He is the omnipotent, or all-powerful, creator.[6] We are told how God, the master designer, engineer and builder, created the heavens and the earth. Job is reminded of who God is—the one who determined the measurements of His creation, who tells the wave it can come this far and no further, who hangs this world in space.

When you look up at the night sky, you can say with the sweet Psalmist, Psalm 19:1, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork’. [6] God’s power extends, not just to creation but in determining what will be and that God is all knowing.

*Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things, that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’… Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. My counsel shall stand and I will do all My*
pleasure… Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it’. (Isaiah 46:9–11).[6]

God is eternal. He is not restricted by time. He has no beginning, no end. Isaiah 43:13: ‘Before the day was, I am’. Note the structure—was, past tense; I am, present tense. He doesn’t change.

God is Holy. Because of this, He is absolute purity, not touched by sin. ‘God is light and in Him is no darkness at all’. 1 John 1:5. God always does what is right. Because of this we can say, ‘Yes, God is faithful’.

Creation Speaks of His Faithfulness

Genesis 1 speaks of God creating. Genesis 1:16 says: ‘God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night’. This remains so, for as long as time, as we know it. This has been so and it will be so until God says, ‘Time is finished’.

Also, we see God’s faithfulness in the seasons. Genesis 8:22 says, ‘While the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer and day and night shall not cease’.

God also said to Noah He would not flood the earth again, in Genesis 9:11. As a witness to this covenant, or promise, God set the rainbow in the clouds. Yes, we have floods all over the world. But not one that has covered the whole earth.

Scripture Speaks of God’s Faithfulness to Many People

Adam—God told Adam, ‘You shall surely die if you eat of the tree’.

Adam disobeyed and death entered the world. God was being faithful to His word. After Adam had sinned, God went after him in the garden in order to restore fellowship. God was still faithful to man.

Abraham—He knew God’s faithfulness. God provided him a son in his old age. He provided a sacrificial offering instead of Isaac. God promised, back in Genesis, someone who would crush the serpent’s head. It was through Abraham’s descendants that Jesus came.

Joshua—He testified about God. Joshua 23:14, ‘You know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed’.

Simeon and Anna—in the temple, they knew the scriptures and believed them. They were waiting to see the promised Christ and they did.[6]
**Paul**—In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul says, ‘I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day’. [6]

**People Throughout History Speak of God’s Faithfulness**

**Polycarp**—In the second century AD, Polycarp served the Lord for 80-plus years and then was martyred because he wouldn’t renounce Christ. [7] He trusted in God and knew that, even in death, God remained faithful. There are many more we have heard of down through history, and even today, who have faced martyrdom. [7]

**Israel**—The fact the nation still exists, this tiny little nation. Throughout history, nations have risen against it. Tried to obliterate it. But God has promised, in Jeremiah 31:35–37:

> Thus, says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day. The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night. Who disturbs the sea, and its waves’ roar (The Lord of hosts is His name): If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever. Thus, says the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord. [6]

**Saints**—in glory. There are those we know who have gone home to glory and if they were still here they would testify of God’s faithfulness.

**Saints**—on earth. The majority of our ladies at the 2016 Convention could stand and say, ‘Yes, God is faithful’.

I know there are times for each of us when God’s faithfulness has appeared dim. In times of trial, grief over lost loved ones, rebellious children, unfaithful spouses, sickness and ageing. Even witnessing the chaos the world is in. So we question and doubt God.

Job was one who knew trials. If you know his story, he lost all he had—family, wealth, health. Even his wife urged him to curse God and die. But, what did Job say? ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him’, Job 13:15. [6]

Job also said, in the midst of his trials, ‘Look, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him. But He knows the way that I take’, Job 23:8–10. [6]

Job knew God’s faithfulness to Him.

Has life had trials for you? Listen to what Job says at the end of his suffering, ‘When he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold’, Job 23:10. [6]
Job knew God’s hand in all things. God was at work. It is the same for you and all who have faith in Almighty God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of the Bible. The one true God. Like Job you ‘shall come forth as gold’.

A warning to those who are messing around with God—those who worship God with their mouths but their hearts are far from Him. God is not to be mocked. To them that have heard the gospel time and time again, but continue to reject it. God is faithful to you. Judgement, however, is coming. God is true to himself, He cannot acquit the guilty. You will face judgement. Your only hope is to flee to the Lord Jesus. Repent and confess your sin before Almighty God, put your faith and trust in Jesus.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’, 1 John 1:9.[6]

Ladies, what a mighty God we serve. God is faithful.

Honouring Youth and Children’s Ministry

Pastor Jarred Dimer’s Testimony

I grew up in Kalgoorlie and Carnarvon in a Christian home and I am Wongi from the Goldfields. My people go right through to the central desert. At 15, I was in the Zoe Band with Pastor Denzil Humphries and his team. We went over to the eastern states and that was an experience I will never forget. It was when I got back home that I fell into the ways of the world - drugs and alcohol.

In my teenage years, I drifted away from the Church and rebelled. By the time I turned 21 years old, I was the father of two children. I took up my responsibilities for nearly 10 years, but my life was full of drugs and alcohol. My relationship broke up. I was alone and I turned even more to alcohol and drugs and half my family left me. I began working in the mines, with a drug and alcohol problem. Eventually, I was laid off work and was told to get some help as I was an alcoholic. It was then that I hit rock bottom and thought about suicide. It made me stop and look at my life. In 2002, I was invited by my parents to come to the Easter Convention in Perth. It was on my thirtieth birthday and, although I had other plans, I went to the service that day and the Lord spoke to me. I came home and I got on my knees and asked the Lord into my heart. Then I went back to church later that night, walked up to the front and made a public confession. The first week as a Christian was very challenging. The devil worked through my friends and those closest to me, trying to lead me astray. The more I prayed and the more I read God’s word, the stronger I became. It was when my uncle committed suicide that things really changed—it was
a real turning point in my life. I decided to never look back from being a Christian. In 2003, I signed up at the AEF Bible College. I graduated in 2005. I was looking for where the Lord was going to lead me. I worked on a construction site in Perth for nearly two years because I was a welder by trade. I then went into prison work. My main aim was to get alongside young people in the juvenile centres and help them.

At the same time, I had been working for the Bellevue People’s Church for a couple of years. That was a learning period. That was where I learnt how to preach and song-lead. I then moved to a church in Balga and was there for about three years. By then, I felt strong enough to come back home to the Goldfields of Kalgoorlie and help my father in the church that he was pastoring. Within six months of me returning, he passed away. I found myself seeking the Lord to where he would want me. I am still in Kalgoorlie now, working for Boulder Baptist Church.

Back in 2007, an important thing happened. As I mentioned, I had started working in the prisons as an Aboriginal visitor. I am still working in the prisons today, going on to 10 years. I work with some of the worst criminals in WA. What started me working in the prisons was that a lot of my friends were there. Lots of people who were close to me in my younger days were all in jail and I wanted to help them. Being a Christian, I am going into the jail, letting my light shine and my testimony do the talking.

I have also been taking a lot of funerals around the Goldfields. It is just the beginning of April and I have conducted six funerals in Kalgoorlie already this year. Three funerals were due to suicide—and that is only in the first three months of this year. There have been a lot of funerals since I moved back to the Goldfields. It is a huge load doing lots of funeral services. Many of the funeral services are my family—my aunties, cousins, brothers. I even took my dad’s funeral.

In looking back over my life, I must say, God is good and He is always with me. He has never left me or forsaken me.

Growing up, I always had connections with the AEF, particularly with the Port Augusta conventions. The AEF made me realise how important it is for Aboriginal men to stand up in the church. Not only to stand up in the church, but to lead the church to the best of our abilities and to be among our people.

**Pastor Jarred Dimer’s Message: Occupy Till I Come**

Noah occupied himself until the Lord came by building the ark. He had a testimony that pleased God and he walked with God. This can be seen in Genesis 6: 8–13:

*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh*
is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.[1]

We also see how Noah occupied himself in Hebrews 11:7:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.[1] $^{[1]}

Noah’s life was about grace in the eyes of God. He walked with God. Noah lived 120 years, a long life by today’s standards. He tried warning the people about the flood but they did not listen. They mocked him and made fun of him, but that did not stop him telling the people about the flood. The world was full of violence and corruption at the time. No-one wanted to hear the message he was saying. That did not stop him from telling the people about the flood that was going to happen to the earth.

It was all by faith that Noah acted and occupied himself until the flood came. Because of Noah, the people were warned about the future.

Enoch also walked with God. We see this in Genesis 5:22–24:

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.[1] $^{[1]}

We see this, too, in Hebrews 11:5:

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.[1] $^{[1]}

By faith, Enoch was translated and he did not see death. He also had a testimony that pleased God. When you are walking with the Lord through the Holy Spirit, He leads you and guides you. His Spirit helps you tell others about the Lord.

Our testimony and witness is important. You will find that the first thing the devil attacks about a Christian is our testimony. If the devil ruins your testimony, he has got you, because not many people are going to listen to you. Our testimony is important in the workplace, among family at home and among our friends. It is only through prayer and reading God’s word that we can have the strength to stand up as a Christian. We need to be strong.

Because Enoch had a testimony that pleased God, God took him and he did not know death. I can imagine Enoch’s people looking around everywhere, they could not find him. God said he should not see death. Enoch was the first man ever to be raptured, and this event is important
for today—because the rapture could happen anytime now. The only way we can be raptured is if we are living with the Lord and we have a testimony that is pleasing unto him. We can see this in Matthew 24:36–42:

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.[1]

The Lord will return very soon. The rapture is going to take place anytime. Enoch and Noah, they occupied themselves until God took them. We must do the very same today, occupy ourselves until the Lord takes us. And remember, there is nothing we can hide from the Lord. He knows our thoughts and what is in our hearts. We need to do what is right in the Lord’s eyes.

**Youth Ministry at the 2016 AEF Convention, by Ace Kim**

Two teams ministered to the young people at the AEF Convention. These were the OneHeart ministry team, led by Ace Kim and St Mark’s Anglican Church team, Camberwell, Melbourne, led by Ben Hewitt. Ace Kim, is a senior pastor at OneHeart Uniting Church in Sydney. He is originally from South Korea and has been in Australia for nearly 19 years. Ben Hewitt is from Northern Ireland and is a youth worker. He came to Australia in 2010 to get married, and stayed.

Mission trips have always been at the core of OneHeart’s vision to be a cross-cultural, missional, worshipping movement that seeks to break down barriers of all kinds and to spread the word of God. Our trip to Port Augusta, at the end of 2015, was no different. It was such a great opportunity for OneHeart to serve AEF.

In partnership with St. Mark’s Anglican Church, OneHeart ran activities for children and young people at the AEF Testimonial Convention. These included community-based evangelistic opportunities. This brought numerous opportunities to engage with the locals and others in events such as sports competitions and music jam sessions.

**Ace Kim’s Testimony**

God led us day by day—whether we were leading the entire group in worship, or were providing the team and the young people with hospitality, or encouraging and engaging the entire group with activities or sports with our passion and our desire to serve for God’s kingdom.
Attending the AEF Convention at night also opened our eyes to the different ways God’s people can worship and praise His name. Although we knew many of the worship songs, we experienced a fresh expression of worship. We could feel a great passion and stirring in the place in which we were worshipping. It was powerful.

All in all, the entire experience of going to Port Augusta for the AEF Convention, whether it was worshipping and having a fellowship with the Indigenous young people, or having deeper fellowship with fellow mission team members, or just seeing the natural beauty that Port Augusta and its people had to offer, has created a genuine connection between different groups. It has also put us on the path of becoming stronger and more faithful servants of God.

Children’s Ministry team at the 2016 AEF Convention. *Photograph Andrew McDonough’s Collection.*

**Children’s Ministry at the 2016 AEF Convention,**
**by Andrew McDonough**

Andrew McDonough is a Baptist Pastor and the creator of the popular Lost Sheep Bible. He has two spiritual gifts—he can draw a yellow sheep and tell stories.

**Andrew McDonough’s Testimony**

Thanks for asking me to run the kid’s program. The team worked together well. Everyone was on the front foot, positive and caring. We had 27 people in total, including 12 accredited volunteers, seven supervised volunteers and four student volunteers. There were 30–40 kids attending each day. The mornings felt relaxed and fun, the kids were great and all joined in with the activities. They seemed to enjoy everything and I sensed they were learning. The venue
worked well. Thanks for inviting me to be part of the convention. What a huge privilege—plenty of fun. Praise God.

Honouring Hospitality Ministry

Over the years, Margaret Jacobs and Maxine Knapp have organised catering for the AEF. Here are their stories, one from the 1970s and one from the 2016 Convention.

Margaret Jacobs’ Hospitality Ministry Story

It could get to 46° C in the AEF Convention kitchen in Port Augusta. The AEF was established in 1970, after much prayer and deliberation between the eastern and western states Indigenous Christian leaders of Australia. My husband, The Reverend Cedric Jacobs, was one of the founding members.

Each year, right after Christmas, we would pack, load our children into our car and drive across the Nullarbor to the hot, dusty town of Port Augusta. Then on to Adelaide, to pick up a week’s worth of food supplies to feed the many other Indigenous folks who would also travel many kilometers to attend the Convention.

Tents and caravans would cover the oval of the mission, just on the outskirts of the town. It was a great time of fellowship and ministry. The kitchen was a focal point of the convention as hundreds of people needed feeding three times a day. One particular day, I was cooking several legs of lamb for the evening meal. The wood fired ovens were getting too hot and the meat on the top shelves started turning. Opening the oven doors, I realised that the trays of meat on the top shelves needed to be moved to the bottom shelves and the meat on the bottom shelves moved to the top. Each tray held four legs of lamb. I lifted one of the top shelf trays and accidentally tipped the tray towards me. The boiling fat spilt down my legs and ran on to the floor. The fat was burning both my legs from the knees down and over my feet. I dropped the tray to the floor and, placing my hands on my legs, I cried out to the Lord to have mercy on me and touch me with His healing power. The burning immediately stopped. Praise the Lord, not a red mark or blister developed and I was able to clean up the mess and get the meat back inside the oven. Just one story of the incredible enabling and miracle-working wonders of Jesus during my 18 years of feeding the thousands at Port Augusta.

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78 Jacobs, M. 2016, ‘Cooking for the AEF’ in the Bush Church Aid (BCA) Still Waters Magazine, Issue 11. The editors are grateful to BCA for permission to reprint sections of this magazine here. We encourage you to read the magazine in full. BCA has also given permission for this story to be used with associated activities and publicity of this book.
Dr Maxine Knapp’s Hospitality Ministry Story

My contact with the leaders who pioneered the work of AEF in WA took place in the mid 1960s. I followed this movement with great interest. In 1974, I became a member, along with my husband Pastor Albert Knapp. We worked under the auspice of the AEF for two years in Melbourne and 11 years with the AEF Bible College, of which Albert was the founding Principal. We are still active members of the fellowship.

The 2016 Convention was special. The testimonial dinner to honour our founding leaders and the meetings and program to celebrate over 45 years of ministry were most successful and informative. The idea to provide prepared meals available for purchase created further opportunities for fellowship, especially for members to meet with founding members of AEF. On a daily basis, the catering team prepared about 400 meals, comprising hot cooked meals, meat and salad platters, salad rolls and sandwiches, sweets and cold drinks for sale. I thank my daughter Joy for all the time and effort she put into the catering. A big thank you to everyone who helped in the kitchen.

79 Knapp, M. 2016, ‘An interview with Maxine Knapp’ in the Bush Church Aid (BCA) Still Waters Magazine, Issue 11. The editors are grateful to BCA for permission to reprint sections of this magazine here. We encourage you to read the magazine in full. BCA has also given permission for this story to be used with associated activities and publicity of this book.
Chapter 4: Honouring God Through Personal Reflections and Sermons

The reflections in this section remind us that every Christian has a personal story to share about their relationship with God through Jesus and about their ministry. Through words and art, these stories enable us to examine different individuals’ lives and history. The narrations allow us to observe the movement of AEF across Australia. We remember how Aboriginal Christian leaders were taking the gospel to people in the cities, to rural and very remote areas. We honour each person’s contribution and honesty and thank everyone for sharing their lived experience, joys and struggles with us. These testimonials lead on to examples of preaching about becoming a Christian, knowing Salvation and understanding the church.

Reverend Ray Minniecon’s Testimony

The AEF conventions are important because they are a place where Indigenous people are encouraged to develop their leadership skills and gather to have fellowship. Non-Indigenous people are valued and welcomed to the conventions to share as speakers and to support the fellowship. The conventions give us an opportunity to come together to connect, pray, encourage one another and build relationships. We hear testimonies of what God is doing in peoples’ communities, their victories and how they are overcoming trials and temptations.

I am blessed to be a part of the AEF and to see what God is doing among our people.

My wife Sharon and I have been in ministry for 41 years. I am a third-generation Aboriginal Christian, starting with my grandmother, then to my father and then to me. I am from the Kabi Kabi people on my father’s side and the Goreng Goreng people on my mother’s side, from South East Queensland. My grandfather on my dad’s side was forcibly removed from Ambrym Island in Vanuatu and brought to Queensland as part of the slave era. Over 60,000 Pacific Island people were brought to Queensland as slaves for the sugar farms.

I lived my teenage years under the Queensland Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act of 1939. That legislation forced us to live on a mission and placed restrictions on movement. The government could take our children or our parents away from us. They took our wages.
They placed curfews on us. We needed their permission to marry. My eldest sister had to get permission to get married.

Let us remember that 2017 is the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 Commonwealth Constitutional referendum that gave the federal government responsibility for our issues. So, it was not that long ago that these things were happening to me and my people. I was brought up under that regime until my teenage years.

Independent missionaries came and brought the Christian message to us. Our people decided that the Christian message was for them. They chose that message and we are still passing it on.

My wife and I felt the call of our creator to enter into the ministry in the mid 1970s. We left our home, family and work in Gladstone and travelled to Katoomba where we began our theological studies at the Assemblies of God’s Commonwealth Bible College.

We finished our studies at a time when no white church would employ an Aboriginal pastor. We knew that. The systems and the churches back then were very racist. For example, there used to be designated seats for Aboriginal people. My father and my grandfather did not get to preach in white churches, even though they were outstanding preachers. My people still do not get a proper voice in the Church because the Church systems remain racist towards Aboriginal people.

After I graduated, I was introduced to the AEF. I went to Bimbadeen at Cootamundra and met two very impressive Aboriginal leaders, Pastor David Kirk and Pastor Ossie Cruse. These two men welcomed me into the AEF with open arms. The Lord led us to them and we found our place where we could minister in freedom to our people. We started our ministry as youth leaders in the little historic church at La Perouse. We were then called to an AEF gathering in Katanning, WA. We spent 10 years in WA, where I pastored three Aboriginal churches and helped to establish other AEF churches. I also began my Bachelor of Arts in Theology Studies through the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia and graduated from Murdoch University with a Bachelor of Arts in Theology.

Sharon and I have been with the AEF movement for about 40 years. I feel it is the only place where I will be accepted as an Aboriginal minister of the gospel and be given the freedom to practice being an Aboriginal minister among our own people. The AEF has given me a specific Minister of Religion licence to do this. I must say I have had the incredible honour and privilege to sit at the feet of some of the greatest Aboriginal Christian leaders in Australia. They taught me more about Jesus and His word and reliance on the spirit of God than most Australian Christians and churches. I feel comfortable being an AEF Pastor because the AEF is a fellowship and not a denomination. This concept comes from the genius of our AEF elders. Being a fellowship means we can work across Australia’s denominational landscape. It is amazing what God has done through the fellowship. God has shown us how Christ can build His kingdom
among the most marginalised and despised in our country. The Lord has used this community of believers, the AEF, to inspire me to continue to follow Jesus.

I am also the National Secretary of the AEF. I work mostly behind the scenes at the convention, to ensure everything runs well. At the 2016 AEF Convention, a local dance group called ‘Dusty Feet’ danced a story about the Stolen Generations. After the dance, The Reverend Cedric Jacobs spoke. He is a founding member of the AEF and a survivor of the Stolen Generations. After this dance and speech, I helped to create a ceremony during the evening service, to acknowledge all Stolen Generation survivors. We did this because we wanted to recognise all who were stolen and the pain that they have experienced. Many families had very bitter and traumatic experiences because of the terrible government policies. We wanted to honour those who survived being stolen and, in our own community, commit ourselves to working with those survivors to get their lives back on track. We also wanted to acknowledge and honour our returned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers, warriors and veterans. Pastor Albert Knapp and I held a small ceremony during our evening service to honour them all.

Aboriginal soldiers have participated in every overseas conflict in which Australia has been involved. We wanted to remember their involvement and show respect to those serving this country in the Australian Defence Force uniform and under the flag. We also wanted to acknowledge our frontier warriors who fought to defend this country with the truth. We will continue to fight against ignorance and apathy in our land, especially within the Australian church, to ensure that the sins this country has committed against Australia’s First Peoples will one day be recognised by our invaders and oppressors and that they will choose to repent of their sins and work with us for a truly reconciled Australia, based on His word, His death and His resurrection. Only Jesus can bring about true reconciliation.

At the gathering, I also read a passage of scripture from the Kriol Baibul. It was Genesis 1:1–30. I did this to encourage our people to speak in their own language, so we would not lose the language of our ancestors. There were many different Aboriginal language speakers at the gathering.
Kriol Baibul: Jenasis 1

Jenasis
Ola Basdamwan Stori
God bin meigim ebrijing

Orait, longtaim wen God bin stat meigimbat ebrijing, nomo enijing bin jidan. Imbin jis eniwei, nomo garram enijing. Oni strongbala woda bin goran goran ebrivei, en imbin brabli dakhala, en det spirit blanga God bin mubabat ontop langa det woda.

Brom deya God bin tok, ‘Lait!’ En streidawei det lait bin kamat. En wen God bin luk det lait bin gudwan, imbin gudbinji.

Brom deya God bin kadimat det lait brom det dakhala, en imbin gulum det lait Deitaim, en imbin gulum det dakhala Naitaim.

Brom deya naitaim bin gowei, en wen imbin ailibala, imbin det sekan dei na.

Brom deya God bin tok, ‘Larram samting jidan blanga kadimat det woda en meigim det woda jidan miselpmiselp.’ En imbin hepin lagijat na, dumaji God bin meigim det ting, en det ting bin kadimat det woda langa bodam brom det woda langa top, 8en God bin gulum det ting Skai.

Brom deya naitaim bin gowei, en wen imbin ailibala, imbin det namba 3 dei na.

Brom deya God bin tok, ‘Larram det woda langa bodam hipimap miselp langa wan pleis blanga meigim draiwan kamat.’ En imbin hepin lagijat na, en God bin gulum det draiwan pat Graun, en imbin gulum det woda weya bin hipimap miselp langa wan pleis Solwoda. En wen God bin luk ebrijing bin gudwan, imbin gudbinji.

Brom deya God bin tok, ‘Larram det graun growimapolkain tri en gras en purdiflawa, sambalagarram sid daga en sambala garram frut daga.’ En imbin hepin lagijat na, en det graun bin growimapolkain tri en gras en purdiflawa. En wen God bin luk ebrijing bin gudwan, imbin gudbinji.

Brom deya naitaim bin gowei, en wen imbin ailibala, imbin det namba 4 dei na.

Brom deya God bin tok, ‘Larram olkain lait kamat langa top blanga kadimat deitaimeitaim, en detlot lait garra shain blanga shoum wotaim ola difrinwan dei en ola difrinwan sisan en ola difrinwan serramonigarrastat, en detlot lait garra shaindan brom det skai blanga gibeilait oloba langa dijan wel.’ En imbin hepin lagijat na, en God bin meigim dubala bigwan lait. Imbin meigim san blanga deitaimeitaim, en imbin meigim mun blanga naitaim, en imbin meigim bigismob sta du, en imbin pudum ol detlot lait langa skai blanga shaindan oloba langa dijan wel, en imbin pudum olabatdeya blanga jidan deitaimeitaim en naitaim en blanga kadimat det lait brom det dakhala. En wen imbin luk ebrijing bin gudwan, imbin gudbinji.
Sharon Minniecon’s Testimony

I was born in 1959, in Ayr in North Queensland. My dad is from Ugar Island, Torres Strait. My mother’s side is from Tanna Island, Vanuatu. I come from a family of 13, seven girls and six boys. My family grew up in Ayr and a lot of families went to the local Assemblies of God Church. For many years, dad and mum pastored a church in Babinda, North Queensland. I was 15 years old when I committed my life to Jesus. I am fifth-generation Christian, my daughter is sixth-generation and my granddaughter is seventh-generation.

My experience of the Church is a mixture of feelings. I have good memories of fellowship with our community leadership. Then I remember the 1960s and the hurt and disappointment
because of the inequalities and the treatment of Indigenous Christians by the non-Indigenous church leaders who had issues with recognising Indigenous leadership. This caused some of the Indigenous leaders to start their own churches, meeting in halls, schools and houses. I really admire our pastors and elders—even though they were pushed aside, they continued to share God's word and were faithful to God.

There has been little progress in the mainstream churches in supporting and developing Indigenous leadership across our nation. The experience of seeing our parents and our Indigenous elders not being treated fairly has shaped my commitment to Christ and to bringing about change.

When I was 17, I married a handsome man named Ray Minniecon. He had the call to go to Bible college at Katoomba, in the ancient Blue Mountains. After finishing Bible college, in 1980, we joined the AEF.

We are committed to ensuring our Indigenous leaders have the same opportunities as others. Ray and I have had many meetings with mainstream Christian churches and services, aiming to create opportunities towards empowering our Indigenous people. Indigenous Christians can be supported, trained and equipped to take their place in leadership in their communities and other places. They can go out into the world to encourage and give the good news of Jesus.

What an amazing journey we have had—40 years working for Jesus and being blessed with three children and two grandchildren. We have pastored six churches in WA: Katanning, Marribank and Tambellup and three in NSW: La Perouse, Redfern and Glebe. We are celebrating 10 years as foundation members of Guwara, an Indigenous private school. We are also celebrating the first Indigenous masters program in Aboriginal Theology. We have lobbied Anglican leaders to establish three Indigenous churches in the Sydney region and for the churches to be fully supported.

Dispossession, government policies and injustices have left our communities devastated and traumatised. This has led us to work with the Stolen Generations towards their journey of healing.

We have had the privilege to travel to New Zealand, the US, Hawaii, Sweden, The Philippines, Israel, Canada, Switzerland and France, sharing the good news of Jesus and encouraging our Indigenous leaders, brothers and sisters around the world.
Maxine Knapp: We graduated from the UAM Bible Training Institute in 1968. In February 1969 we married and, in May 1969, Albert and I began our missionary service with the Australian Aborigines Evangelical Mission (AAEM). We had applied to go to Cundeelee Mission, situated 160 km east of Kalgoorlie, but we were directed to Esperance to work in the mission hostels. The mission's aim was to find employment for young men on the farms and other forms of employment in the Esperance region. When we first arrived in Esperance, there were 49 young men living in the town hostel and all were employed. Albert was appointed pastor of hostel ministries and conducted the Sunday morning and evening church services. These services were compulsory for both staff and young men to attend. Folk from in the town were invited and many came. We also managed a hostel at Condingup, 70 km east of Esperance. We had 18 young men living in the hostel. During the week, they worked on the farms in the area and at the weekend they stayed in Esperance.

Another mission organisation working in Esperance among Aboriginal people was the Church of Christ. The church worked with young working women and teenage girls who attended high school. In 1958, the mission established Wongutha Training Farm to train Aboriginal teenage boys in agriculture to increase their job opportunities. The mission also started a training program for teenage girls and, later, established the evangelistic outreach wing of Wongutha. The Kurrawang Mission, operated by the Brethren Church, established a holiday home in Esperance for children and staff from the Goldfields area.

There was a good working relationship and fellowship with churches and great community spirit in the town. Many missionaries, who had served for years in the Goldfields region of WA, retired to Esperance to live. Yes, Esperance was indeed a good place to begin our missionary work.

Albert Knapp: My blessed memories of Port Augusta go way back to 1973. My wife Maxine and I and our two children were living and working with the AAEM in Esperance. After months of thinking and praying about attending the AEF convention in Port Augusta, the Lord laid on my heart a powerful desire to go to the 1973–1974 AEF Convention in Port Augusta. With the blessing of my wife, Maxine, I took a few belongings and went to catch the train from Esperance to Norseman only to find I had missed it. A staff member of our hostel drove me in his vehicle to Gibson, a small country town 20 km east of Esperance. I waited almost two hours
in Gibson for the train to arrive from Esperance, only to find out from the station master that
the train line had buckled because of the intense heat.

Not to be deterred, I got on the road to thumb a lift to Norseman, another 234 km east of
Gibson. I set out on an adventure that would take me almost halfway across Australia. The first
car to come by was really flash. I put out my arm to see if the driver would stop. But he drove
straight on. I waited in the heat for the next car to arrive. Sure enough, another car came by, an
old bomb that appeared almost ready for the scrap heap. A scruffy, unshaven man sat behind
the wheel. Out went my arm and the old car came to a halt. ‘Where are you going?’ he called
out through an open window.

‘Norseman’, I replied.

‘Hop in’, he said.

I offered a prayer to God, Port Augusta here I come. I arrived in Norseman in time to catch the
Greyhound bus to Port Augusta.

I didn’t sleep too well on the bus that night, but the stopovers at the different service stations
on the Nullarbor were most welcome. Finally, I arrived in Port Augusta. I can’t remember who
I stayed with, but one thing I do remember to this very day is the warm fellowship of everyone
I came in contact with. The blessings of the testimonies and the singing of the choir from our
brothers and sisters from central Australia will be with me until the day I die. The preaching of
God’s word and the early morning and evening prayer meetings will forever be etched in my
memory. The wonderful example set by the men and women in the AEF will always serve as a
lasting legacy in my memory. I am just so grateful to those men and women in the AEF. Some
of the founding leaders of those early days are still with us and others have gone home to glory.
These men and women mean more to me in what they had accomplished than gold. As long
as I live, I will never forget them.

At the conclusion of the week-long AEF Convention, I was privileged to attend a series of lec-
tures at Flinders University, organised by the AEF and sponsored by World Vision. The keynote
speaker was Bishop Festo Kivengere from Uganda, Africa. Bishop Festo was a quietly spoken
man whose messages touched my heart. I had a life-changing experience in which I was never
to be the same again.

Maxine: When Albert arrived back from Port Augusta, we, the staff in the hostel, knew that
something wonderful had happened in his life. He was so happy and just beaming for days. He
told us how his heart was touched by what he had seen and experienced at the Port Augusta
Convention and the meetings at Flinders University. I knew something special was taking place
in Albert’s life and I wanted to be a part of it. In a quiet moment together I said, ‘Albert, I want
what you got.’
We had prayer together. It was a prayer of commitment, to obey and wholeheartedly serve God. Albert was motivated by what he had witnessed at the convention, and shared with the staff from our mission and missionaries from the other denominational bodies, the sense of urgency he had to bring together the mission churches for Sunday services. We both felt that bringing our Aboriginal people together for fellowship would create a more realistic way of working together with missionaries to build up the body of Christ among our Aboriginal people. Albert believed a national fellowship like the AEF would be a good group to be associated with.

We had the cooperation and blessing of the missionaries at the AAEM hostel; however, the other mission bodies were hesitant to join. We accepted that, but Albert followed his heart and went ahead and started Sunday services. We decided we would work as an independent church under the auspices of the Esperance Aboriginal Christian Fellowship. It wasn’t long before the first venue we used was overcrowded with people, including the missionaries from the hostels who wanted to be a part of our vision. We graciously accepted an offer to use a large hall at Fairhaven. For the next four-and-a-half years we had a full scale church program.

We were excited and looked forward to what God had in store for us as a Church. God worked among us in a wonderful way. One Aboriginal lady opened her home on a weekly basis for an afternoon children’s club, with the support of two young ladies from the Fairhaven hostel. Her small lounge was full and overflowing with children for quite a few years. Prayer meetings were held once a week during the evenings in different homes and families were eager to have the meetings in their homes. Youth ministry started and young and old Christian men and women and missionaries were keen to participate in the church services and the many other programs in the church. Some of the young women were excellent pianists and the young men were skilled at playing guitars. It was like a mini revival taking place in the community. It was a great experience to see the different missions working together and many non-Aboriginal people joined our church fellowship. We were still working full-time in the AAEM hostel. Mid 1977, we resigned and found accommodation in Esperance where we continued the pastoral ministry in the community. It was a blessing to work with missionaries from the various denominational bodies, local churches and our Aboriginal Christians from Esperance.

In 1975, for the first time, we went as a family to the AEF Convention in Port Augusta. Like Albert, I was thrilled by what I witnessed there. Camping at the Brethren Mission oval with other campers from many parts of Australia was an amazing experience. Enjoying early cups of tea around our portable gas burner with new and old friends was great. It thrilled my soul, sitting on the oval, listening to the preaching and the singing and the testimonies of other Christians. It was always my desire and passion to work among Aboriginal people. To see Aboriginal leaders leading upfront and a huge crowd of people drawn from many places throughout Australia to come together to praise God was wonderful. It was a movement I wanted to be a part of. We became members in 1974 and remain members to this day.

Finally, we were able to fulfil the desire of our hearts to work full-time with the AEF. We said our goodbyes to our church family after 10 years of ministry in Esperance and, in December
1978, left to attend the Port Augusta convention. At the completion of the convention we embarked on the next stage of our missionary journey—to Melbourne, Victoria, to work under auspice of the AEF.

Albert: Looking back through the years, how we thank God for the work that the AEF pioneers put into making the organisation an Australia-wide ministry. In over 200 years, no other Christian organisation has achieved this. One of the most outstanding characteristics of our early Christian leaders in the AEF was their love for their own Aboriginal people. They identified themselves with the suffering, the broken and the outcast in society. Our early leaders showed great empathy for those who were lost and without hope. They wept, ate and identified with those whom they sought to win to Christ and they were concerned for the lost. Sadly, we witness so little of this today.

Our early leaders were so concerned for others that they formed churches and Bible training institutions where people could go to receive teaching so they could be established in their own Christian growth. After graduating from Bible institutes they would be better equipped to serve the Lord. Our early Christian leaders saw that the need was great and, under the hand of their God, the Port Augusta Convention began as a place where people could gather to enrich their own spiritual lives.

Our early Christian leaders knew what sacrifice meant—they laid their lives on God’s altar and remained there. They were resolute in aim and goal and remained so until their race was won. A number have now gone to glory, a few still remain as warriors forever. Fighting men and women in God’s triumphant army, they’re gone but they still speak from their graves. Our cry is, God give us more Moses, Nehemiahs, Daniels and Pauls who will call men and women, girls and boys to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. God is still looking for men and women who will place their lives on His altar. It will be challenging and difficult, but worth it in eternity. When God asks us for the harvest we will be able to say, similar to John 17:24, ‘Lord, these are those “whom thou hast given me”’. [1]. He is able to do new work in the lives of His followers. He can and He will. All that our God requires of us is our consent and cooperation. I have been privileged to have been able to play a small part in this mighty ministry.

Maxine: It was a great experience to attend the 2016 AEF Convention and to celebrate AEF’s years of ministry, from 1970 to 2015. It was also my privilege to write a brief history of the AEF. I discovered many inspirational and challenging stories in my journey and I gave one example that stood out for me. Most of the leaders of the AEF were still in their teenage years, some in their early twenties when they became Christians. Further, the young men became actively involved in Christian service from the point of their conversion. One of the men, Pastor Lyle Browning, was 10 years of age when he became a Christian. Those who have passed on faithfully served the Lord until their home call. The founding leaders and their wives of the AEF have left us a precious heritage.

Pastor Ronnie Williams said, ‘Our leaders had to struggle to find their place in the Christian world and they fought a good fight. They kept the faith’.
Many had finished their course, but they gave their all so that the AEF might stand through history and show what God brought into being. The AEF has enriched the church and has enriched our nation of Australia.

Katrina Tjitayi’s Testimony

It was a long time ago that the AEF started. It was really good. People from all over the country would come to Port Augusta and hear good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. They changed their lives and they would sing praises and worship the Lord. We know some preachers are not with us anymore. They are now in heaven with the Lord, including our very own Kinyin McKenzie, ngaltutjara! The preachers travelled to lots of places sharing the good news. Some of those preachers are still with us now. They are getting old now—they’ve done their race (2 Timothy 4:7).[8] And now, our next generation has to take God’s good news to the world about the Lord Jesus Christ. God has a good place for our generation to go. We want to see the AEF ministry grow, like a strong tree planted by the living water (Jeremiah 17:8).[8] Palya.

I was born in country WA, in a place called Katanning. In the early 1970s there was a really good Christian influence among the Aboriginals. One such man was Uncle Ronnie (Pastor Ronnie Williams), Brother Ronnie, as everyone called him, and others had a large area that they covered and reached out to people everywhere.

Both my parents came from different missions and were influenced by missionaries. One was UAM I think, but I’m not sure of the others. There were always missionaries, someone telling them about Jesus.

We moved to a little country town called Brookton in the late 1960s. It was one of the first areas of WA to have an AEF convention. That was in 1970, when the men from the east coast and west coast came together in that little town. Our family was going to church in Brookton at this time with a missionary called Miss Mary Jones. I would have been around the age of six or seven. My dad was a layman in the church. He helped the missionaries to do church based work. I do remember travelling to towns with my family and other Aboriginal Christian leaders as my dad and others were conducting church services on reserves (today called Aboriginal communities). The neighbouring towns were Beverley and Quairading and we went over to Pingelly from Brookton. At that stage, I remember meeting Pastor Frank Johnson and Aunty Rose, a very close relative of my mother. That would have been in the late 1960s to 1971. That’s when we really learnt about the Lord and the commitment that the missionaries and Aboriginal Christian leaders had within the Church.

After we moved to Perth in 1971, my parents no longer went to church. But there were always people reaching out, inviting us to Sunday school. One of those people encouraging us was a minister by the name of David Cross and another person was Mr Bruce Smoker. David Cross we knew from the Brookton days as he worked with Miss Mary Jones in Brookton. Although we were encouraged to go to church and Sunday School and also youth groups, we never really went. We fell away from the influence of God.

My father’s sister was heavily involved in the church in Katanning and she always came around and encouraged us to follow the Lord when in the city. God always made sure he had people telling us about Him and that we knew He was there.

I never realised this until many, many years later and through many hard lessons in life. The Lord never took his hand off me in all that time.
In 1994 I travelled to Queensland with my dad’s sister, Cherry, and her husband Reg Yates. Reg was going to the Baptist Theological College of Queensland. At that stage, my life was a total mess. I was doing anything but seeking after the Lord. Even though my father wasn’t in a committed relationship with the Lord he knew that God’s way was a better road to travel.

We left Perth on Boxing Day 1994, with a trailer load of furniture and another nephew who had joined us. It took us about five days to reach Brisbane. Once there, Cherry and Reg got settled into the church they were working, the Dinmore Murri Baptist Church in Ipswich. Because I was living with them, I felt compelled to go to church. I was very observant of them—how they interacted with strangers and fellow Christians. On a personal level, it really touched me. I saw that they were different.

Between 26 December and 27 March, the Lord was challenging my heart and was really getting to the core of who I was—the core of my spiritual being. He was saying, ‘Every time you get into trouble, you always cry out for me to help you, I help you, but when you are doing okay, you turn your back on me. I’m not going to do that anymore. You need to make up your mind if you want me in your life’.

I didn’t understand until much later that I didn’t want Him, I just wanted my problems to be gone. It was not until 27 March, when I was sitting on the edge of my bed in Ipswich, QLD, at home on my own, that I poured out my heart to Him. I said to God, ‘I am sick of the way I am living. I know it’s wrong and I can’t do it on my own. I want you in my life.’

That’s when I became a ‘born again’ Christian. As a man, I was really broken. I regarded myself as a failure. I needed God to show me who I really was, a sinner who needed to be saved by His grace.

After my conversion I was asked about baptism. I didn’t quite know what it meant but knew Christians took it seriously. Myself and others were given counselling regarding baptism and we were soon baptised by Pastor Ben Bird in the church.

I was going to Kangaroo Point TAFE in Brisbane. I had re-entered the education system. I did minimal high school, I wasn’t really interested. I wanted to be a social worker, working with alcohol and substance abuse. I spent four years preparing myself for getting a social work degree. That was my plan, but it wasn’t God’s plan. After TAFE, I spent one year at Queensland University doing a social work degree, but God had other plans for me.

From the very beginning of my conversion, I was seeing the way my uncle and aunty were involved in the church, organising rallies and conventions, picking up bread and bringing it to the church and picking up people from men’s hostels with alcohol-based difficulties and intellectual disabilities. They were ‘full-on’. When I saw all this, I was so impressed. Yet they were raising a family. Their youngest was just born. They were so busy in the Lord’s service.
I sat down with my uncle and said, ‘I want to know more about the church and what God is doing. I want to get involved’.

So they said, ‘You need to just be faithful and consistent. Come to church to the prayer meetings and get involved with whatever is going on’.

I was in a really good environment. It was so encouraging. Then 18 months later, once they saw my consistency, a group of us were taught how to lead the worship service. Everything was new and exciting. It was the right place and it was the right time to be there. But that’s how God works if you are really keen for him. I was under the guidance and leadership of Pastor Ben and Mrs Kathy Bird for my first four years. I loved God and wanted to serve Him.

Around 1998, I got interested in wanting to understand the Bible at a deeper level. So I spoke to Pastor Ben and my uncle and aunty. They asked if I had ever considered Bible College. ‘Nah,’ I said, ‘That’s for pastors and learned people’.

They said, ‘It’s for every Christian’, so I said, ‘I would pray about it’.

What was the next step? I wanted to know more. They said, ‘You need to get involved in prayer meetings. You need to learn to pray with others. These things were new. You have unreal expectations that only super Christians do these things’.

I was in a really good environment. They just nurtured me, nurtured me and nurtured me and encouraged me and picked me up when I fell down. It was the best environment a young Christian could be in. It was time to stand up for God and what God was doing.

I got involved in leading services on Sunday nights and some Sunday mornings and with Sunday school—first as a helper, then as a teacher. They needed helpers with youth, so I said, ‘Count me in’.

That was a really good grounding.

I got involved with youth, picking them up and bringing them to the church and being the church contact within the community and with the families. We were dealing with a lot of people wrecked by alcohol and drugs—destructive lifestyles. But God had his people in the community, people who were standing up and being strong, and they had their extended family as well. Our area of contact was enormous. It opened up doors to numbers of people. Even though they didn’t go to church, they wanted their children to go to Sunday school, because they knew the value of it. I went to the caravan park with a six to eight seater bus and I was picking up children aged six to ten, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It was a really multicultural place. The parents wanted to know nothing of God for themselves, but they did want their children to know Him. It was very humbling, seeing the children dressed up in their Sunday best. It was so impressive what God was doing.
I was ready to go to Bible College. I prayed about it and I ended up going to the AEF Bimbadeen Bible College in Cootamundra, NSW, under the leadership of Rev Graham Paulson. I absolutely loved it at Bimbadeen. I felt God steamrolled my learning. There was no time to waste. That’s how I felt. God knew what he was doing. I trained there for three years in basic theology. I also went through another institution on the Sunshine Coast, to study evangelism and basic church planting with John Tanner, who was heavily involved in the Baptist scene in Queensland.

I met Raelene, a young Christian lady at an AEF National Convention in Ceduna, SA. We started communicating with each other and after a short romance in December 2000 we got married. Raelene was a Port Augusta girl. We spent our first six months at Bimbadeen as I was still studying. We ended up getting a call from the AEF Bible College in Perth, asking us to help out with administration work and also to be student carers. My wife had been at that college in 1998–99. We moved there with our daughter (my wife already had a daughter when we got married). One of our main jobs was to be student carers and to support them with their studies. That was another steep learning curve. It was our first role together in Christian leadership. We spent the best part of six years there. After a couple of years, I was asked to join the board. I was given an opportunity to lecture for three years on basic theology and public speaking.

During our time at the college we were involved with about 50 students. There was always something to do and we were involved in different forms of evangelism. We established a little church that was used for outreach and practical training for our students in the Armadale area. Our students led the service and some preached while others took Sunday school. Our congregation consisted of local families from around the area.

One thing I came away with from Bible College was this - and I say this to everyone who considers going to Bible College: You are going there to learn about books, but never forget that God is working on you. A lot of that is academic and a lot of it is personal work that God is doing in your own lives. People come to Bible College for all sorts of reasons. A lot of them think it’s about books and it is, but it’s also about that work God is doing on you at a spiritual level. That’s some of the difficult work God does, working on you spiritually and physically. My wife and I spent many hours with students who were wanting to throw in their studies and go home, disappointed with themselves and with other students.

When at the WA Bible College we had the opportunity to travel several times to the North West and South West of WA as well as parts of SA and NSW.

We really loved it there and our daughter had plenty of people to socialise with and who were a positive Christian influence.

If you feel the call of God upon you to go to Bible College, go and learn everything you can. But with that comes tremendous responsibility. God is not teaching you so you can go back to your church and do nothing. He is giving you this opportunity to learn so you can teach other people. With the students, the academic side is really important and that is why you are there. Never forget the words of Philippians 1:6 that God has begun a good work… that’s you![6]
In 2006, we felt God calling us to Ceduna in SA. There was a small group of Christians that needed some help and leadership. My wife and I both had to find work. We both became involved in different aspects of the community. However, our biggest role was church leadership and encouraging those who wanted to stand up for the Lord. We did spend some time with Rev Max Wright and his wife Naomi in shared ministry. We spent nearly four years there. It was a difficult time. It was extremely tough, being on your own. At times, I queried my motives for even going there. You have to continually believe in what God is doing, that you are in the Will and Word of God. I make it a habit of never going anywhere on a whim. I have to be called by God. Every now and then, when I really needed it, people would call to encourage me. Their contact always came at the right time. It reaffirmed why we were there and what we were doing.

We started to realise there was a group of people who didn’t want God in their lives but they wanted us in their lives. We reached out to them, inviting them to our home for a cup of tea. These were people who never went to church. We were sharing the gospel with them through deeds. We had a little home fellowship for a while. There were times when I had prepared the message and there was only my wife and I, but people always came. Sometimes it was people from out of town looking for somewhere to go. There was a lady and her three children from Tasmania who ended up spending three months with us. She eventually went back to Tasmania. Others were travelling through and, because we were so isolated, they ended up staying a few nights.

In 2010, we felt the calling of the Lord to go to the Adelaide Berean Community Church in Port Adelaide to help out Pastor Donald Hayward. We became involved and I pastored the church for a year.

While in SA my wife and I began working with the Mr and Mrs McWilliams, or Mr Mac as he’s fondly known. They had been involved in my wife’s upbringing at Umeewarra Mission, Port Augusta. He asked me if we wanted to do some outreach work in Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta. We both readily agreed.

To travel in the outback, you need a four-wheel drive, which God supplied. I was working at the time and my employers were very helpful, letting me have time off and I made it up to them in other ways. God was always there, opening up doors for ministry opportunities. I also became involved with Mr Mac at Umeewarra Ministries at a board level.

My wife and I with other like-minded Christians helped to organise Easter rallies and conventions in Ceduna, Coober Pedy and Port Augusta. We did a lot of work in Coober Pedy and with the Aboriginal communities that were further north. Mr Mac and I would travel there, sometimes for a week. We’d go and visit homes and go to Oodnadatta. We’d just teach and encourage people. We’d go out to communities and some stations, if they’d allow us. We would witness and encourage the Christians who loved the Lord. We would encourage those who had slid back and were part of the prodigal family. Non-Indigenous people would also
come and talk to us, which was very humbling, as many were in their later years. We clocked up many thousands of kilometres on our trips throughout South Australia.

In 2010, after we had been pastoring in the Adelaide Berean Community Church for over a year, we felt the call of the Lord to head back to Perth. Once we returned, we went to our local Aboriginal church, the one that we had been involved in before we left.

Within that first month back we were asked to come to the Balga Church to help their leadership group. Pastor Harley Hayward hadn’t had a break for a while and needed time off. We prayed about it and sought the Lord’s guidance and felt it was the right thing to do. In 2013 I officially took over the role of pastor of that church. Since then Raelene and I have been heavily involved in the work. There was a good, solid base to work from. Pastor Denzil Humphries had started the church 35 years earlier, as an outreach in that area.

The AEF have been holding meetings and conventions, yearly or bi-annually, for 30 or 40 years. Because of my experience in Brookton, and listening to other Christians, I made it my business to go to these meetings to find out what other groups were doing and to enjoy the fellowship of others. I’ve been attending since 1995, virtually every year. I think I’ve only missed one or two conventions. I actually met Raelene, my beautiful wife, at an AEF convention in Ceduna in 1997. Since my conversion I have made it my business to get involved with what was happening within every church I attended and an important part of that was the AEF.

From about 2002, Raelene and I have been helping to organise annual conventions in Perth and country areas. I became involved with the AEF at a local and national level in various forms from mid 2000 to early 2010. I worked at the national level as a secretary, board member and junior vice chair. I’ve helped organise conventions, youth conventions, men’s meetings, women’s meetings and I have been involved in church leadership. I haven’t had time to sit back and watch other people. It’s always been get in, get involved and watch people as they and I work and learn as you go. It was always a strong, steep learning curve—there was no time to sit around and do a five year apprenticeship. Sometimes I was thrown in the deep end, at times reluctantly, but mostly with my eyes wide open.

We have some incredible people in Christian leadership, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. They have God and Indigenous ministry in their hearts. I have been blessed by being alongside strong Aboriginal people and I have benefited from their passion, wisdom and knowledge. It has been a great blessing.

Praise always goes to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
I’m Donna Meehan, a Gamilaroi woman. I pay my respects to the elders, past and present. I would also like to acknowledge God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Greetings from my church, Sugarloaf Ministries in Newcastle.

When I was five years old, I was taken from my Aboriginal family in Coonamble. I was placed as an only child, with a European family in Newcastle. They fostered me for three years and then adopted me. They were Christians and we attended Methodist churches for seven years. Then our family attended Baptist churches, from my youth to this current day.

I was the only Aboriginal person in these churches and that is why I long to have fellowship with my people.

I asked Jesus to be my best friend when I was five. When I was 13, I made the decision to follow Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade and, at the age of 23, I was born again. I had ended up in hospital and asked God to take control of my life. There was never a doubt. There was no turning back. God chose my adoptive parents, who always said, ‘When Donna is old enough, she must find her family’.

I struggled with my identity, not knowing what I should be. Growing up in the sixties was hard for Aboriginal people. I knew I was Aboriginal, but I had no role models. There were no Aboriginal studies at school and I experienced racism and prejudice every day. I was angry with my mob for sending me away and had no intention of finding them—but God did.

My birth mother was the first person I led to the Lord. Her name was Beatrice. She met my adoptive mum, Elizabeth. That was a sacred moment. I was able to go back home and meet all my siblings and most of my aunts and uncles. I was delighted to find I had one aunty who was a Christian—Aunty Ivy from the AIM at Walgett.

God chose my non-Aboriginal husband Ron and we proved that reconciliation could work. Although a non-Christian, he supported me in everything I wanted to do. He died when he was 46 years old, but gave his heart to the Lord nine days before he passed over. I saw the peace of God on his face.

All my life, I have always been the only Aboriginal person at church and I often wondered where the other Aboriginal Christians were. Being at the 2016 AEF Convention and meeting so many of my people is a foretaste of heaven. Hearing hymns sung in language has brought
tears to my eyes. It’s inspiring to hear what other workers are achieving in their corner of the vineyard.

The highlight has been meeting ‘The Heroes of the Faith’—some of the first Aboriginal pastors who stepped out in faith, educating the Church about equity, equality and justice within the Church. They have paved the way for the younger generation in the AEF and have modelled how to ‘Occupy till He comes’. All were Aboriginal pastors, chaplains, youth pastors and mission teams and they showed me God is answering prayer. Our men are rising up and we see God moving across our nation.

All glory to God. He has been so good to me, He was there all the time. He rescued me, called me and healed me. At last I can say, ‘In the natural I was stolen, but in the supernatural I was chosen. May I continue to “Occupy till He comes”’.

**Pastor Max Conlon’s Testimony**

I was born in the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community, into a family of ten. I married Tracey Naden, a Wiradjuri girl. We have been married for 36 years and have four daughters and one son. Our baby son in 2014 at the age of 24, was promoted to glory. God called me at the age of 16 and He has never failed me these past 41 years. I worked in different government positions in Queensland and NSW. Two positions I have most enjoyed were as an education counsellor at Murgon High School in Queensland and as a drug and alcohol worker with Cherbourg Community Health. Both of these positions opened the doors of ministry to many communities, cultural and service groups.

God spoke to Tracey and I, telling us to go to Bible college. We gave up our positions with Queensland Health to follow God’s calling. We were worried about going away and leaving our home. God took care of it by causing a house fire and we lost most of our stuff so we had no choice but to go to college. That was in 2011 and now the new house is nearly completed. God’s timing is perfect.

After college, God called us to support our Christian workers in the bush through teaching, evangelism, practical ministry and sharing. We found ourselves travelling at least 60,000 km over two years. We travelled from our Murgon base in Queensland to the Brewarrina area, North West NSW, Central West NSW, Broken Hill, and to outback Queensland, Rockhampton, plus places in SA and Victoria.
Our God has never failed us as we travelled these long, and sometimes tiring, distances. He protected us, gave us strength for the late nights and early risings. He provided the resources and finances to fulfil the calling and we continue to do as He calls us.

Cherbourg Australian Indigenous Ministries is our home church. We fellowship with the Murgon Baptist and often with Pastor John and Maria Tonga from the Logan Church of Christ in Brisbane. We are members of the AEF and I have been appointed to the AEF Federal Council, for which I feel honoured and will serve to honour God with my best, to grow His kingdom with the tools that He has entrusted to me.

1 Corinthians 15:58: ‘Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ [10]

I am an Aboriginal artist and I use these God-given talents to share the gospel. This has certainly given me many wonderful opportunities for the Lord. I also play golf and compete in various art competitions where I’m often called upon for pastoral care by my fellow competitors, both black and white.

Max Conlon’s Artwork

Birth of Jesus by Max Conlon. Used with permission.
Crucifixion, by Max Conlon. Used with permission.

Resurrection, by Max Conlon. Used with permission.
Introducing: Reverend Max Wright

I grew up in the Mount Margaret Mission and am part of the Stolen Generation. When I was six months old, I was put into a toddlers’ home at the mission, and then into the care of Fred and Elsie Jackson. They came from England. That was my first part of my life in the mission. When I was six years of age I moved from their care to Miss Ball’s. She was a single lady who looked after the boys. There were several people who then provided care for me including Mr and Mrs Stewart and Elizabeth Miller. Elizabeth Miller was the daughter of the founder of the mission. Then she and her husband left and a couple from New Zealand, Mr and Mrs Scott, looked after the boys. I went to high school in Kalgoorlie and did three years of secondary education. I stayed at Kurrawang, 19 km out of Kalgoorlie, at a mission that was under the auspice of the Brethren Assembly.

In 1959–1963, Ben Mason came to Mount Margaret and conducted a series of meetings. We all had to attend and, at one of those meetings, God spoke to me. I gave my life to the Lord in 1959. I was baptised on 1 January 1967 in Newcastle—a very significant moment for me.

In 1966, I went to the Singleton Bible Training Institute and trained to be an Aboriginal pastor. I graduated in 1969, after completing a four-year course. I then married Naomi Ruth Charles, who was from Griffith, NSW. We served for 10 years as missionaries with the AIM. In 1979, I joined the Churches of Christ as a minister, working in Victoria, NSW and SA.

We are now retired, but we still work for the Lord and do more now than ever before.

It is an interesting story how I became involved with AEF. During my time as a student at the theological college, I witnessed the birth of the AEF. I was only a young man at time. We followed Ben Mason and David Kirk. David taught me at college. I saw their struggles in the leadership program and their struggles lead to the birth of AEF. I thought I would be interested in being part of that organisation, so I became a member. During my time, I have served on the AEF Council. I also served on the council after Wali Fejo, as the Dean of students at Bimbadeen.

We believe that God gave AEF a mandate. I learnt a lot from our predecessors who set the pattern for us young fellows. I was very young in those days. We saw the development of the Bimbadeen Bible College and the College of WA and the general leadership among our Aboriginal mob and leadership among our women. We helped established the leadership. It
was quite a difficult time. We often thought about what should we be doing. We were pushed out on our own and we struggled a bit. God was faithful! He knew what He was doing. We also saw different young men, such as Neville Naden, stand up and be counted. It has been interesting.

What struck me was the struggles we had in the beginning of the AEF. To see our blokes establish themselves in leadership—to see Ben Mason, Denzil Humphries, Ronnie Williams and David Kirk lead. They developed the AEF under a lot of stress and strain. There were a variety of things happening, such as the convention. The convention was an activity in which everybody participated. I probably learnt my leadership skills under David Kirk because he was a type of teacher. I am not a good evangelist. I was not eloquent enough to speak as a preacher because I was always stuttering. Someone said to me to forget about trying to be like Ben Mason—when I was being myself I found I was able to cope better, I was able to present the gospel better. I was able to become a theologian and express myself. When I preached last year at Port Augusta, someone said to me that they saw me as a teacher.

The AEF also held camps. Wherever we went, we would always have a camp. It was like a Bible school. We had different activities, such as basketball. The camps were held in different places, including Bimbabeen at Cootamundra. The convention was where we all got together on a national scale. Often, about 2000 people would turn up. We would watch the struggles of running it, people struggling with the catering and then arguing over who was going to do what. It was a really interesting time. We saw the changes within the AEF and what it used to be like, from when it was small scale to its highest peak when there was 3,000 or 4,000 people attending the conventions.

At the 2016 Convention, I was asked by Neville to speak at the tribal night. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I was chosen to speak because I am fluent in my language, Nganda. I would say a sentence in language and then repeat it in English. Working across two languages and speaking to many different people was nerve-racking for me. I did not know if I was taking the talk in the right or wrong direction and I did not know what emphasis I should place on different parts of the sermon. So I began talking in fear and trembling.

I had the chance to practice my talk the year before, on a road trip around the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY lands), SA, in front of Mark Short, Neville Naden and Neville Lilley at Ernabella. So I spoke and practiced the sermon that I later gave at the AEF Convention. I struggled with it that day. One of the ladies read the scripture out of the Bible. We did pretty well at Ernabella. I know my language, Nganda. I started in my language and I went through all the words I knew. I told them the two ways talk and we talked about the broad and narrow road.
Reverend Max Wright’s Message: The Broad Path and the Narrow Path

Matthew 7:13, on entering through the narrow gate:

*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.*[8]

What I am going to talk to you about is about two ways. The first way is a broad road that leads to destruction. You find that in Matthew, Chapter 7. Second, we have a narrow road—the small road that leads to life. You must get on that road if you want to go to heaven.

Let me ask you now, how do you get onto the broad road? We are born onto the broad road by birth. The Bible says, I was born in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. Now, you have to get off this broad road and onto the narrow road?

To get onto the narrow road, the Bible says you need to be born again. Can a man be born again? Unless he is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God. When you go along this narrow road, you will come to the cross. Jesus is waiting for you when you come to the cross.

The decision is what you are going to do? Which road will you go down? Will you continue on the broad road, or take the narrow road to life?

Some have tried to capture the gospel by drawing images. I have come across images that depicted there are two roads, a narrow one with white people going to heaven and a wide or broad one with dark-skinned people going to hell. The intent of an image like this is to help Aboriginal people come to Christ. My first impression on an image like this is there was something wrong with it. What is wrong?

Such an image is showing me that only Aboriginal people are going down that broad road to hell. But the Bible says, in Romans 3:23, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.[8] It also says, in Romans 6:23, that the wages of sin is death.[8] In this image, it does not show white man’s involvement on that broad road. In the image, only white people are on the narrow road. Such images seems to say that only the white people had the answers on how to get to God.

There should have been more people on that broad road. This image was giving the wrong impression on who was on the broad road and who was on the narrow road. It is not just Aboriginal people on the broad road. In the old days, white people were out there to save the pagans. That was the impression I would have got from this image. I know that what this image says is not quite true. The scriptures say that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is no-one who does any good. The wages of sin is death. White people are also on that broad road. Everyone needs to make up their minds about God and get off the broad road onto the narrow road.
Introducing: Pastor Mark Naden

In 1976, Mark made a commitment to follow Christ at a ‘Truth to Youth’ rally at the Gilgandra Showground. He is married to Alexandra O’Chin from Cherbourg (pictured). They have five daughters and one son. Their home church is Dubbo Christian Family Church (AIM). In 1991–92, Mark studied at Bimbadeen Bible College, Cootamundra, NSW.

Mark has pastored at La Perouse, Logan City Aboriginal and Islander Christian Fellowship (AICF), Eidsvold AICF and Wyong Christian Koori Fellowship. He has also been a student counsellor in Brisbane schools, a prison chaplain in Brisbane and Sydney and, for a time, did administration work for AEF Bimbadeen Bible College.

Pastor Mark Naden’s Message: True Salvation

Philippians 1:1–6:

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.[1]

What an honour it is to be able to share with you all this message about true Salvation. We must keep our focus firmly fixed on the one whom we worship, understanding that it is Jesus Christ we are here for. To praise and worship our Saviour and to lift up His name, far above anyone or anything including the AEF, AIM, Baptist or whatever. Christ must have pre-eminence. It is He who we must focus on—Jesus Christ our Lord, our Saviour and our God.

I would like to share with you all from the first chapter of Philippians; focusing mainly on verse 6, in which it clearly shows us it is all about him, it is all of Christ.

The apostle Paul showed the same zeal, that same desire and that same faithfulness to his Saviour through his concern and love for the many lost souls of Philippi, as our mob of years gone by did also for us. As Paul starts this letter, you can almost hear the excitement in his voice. He is excited that his fellow Christians, fellow labourers in ministry, are still standing strong in the power of Jesus Christ. They are getting about the Father’s business and are still remaining
faithful to their God. He rejoiced that those who were saved by Jesus Christ were really saved. They had true Salvation, real eternal life because it was not of them. He had confidence that Jesus, and Jesus alone, cannot only save from sin, but he can also keep us for all eternity. He had an understanding of what true Salvation is all about and he shows us this in this passage.

First our Bible passage shows the origin of Salvation. It says, ‘Being confident of this very thing, He which hath begun a good work in you’.

We are talking about true Salvation. We are not talking about a misconception of salvation’s origin, such as salvation is works-based, or is Jesus-plus-something, or is denomination-based. We are talking about the truth of its origin. Salvation is found in Christ alone.

Jesus himself says in John 14:6:

\[I\ \text{am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father, but by me. Neither is there Salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men, whereby we must be saved.}\]

This Salvation is made complete through Jesus. In John 19:30, the Bible says when Jesus was hanging on that dark cross of shame and, as the blood ran down his face, while in great distress he said, ‘It is finished! It is finished.’ All is complete, the ransom is paid. You need to do nothing because, ‘I have done it all’. What was required by the Father, to appease his anger and to wipe out the debt that we owed, has been done. It is finished!

In Acts, Chapter 16:30–31, a prison guard asked Paul, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ Paul answered plainly and simply, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved’.[1] Paul continues on to show us that Jesus is not only the author of salvation, but that he also has the power of sanctification.

In our own strength we try to live a good life, but it never works. Our own attempts are futile. With Jesus, it is different. Ephesians 2:8–9 says it in a wonderful way: ‘For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast’[1] Not of yourselves, it says, not of yourselves. It is a gift of God. Sanctification is all because of Christ. It is about being confident of this very thing that, ‘He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it’. And for how long? Until the day of Jesus Christ. That’s what we are aiming for—we, as Christian brethren—until the day of Jesus Christ.

Do you look for the day of Jesus Christ, with celebration or hesitation?

The time of Jesus Christ, or the second coming of Christ, will be a time of separation that will bring about judgement upon the world. Are you ready? The heat is coming and you’ll find yourself right in the middle of it. In Revelation 20:15 it says, ‘And whosoever was not found written in the lamb’s book of life was cast into a lake of fire’.[1]
Jesus is coming as judge of all the earth—are you ready? If you belong to God, you will shout, ‘Praise the Lord, hallelujah!’[1] For we shall soon see him face to face and you will rejoice. John 14 says, ‘Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again’.

Revelations 21:1–7 reads:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John, saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, it is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that over-cometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.[1]

God, in his perfect wisdom, has decided it is time to decide! My Salvation is in Christ Jesus today. My hope of eternal life is not in what I have done or said. It is all in Christ. I pray that yours will be also.
Introducing: Pastor Tony Riches

Tony and his wife, Francine (pictured), have been serving God for 35 years in various Indigenous ministries across Australia including hostel work, evangelism, pastoring, chaplaincy and training. They are in their eighth year with the Aboriginal churches in Melbourne (Thornbury and Footscray). Tony and Francine have four grown sons and one granddaughter.

Ngardarb Francine Riches and Pastor Tony Riches.

Photographer Philippa Naden.

Pastor Tony Riches’ Message: The Church

Psalm 122:1, ‘I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord.” ’

What is the Church?

The word for church in Greek is ‘ekklésia’. It is made up of the words, ‘ek’, meaning ‘out from’ and ‘kaléo’, meaning ‘to call’ [11]. People are called out from the world and to God, with the outcome being the Church (the mystical body of Christ).[11] That is, the Church is the universal (total) body of believers that God calls out from the world and into His eternal kingdom.

What Does the Church do?

What the Church does is outlined in the following eight points:

1. The Church loves. In John 13:34–35 it says, ‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’. [6]

2. The Church gathers. Matthew 18:20 says, ‘For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them’. [6]

3. The Church is watching for the Day. Hebrews 10:25 says, ‘Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching’. [6]
4. The Church stirs. Hebrews 10:24 says, ‘Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works’. [6]


James 2 says:

‘My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.’ [6]

6. The Church reaches out to others. James 1:27: ‘Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world’. [6]

7. The Church prays. Acts 12:5: ‘Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church’. [6]

8. The Church loves the word. Acts 17:11: ‘They received the word with all readiness, and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so’. [6]

What Shape is Your Church?

Is it a:

Square—everything has to fit in the box. Everyone who comes needs to accept that this is the permanent shape of how things are. There is no room for the unusual, the hurting and the needy. They need to fit in—but they don’t.

Circle—this is the church that welcomes all people. Everyone is in this together, regardless of their issues, and the doors are always open. Different people who come through our doors find this church doesn’t have cliques and doesn’t pass judgement. Everyone is made to feel welcome.
Triangle – People are split into group or factions and they distance themselves from one another into the corners.

The Church is Called a Body

We can see this in the following Bible passages.

Romans 12:5 says, ‘So we, being many, are one body in Christ’. [6]

Romans 12:4–6:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.[6]

1 Corinthians 12:18:

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.[6]
Why the Church is a Body

Jesus came for us and took on human form, a body, and gave His all for us—the Church. The church is made up of many people and together we are called as a body, to give our all for Him.

The Church has an Eternal Future

You can see this in Matthew 16:16: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’. And verse 18: ‘On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it’.

Live for Your Future With Him

Ephesians 5:25–27:

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

As Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, so should we also. It should be a normal part of our life and the centre of our love.

The Church

Psalm 122:1: ‘I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord”’. Does that sound like you? Happy, and even excited, to go to church?[5]

The Church Loves

Ephesians 5:1–2 states, ‘Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.’[6] Love should be the identifying factor of the church! It is different to all other structures and organisations because of the love of God that we share as His people. The two great commandments are to love God and to love people.

The Building of the Church

2 Peter 3:14–16:

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the long-suffering of our Lord is Salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some
things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.[6]

This building requires planning, looking forward and taking the steps needed to make the plans a reality. We need a good plan, good foundations and straight lines. The Bible tells us that we are meant to live and build with integrity. The reading goes on to say, in verses 17–18:

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.[6]

The grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of our growth, both personally and as a church. We will grow if we build on Him who is the foundation stone. If not, we are just playing church.

To be Occupied With the Church

What practical things would show that we are occupied with His church till He comes?
We would attend
We would encourage people
We would serve
We would share
We would invite others
We would pray.

We must love! Everything else will be seen as shallow or even fake. Without love, we have nothing! We give nothing and we mean nothing.

To Conclude: Why the Church is a Body

It needs all the differences to become fully functioning. Not all members or parts should try and be an arm, or we couldn’t stand. We all come from different life experiences, cultures, families and God wants to work your uniqueness into His master plan. He wants you to reach people that I can’t and vice versa. He needs us to be loving enough to demonstrate who He is through the way we treat one another. The world longs for a Church that lives out his commands as a united body, giving honour to Him who is the head.
Chapter 5: Honouring God’s Word

These five Bible studies honour God’s word. They were preached by The Reverend Dr Mark Short at the 2016 AEF Convention. Mark’s talks remind us of the importance of passing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ respectfully from one person to another until His return. We need to do this in a way that: loves and glorifies Jesus, loves and honours our elders for their teaching and examples and loves and encourages the younger ones.

Introducing: The Reverend Dr Mark Short

Dr Mark Short (pictured) is the National Director of the Bush Church Aid Society (BCA). He grew up at Leeton, NSW and in the western suburbs of Sydney. He came to Christ as a teenager, through the witness of Christian teachers at his school. After working as a newspaper journalist and for the federal government, he trained at a Bible college in Sydney. He then went back to the bush to minister at Temora, Wagga Wagga and Tarcutta. In 2011, Mark joined BCA as National Director. BCA is committed to reaching rural and regional Australia for Christ. It has a particular passion for supporting and working with Aboriginal Christians. Mark is married to Monica and they have been blessed with two sons, Andrew and Matthew. He loves getting away from the big city to enjoy the beauty of God’s creation in the mountains and deserts.

Bible Studies: Occupy Till I Come, by Reverend Dr Mark Short

80 The following texts informed these Bible Studies:
Matthew 20:1–16

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

20 ‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.³ About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.⁴ He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.”⁵ So they went. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?”⁷ “Because no-one has hired us,” they answered. He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.”⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”⁹ The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.¹² “These who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.”¹³ But he answered one of them, “I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’¹⁸

I have not won many sporting medals in my life, so the ones I have are special to me. I have a medal for winning the C-grade cricket competition in Temora. There is a story behind that medal. I didn’t play in the Grand Final—maybe that’s why my team won! I am a minister and I had to marry a couple that day. I could not convince the couple to have the ceremony on the oval between innings, so I missed out on the game. But I still got the same prize as everyone else on the team. Was that fair?

Here’s another story:

There was a footy team. Every week they would come to practice and work hard. Every week they would be there at the ground in time for the match to begin. Every week they would run and tackle until they were exhausted. Everyone, except for one player. He never came to
practice. He never played a single game. Except the Grand Final. And even then, he didn’t play very well.

But his team won.

When the game was over and it was time for the winners’ medals to be handed out and everyone received the same prize—from the ones who had played every game to the one who’d joined in at the last minute. Was that fair?

In our Bible reading, Jesus tells a story that is like these two games. He tells it just after Peter has reminded Jesus that he and the other disciples have paid a great price to follow Him. Peter and the others have left their homes. They have left their families. Some of them have left businesses to walk with Jesus. Surely, when Jesus comes as king they will get the best prizes and the biggest medals. Peter asks, ‘Do we get anything for following you?’

Jesus says to Peter and the others, ‘Yes, and no. Yes, when the Son of Man sits on His throne, those who have followed Him will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’. Jesus says, ‘You will be honoured in my kingdom. You will have important work in my kingdom. But no, don’t think you can bargain your way into my kingdom. Don’t think you can force God to give you more then by what you give up now.’

That is not how this kingdom, or its king, works. The Bible says, in Matthew 20:16, ‘Because many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first’.

Jesus tells a story about a man who owns a vineyard. It is time to harvest the grapes. Matthew 20: 1–2: ‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard’. After agreeing with the labourers to pay them a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. The harvest only happens once a year and when it does there is a lot of work to be done. So the owner needs people to work for him this day. At six o’clock, just as the sun is rising, he goes out into the marketplace at the centre of the nearest village. He hires whoever he finds and agrees to pay them a denarius, the normal day rate for a labourer and sent them into his vineyard. Now, surely, these must be the best workers. They haven’t slept in. They’ve been up at the break of day, ready to do a hard and honest day’s work.

Three hours later, the owner goes into the marketplace once again. He sees others doing nothing. Clearly, they weren’t keen enough to be up and about when he made the first visit, but still he hires them and agrees to pay them what is right. Three hours later, at noon, the owner does the same thing again. He hires whoever he finds and sends them into his vineyard.

What extraordinary behaviour this is!

We’re not told that the owner needed all these workers. No—his concern is for the workers and their needs. He does not want to see them unemployed, unable to use their gifts and
unable to feed their families. Time and time again, the owner searches them out and calls them into his service.

But the biggest surprise is still to come. Matthew 20: 6–7 says, ‘And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, “Why do you stand here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no-one has hired us”. He said to them, “You go into the vineyard, too”.’ [8]

Where have these workers been all day? They can’t have been in the marketplace or the owner would have seen them earlier. I reckon these are the ones who haven’t even made the effort to get down to the employment office. They’ve been hanging around the clubs and the bars doing not much at all. And by now it’s five o’clock, only an hour or so from sunset and the end of the working day. They’ll barely have time to make it down to the vineyard, be given their bag and start work. Surely they have nothing to offer the owner. But still, he calls them into his service.

Evening comes and, with it, the end of the working day. The owner is a just man and agrees to pay everyone then and there, rather than make them wait until the following morning.

All the workers gather around the foreman. Some of them are thirsty and sunburnt after spending 12 hours in the Middle Eastern heat. Their hands are scratched from reaching into the vines and their muscles ache from carrying heavy bags of grapes up and down the rows. The owner doesn’t begin with these hard workers.

First, he calls out to the workers who were hired at the last minute. They are not tired or thirsty. Their clothes are still neat and fresh. They haven’t even worked up a sweat. The owner gives them each a denarius. Exactly what he’d promised to those who were hired at the start of the day.

Now, those who’ve been working all day are really excited. They’ve got out their calculators and they’re doing their sums. They are thinking, ‘If one hour’s work earns one denarius then 12 hours work earns… ’

Some of them are already imagining what they can do with the extra money. Maybe, at last, they can buy that flash new chariot they’ve always wanted, or get a new pair of sandals for the wife, or book that family holiday down at the Dead Sea.

Matthew 20:10: ‘Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.’ [8] What a letdown!

And they are outraged!

How dare he!
Doesn’t the owner know how hard they’ve worked! Can’t he see their blisters and their scratches! How dare he make these latecomers equal to them! It just isn’t fair!

And I reckon, if you or I were in their sandals, we might feel exactly the same way. Does money make people happy? Our world thinks it does. All those advertisements on TV telling us that life will be better if we have more in the bank.

But what makes people happiest is this: having more money than their neighbour! We can’t look at what is in our hand without having a look to see if the person next to us has more. That is what the workers in this story are thinking. But the owner sees things differently. Look at Matthew 20: 13–15: ‘But he answered one of them, “I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”’

The owner is not less than fair. No-one receives less than what they were promised. No-one is ripped off. But the owner is more than fair. He is generous and gracious with what he owns. No-one receives less than they deserve. Many receive more than they deserve. And so it’s true that, ‘The last will be first and the first will be last’.

Now, this parable is certainly not here to give us a model for how to be a good boss in twenty-first century Australia! It’s about something quite different.

I said earlier, that Jesus told this story to the disciples when they were worried about what they had left behind and given up to follow Him. They wanted to write up an IOU to give to God, a list of all the sacrifices they had made so that God could pay them back—with interest. I don’t know about you, but I find it so easy to draw up my own list to give to God. What would be on your list? What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Perhaps it was a well-paid job. Perhaps it was a promising sporting career. Perhaps it was a relationship. Perhaps it was your country. Perhaps it was a quiet life without the worries of ministry.

Do you ever wish that God would pay you back? With a happy marriage? With a successful ministry? With children who love the Lord and follow in your footsteps?

And does it really annoy you when brothers and sisters who seem to have given up less than you have done, seem to receive the same as, or even more than, you do? Do you ever feel like saying to God ‘It just isn’t fair!’?

To my shame, I sometimes have. When I do say that, I forget one important thing. God’s kingdom is not just about fairness. It is all about God’s grace and goodness and generosity. If God’s kingdom was just about us getting what we deserve, then we’d all be in trouble. This is because we deserve nothing more than His judgement and condemnation. Hell is the place for people who want life to be all about justice and nothing else.
I forget then, whenever God called me into his service, whether it was at the first hour or the eleventh hour, he did so not because he needed me, but because he searched me out and took me from a life of idleness and waste and gave me a life of purpose and meaning.

I have a friend called Arthur. Arthur was in his twenties when he came to Christ. At the time, he was going out with a young woman and they were planning to marry. She did not understand his new faith and said, ‘You must choose between me and Jesus’.

He chose Jesus. Arthur’s father did not understand his new faith either. In fact, he hated it. For a year, he attacked Arthur, with his words and his fists. He only stopped when he realised it was doing no good. Over the years, Arthur has given up a lot to follow Jesus. Last year, Arthur’s dad became sick and, not long afterward, he died. Arthur took the funeral, not knowing where his dad stood with the Lord. It was hard day. A couple of weeks after the funeral, Arthur was contacted by someone from the home where his father had lived. She told an amazing story. Just a few months before he died, Arthur’s dad had begun attending the church that met in that place. He’d confessed to Christ and asked for baptism. He’d come into the vineyard five minutes before sunset.

I attended the funeral of Neville Naden Senior, the father of your AEF chair. Although he was the son of a pastor, it wasn’t until he was in his sixties, long after many of his children were walking with the Lord, that Neville Senior began that same journey. He’d come into the vineyard 15 minutes before sunset.

I’m so glad that, when Arthur’s dad and Neville’s dad are raised in glory they will receive a denarius and hear the words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ (Matthew 25:14–28).[8] Is that fair? Well, it is grace and amazing grace at that!

The theme for these AEF Bible studies is ‘Occupy till I come’. We’re going to be looking at the teaching of Jesus on what His people are to be doing between his first coming and his second coming. Whatever we do, or hope to do, let’s not lose sight of what’s been done for us. That’s why it’s so appropriate that we begin our journey by sharing in the Lord’s Supper.

There’s an old saying that, ‘There’s no such thing as a free lunch’.

In this world, that is true. Every meal has its price tag and, the bigger the price tag, the bigger and better the meal.

But this meal is different.

There is no first class and second class dining at this table. No-one has to wait outside for the leftovers while the ‘important people’ are fed first. No-one receives more and no-one receives less. Whether you have been following the Lord faithfully and sacrificially for decades, or whether you have stumbled into his arms just a week ago, this same bread and this same cup
is for you. Because this is the table of the Lord’s grace. And the price of your welcome has been paid in Jesus’s body and His blood.

Come and receive your master’s goodness!

Study 2: Hear and Receive God’s Word! Matthew 25:1–13

Matthew 25:1–13

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 ‘At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 ‘At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”

7 ‘Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.”

9 “No,” they replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.”

10 ‘But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 ‘Later the others also came. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us!”

12 ‘But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”

13 ‘Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.’[8]

I’ve noticed that, over the years, a lot of my bad dreams have to do with not being ready for something important. When I was at school, I’d have nightmares about turning up to an exam at the right place but the wrong time, or the right time but the wrong place. Or I’d turn up and discover I’d been studying for the wrong subject, or I’d turn up to the right subject but have nothing to write with.

My favourite preacher’s nightmare is standing in front of church and finding I have forgotten what to say. I don’t even have to be asleep for that nightmare to happen!
None of us wants to be unprepared for something important. When I was growing up as a teenager in youth group, there was a popular Christian song called, ‘I wish we’d all been ready.’[18]

It was based on some verses from the gospels, Luke 24:40–42 and Luke 17:34–36[8]:

A man and wife asleep in bed
She hears a noise and turns her head—he’s gone
I wish we’d all been ready
Two men walking up a hill
One disappears and one’s left standing still
I wish we’d all been ready
There is no time to change your mind
The Son has come and you’ve been left behind.[18]

It was a very powerful song. None of us wanted to be that person left behind when Jesus returned. We wanted to be ready. The problem was the song didn’t really tell us how to be ready. By itself, it was like being stuck in one of my nightmares without ever waking up.

I had friends who became quite anxious when they thought about Jesus coming back. If they hadn’t seen their Christian friends and family for a time they would begin to worry that the day had come and they had been left. Now, the day of the Lord is a serious matter, but Jesus doesn’t want His people to be anxious about it. He wants them to be ready for it, and he wants them to live in the freedom and confidence that comes from knowing that they are ready for it.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells three parables to encourage His people to be faithful living in the time between His first and second comings. Jesus first came among us 2000 years ago as a baby. He grew up as a human being. A human being who knows what it feels like to be hungry and thirsty. A human being who was rejected and misunderstood by those closest to him. Jesus was no ordinary human being. This was God with us. Jesus taught and acted with a power that no one else had. He calmed a mighty storm with a single word. He healed the sick. He forgave sin. He called people to follow Him and some left behind all they had and did just that.

However, not everyone received Jesus or recognised his power. For some, He was a threat to their own power. When he taught about God’s grace, about God’s rule turning everything upside down, some could see the power they had over other people being taken away. These people made fun of Him, attacked Him, and plotted to have Him killed.

Jesus knew that his death would not be an accident. It was part of His father’s plan. His death would be a ransom, the price paid to set many people free from sin and death and judgement. Jesus’s death would not be the end. He would rise from the dead as Lord and King. Now, as the time for His death draws near, Jesus looks beyond His death and rising again and teaches His disciples about His second coming.
Once, he came as a humble baby. Then, He will come on the clouds of heaven in power and great glory. Once, he came to lay down his life. Then, he will come to gather his chosen people and overthrow everyone who stands against him. What a day it will be—a day like no other. A day of joy and rescue for some. A day of weeping and gnashing of teeth for others.

Jesus knows that delays are dangerous. He knows that when we no longer see Him we can be tempted to forget that He is the one with all the power. We can be tempted to follow other gods. We can be tempted to live for ourselves. We can be tempted to hurt and abuse our brothers and sisters. We can be tempted to live like those around us who have no hope and do not expect Jesus to return.

But delays are also an opportunity. In this time, our time, we can walk by faith and not by sight. In this time, we can serve the King we cannot see by serving the brothers and sisters we can see. In this time, we can show that our hope is not in this world, but in the world that is to come.

Later in this chapter, Jesus will teach us what faithful service looks like. However, now he explains how God changes rebels into faithful servants. Jesus does it by telling a story about a wedding.

I have been to many weddings. At weddings, ministers have to expect the unexpected. I’ve been at a wedding where they left the rings at home. I’ve been at a wedding where they lost the ring in the ute. I’ve been at a wedding where the bride was an hour late because of roadworks and a bridesmaid who had morning sickness. I’ve been at a wedding where the groom was an hour late for no particular reason. But at the end of the day, no-one is worried about what didn’t go to plan because a new marriage has begun and everyone is full of joy.

In Israel, at the time of Jesus, there was a lot to plan for a wedding. The ceremony and celebrations would often last for several days. Sometimes they would begin at the bride’s home and end at the groom’s.

In the story, Jesus tells of 10 young women who have the job of welcoming the groom, the guest of honour, when he arrives. Five of the virgins were wise and five were foolish. What was the difference between the wise and the foolish? Simply this—in Matthew 25:3–4 it says, ‘The foolish ones took their lamps, but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones; however, took oil in jars along with their lamps’. [8]

Notice first what the wise ones didn’t have and didn’t do. The wise virgins didn’t have some inside information on when the bridegroom would arrive. They hadn’t got out the bus timetable, the map, the weather forecast and managed to work out exactly when he would get to the wedding. They had no way of knowing when he would arrive—and they were okay with not knowing.
In the Gospel of Matthew 24:36, Jesus says this about his second coming: ‘But about that day or hour no-one knows, not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’. [8]

We have no way of knowing when Jesus will come. None of us has been given the inside information. We can’t work it out by getting out our calendars and calculators and prophecy books and tapes. We need to be okay with not knowing.

I remember living in Sydney, 25 years ago, when the leaders of a particular church declared that Jesus was going to come back on such-and-such a date. That night, the church gathered in one place waiting for Jesus. As they arrived at the building, people went up to them and offered to buy their cars for five dollars each. Then morning came. And Jesus had not returned. I wonder how many of those people are still following Jesus. If only they had read their Bibles. They thought they were being wise. They were actually being foolish.

There’s another thing the wise virgins don’t do. They didn’t try to stay awake until the bridegroom came. They hadn’t been chugging coffee and energy drinks and trying to do an all-nighter. So, it wasn’t knowing when the groom would come, or staying awake until he did come that made these five virgins wise. This is how they showed their wisdom: by being prepared to meet him whenever he came, whatever the hour. They weren’t assuming that he would come when there was still some daylight, when they could see him coming from a distance and when they would still have time to run off to the shops to get extra supplies. No! As well as the oil that was in their lamps, they’d kept aside some more oil for when it ran out.

While the other five virgins run around trying to find the nearest supermarket still open, the bridegroom arrives. The five virgins who were ready go in with the bridegroom to the wedding banquet and the door is shut behind them. What happens next is desperately sad—the others are left outside.

Imagine how sad and painful you would feel if you were left outside in the cold and darkness. Through the doorway you can feel the warmth, you hear the sounds of music and laughter and you catch a smell of the meat as it roasts on the fire. Mmm. But none of it is for you. The hardest thing to hear are the words of the bridegroom, the one you were meant to honour: ‘I don’t know you’. Then he goes back inside and the door is closed.

There is another passage from the Gospel of Matthew 7:21–23:

> Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ [8]
Being ready is about more than doing the right kind of religious activities, even if they’re done in the name of the Lord. Being ready is about being wise. Thank God, in the very next passage Jesus gives us the key to true wisdom, in Matthew 7:24–26:

> Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.[8]

Notice that both the wise man and the foolish man hear the words of Jesus. They know what God says. Just as the wise and the foolish virgins know that the bridegroom was coming. However, here’s the difference. Foolish people don’t allow what they do in their head to change how they act in their lives. And so, when the moment comes, they aren’t ready because they haven’t prepared. The virgins are left outside, the building is washed away in the flood.

Do you want to be ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus?

Then make sure you are hearing and doing what His word says. His word says, in Matthew 5:3–10, to accept that we are spiritually poor and we need the riches of grace found in Christ. His word says we are to mourn the brokenness in our world and in our lives. His word says we are to hunger and thirst after righteousness. His word says that we are to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be peacemakers. His word says we are to rejoice when we are persecuted. His word says, in Matthew 22:37–39 and Matthew 5:44, we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, even to love our enemies.

You see, being ready for the coming of Jesus is not about looking for some secret knowledge, some hidden message that is hard to find. It is all about what we do with the knowledge that we do have before us in God’s word. It’s all about that word dwelling deep within us, so that, by the power of God’s spirit, it changes how we think and feel and act.

People who know and do God’s word will be prepared whenever the Lord Jesus comes, whether it’s in the heat of the day, or late at midnight, whether they’re wide awake or fast asleep. New Year is a time when many Christians will be making plans about how they will react to God’s word over the next 12 months. Some will have a plan to read a part of the scriptures each day. Others will plan to listen to God’s word on cassette or CD or via the internet. Some will plan to be at church or fellowship where the Bible will be read and preached. All those are good things to plan. Jesus tells us, it’s not enough to read or hear God’s word. We need to do what it says. So here’s a question for you—and for me. What’s your Bible-obeying plan for this year? Where, with God’s help and through the power of the Holy Spirit, are you hoping to grow this year? Is it in your faith in God’s promises? In your joy in God’s love? In your generosity with God’s gifts? In your forgiveness of others?
Wise people ask those kind of questions, and wise people will be ready to welcome the Lord whenever he comes, whether it is this year or in 3016.

Before Christmas, I was sharing with a friend about our plans to be in Port Augusta at the AEF. This friend then spoke of a special time of fellowship she’d spent with Aboriginal brothers and sisters right in this town. What she remembered most about that visit was not how it began, or what she did, but how it ended. Rather, she remembered one of our Christian sisters came up to her and gave her a hug and said, ‘I don’t expect we’ll meet again until we’re in glory. I look forward to seeing you then’.

Friends, we don’t need to wish that we’d all been ready. We don’t need to wish that we might be ready. Like that sister, we can know that we are ready. God has given us His life-giving word. He has given us all that we need to know for life and godliness. In this time of waiting, let’s make sure that we hear and do what it says.
Matthew 25:14–30

The Parable of the Bags of Gold

14 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 15 To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. 17 So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. 18 But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19 “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. “Master,” he said, “you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.”

21 “His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

22 The man with two bags of gold also came. “Master,” he said, “you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.”

23 “His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

24 Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. “Master,” he said, “I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”

26 “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

28 “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” [8]
Can you remember a time when something valuable was handed over to you? When I say valuable, I don’t mean it had to be worth a lot of money. I wouldn’t get a lot of money from selling this wooden plaque.

That doesn’t matter. Its value to me cannot be counted in dollars and cents. My great-uncle Mark made this plaque. I never met him, but my parents gave me his name. The words on the plaque say:

_Sons of this place, let this of you be said_
_That you who live are worthy of your dead._
_They gave their lives that we who live might reap_
_A richer harvest ‘ere we fall asleep._

There’s a double meaning, isn’t there? There’s the plaque itself. I received it from my father and I hope one day to pass it on to my sons. It also speaks of a broader inheritance, a legacy that is handed over from one generation to the next. What has been handed on to you that is special? It could be a way of life. It could be a family tradition. It could be teaching about God and the world. It could be country and the responsibility of caring for country. It could be a physical object—like war medals, or a family Bible or a piece of artwork. It is handed over to us and we, in turn, hope to hand it on to others.

We feel the weight of the responsibility, we don’t know whether we’ll be able to do what others expect of us. We worry about what we might lose before it is our time to pass it on. It’s true—I could lose this plaque. I could forget to pack it when we move house. Someone could steal it. It could be thrown out by accident. Maybe the safest thing to do would be to lock it up and put it in a bank safe where it couldn’t be lost or damaged or stolen. But then, we’d never see it and we would forget its message. I have to take the risk of losing it for it to do its work.

In today’s Bible reading, Jesus tells another story to teach us how we are to live between His first and second coming. Matthew 25:14–15 says, ‘For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.’[8]
In these couple of verses we learn a great deal about this man. First, he is rich—really rich. Eight talents is a lot of money. To earn that much, someone in Jesus's day would have to work six days a week, 52 weeks a year for about 150 years. Second, he is generous and trusting. His wealth isn’t in something like real estate that he would have to leave behind. He could take the gold with him. He could keep it where he could see it and touch it. Yes, that would be risky, but there is also a risk in what he decides to do.

He takes all that he has and hands it over to three of his servants. He has put his future in their hands. He trusts them. Not only is he generous and trusting, he's also wise. He doesn’t divide the talents into three equal amounts, but gives each of them a different amount, each according to their ability. He’s not playing favourites—he wants all of them to succeed. He knows how much responsibility each of them is ready to carry.

He’s like a good sporting coach who, when it comes to training, pushes the players hard enough to stretch their skills and improve their fitness, but not so hard that they break down or become discouraged. Think of this for a moment, because this is how Jesus treats His people. He is generous and trusting with us.

When Jesus left this world His mission had only just begun. There were nations to be discipled, there was a church to be built, there was a kingdom to grow and there was good news to be proclaimed from Jerusalem all the way to the very ends of the earth. Jesus could have kept that mission to himself. After all, He had paid the price of suffering to make that mission possible. Jesus could have proclaimed the gospel in heavenly writing in the sky. He could have grown the kingdom all by himself. But he chose not to do that.

Instead, he took what was most valuable to him and handed it over to His servants and said, ‘You be my messengers. You be my hands of compassion. You be my peacemakers. You be my shepherds. You be my evangelists.’ It’s right that we should trust Jesus, it’s absolutely amazing that He should trust us!

When Jesus hands over His mission he does so with wisdom and care. As in the parable, He gives different jobs to each of us, His servants, not because he is playing favourites, but because he knows us inside out and has exactly the right task for you and for me.

Sometimes we miss this, don’t we? We get so upset with the five talents Jesus has given our brother or sister that we forget the three talents that are sitting right there in our lap. We look at the size and success of their ministries. We look at the opportunities they have to speak and serve. Sometimes we become bitter and jealous.

Perhaps that is what happened in the story Jesus tells. As soon as the master has gone on a journey, the one who had received five talents puts them to work and earns five more. The man who has received two does the same and earns two more. The master was right. He did set them up to succeed. But the man who received one talent acts differently. He goes off, digs a hole in the ground and hides his master’s money.
We are not told why he did that. Maybe he was angry because he’d received less than the other two. Maybe he was so afraid of what might go wrong that he lost sight of what could go right. Maybe he was too busy with his own affairs to care about his master’s business or maybe he was too lazy to do anything more than dig a hole in his backyard. The master returns after a long time to settle accounts. Look at Matthew 25:20–23:

*The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ Also, the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’*[8]

Notice that, although the two servants had received different amounts, they receive the same blessing from their master. They are both praised by him. They are both rewarded with further responsibilities. They both share in their master’s joy. Their master is delighted with what they have done with the gifts he handed over to them.

Think for a moment about what this tells us about God. The Bible is clear that, without the grace of God, we are nothing and we have nothing. We have no hope of salvation.

We have no power for ministry. We have nothing of value to pass on to others. Every gift we have, every blessing we enjoy, every time we make a lasting difference in the life of another person—it all comes from the riches of His grace.

But sometimes we get it wrong. We think that the God who gives us everything is a hard master who demands obedience and gets angry when we don’t get it 100 per cent right.

Is that your picture of God? It will be so hard to serve with joy if it is. Look at what this passage says about our God!

God is overjoyed when his servants take his gifts and use them for his glory and for the good of others. It makes God smile when you visit that sick brother or sister. It makes God smile when you teach that child about His love. It makes God smile when you preach the gospel and welcome the stranger. It makes God smile because he sees in your service the beauty of His own handiwork.

Now it’s the turn of the third servant to front up:

*And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’*[8]
This is not a smart move. He's already dug one hole for the money. Now he digs another for himself. He starts by speaking harsh words against his master. He is saying, ‘You are a hard man, you mistreat your neighbours by taking their harvests for yourself. I was afraid of what you might do to me, so I hid the money and here it is—just a little dirtier than before’.

We know that what he says is not true. The master is not hard, he is generous. The master had set them all up to succeed.

The master says to the servant, ‘Is that really what you believe about me? Because if you really do believe that I am such a hard man you should have put my money in the bank so I could have it back with interest. You couldn’t even do that!’

In Matthew 20:28–30, he says:

*Therefore, take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

It sounds hard, doesn’t it? What is so wrong with choosing not to take a risk?

This is what is wrong: by his actions the servant has shown that he did not trust his master. He did not trust his master’s judgement. He did not trust his master’s wisdom. He did not trust his master, even when his master was ready to trust him. If you don’t trust someone, they are not really your master. And if they are not your master, it’s no surprise that they should take from you what you have and give it to others.

So what does this say to us? What has God handed over to you and me? There are many answers we could give to that question. God has given us this world. God has given us life. God has given us skills and gifts—some with music, others with teaching or caring. However, the greatest gift God has handed over to His people is the gospel —the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the gospel is more than just a set of words to remember and recite. The gospel is a powerful, saving, life-transforming message. Yes, we must speak the gospel and people must hear the gospel to be saved. But we also live out the gospel, as our lives are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we become more like Jesus. God has handed the riches of that gospel over to his people. What are we to do with it? We are to guard the gospel.

In 2 Timothy 1:13–14, Paul says to young Timothy:

*What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*
How will Timothy guard the gospel teaching that Paul has entrusted to him? We often guard things by locking them up in a safe, or putting them behind bars and a high fence, or burying them in the ground. But that is not how Timothy is to guard the gospel.

Right after the words for Timothy that I just read, Paul gives him these instructions (2 Timothy 2:1–2):

> You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.[8]

We guard the gospel by giving it away. We guard the gospel by putting it to work. We guard the gospel by handing over to others what has first been handed over to us.

I’m told that in countries where Christians are persecuted and find it difficult to have a Bible, the scriptures are kept in people’s memory. It’s no good if only one person has memorised all the scriptures, because when they die everything is lost. The best way to guard the scriptures is to pass on those precious memories—to spread them to as many people as possible. What is true of the gospel message is also true of gospel ministry.

I am so thankful for the men and women who handed ministry opportunities to me when I was young. I am so thankful for the 70-year-old man who invited me to teach scripture with him when I was 18. I learnt so much from serving alongside him—seeing how prayerful he was, hearing his concern for others to be saved. I am so thankful for the church that invited me to preach my first sermon, when I didn’t really have a clue what I was doing, and who were so gracious afterwards with their feedback and encouragement. I am thankful to Max and the two Nevilles, who invited me to travel with them to the APY lands last year and taught me so much about sacrificing your own comfort for the sake of others. I am thankful, not because they trusted me, but because they trusted God’s work in me, and because they believed the gospel is powerful enough to do its work, even when we are learning, even when we make mistakes.

Let me give you another picture that demonstrates what I am saying. Marlene Andrews is a vibrant church leader at St Matthew’s Anglican Church at Ngukurr in South East Arnhem Land. She is involved with children, young people and the fellowship meetings. She is also training to be an Indigenous teacher at Nungalinya College in Darwin, a college that trains Indigenous Christians. Marlene’s role is to help the teachers with language and cultural understanding while she is learning to teach.

Marlene comes from a strong Christian heritage. Her grandfather, Gumbuli Wuramurra, was the first Aboriginal person to be ordained in the Anglican Church in the NT. He was the pastor at Ngukurr for 33 years. Marlene’s parents, Ishmael and Irene Andrews, became Christians in the early 1980s. They were an important part of the translation team for the Kriol Baibul. When Ishmael and Irene became Christians, the change in their lives impressed other people. Two couples who were their close friends also became Christians. They also went on to be part of
the translation team and serve in local church ministry. From one generation to another, within
and without the one family, a living faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is being handed
over. The elders are honoured for their teaching and example, the young ones are encouraged
and Jesus is glorified.81 Brothers and sisters, now is the time for putting God’s riches to work, a
time for handing over what we have received.

81 The above stories were shared (with permission) by The Reverend Dr Joy Sandefur, a former mission worker in Arnhem
Land and, later, the BCA’s National Researcher/Adviser on Indigenous Matters.
Matthew 25:31–46

The Sheep and the Goats

31 ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his
glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the
people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put
the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 ‘Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father;
take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35
For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me some-
thing to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed
me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

37 ‘Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite
you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and
go to visit you?”

40 ‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these
brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

41 ‘Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the
eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me
nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and
you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in
prison and you did not look after me.”

44 ‘They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or
needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?”

45 ‘He will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these,
you did not do for me.”

46 ‘Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.’[8]

I want to begin by telling a true story that was brought to my attention by my friend The
Reverend Kanishka Raffel.[20] He shared this story at the 2016 Anglican Future Conference in
Melbourne and it had a big impact on those who attended.
William Cooper was a Yorta Yorta man.[21] He was born in 1860 and grew up on the Maloga Mission on the Murray River. Cooper’s long campaign for Aboriginal rights, especially land rights, began with the Maloga Petition in 1887. It was signed by 11 residents of the mission and was addressed to the Governor of New South Wales.

In 1935, Cooper helped establish the Australian Aborigines’ League. As its secretary, Cooper drew up a petition that called for Aboriginal representation in parliament, the right to vote and for land rights. Knowing that, while not technically Australian citizens, all Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were British subjects, he made up his mind to petition King George V. Over several years, he and his team collected 1814 signatures, despite active obstruction from the national and state governments of the day.

However, it was what happened in 1938 that would one day make the name of William Cooper famous well beyond his country. Adolf Hitler was now in power and one night, in November of that year, Jewish homes and businesses were attacked across Germany. Jews were turned out into the streets, mocked, beaten and killed. It became known as Kristallnacht or Crystal Night, because of the sound of windows being smashed all across the country.

About one month after these events, Cooper led a group of about 20 people, most of them Aboriginal, in a march from his home in Footscray to the German Consulate in the centre of Melbourne. They brought with them a letter protesting the treatment of Jewish people by the Nazi government. The consul refused to accept the letter, but the protest was reported in the newspapers. According to the Jewish Holocaust Museum, this was the only citizens’ protest against the treatment of the Jews anywhere in the world at this time. What makes a man stand with people he has never met, people who will never be able to pay him back, even as he is denied the right of citizenship in his own country?82

Some have called Cooper a great human being—and he was—but the truth is far deeper. When he was in his twenties, he had come to a saving faith in Christ. His grandson remembers that Cooper would read his Bible daily. He had a great confidence in the resurrection, a great expectation of the new heavens and the new earth and a great sense of accountability for his life when the judgement came.

And I reckon he knew these words of Jesus well: Matthew 25:35–36:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.[8]

I reckon he might have added: ‘I was being persecuted. And you stood with me’.

82 Part of The Reverend Kanishka Raffel’s address was subsequently published as ‘William Cooper: creative humble advocacy’, in Essential Magazine, Winter 2015, p. 20.
We now come to the third story that Jesus tells to help us live faithfully between his first and second comings. Matthew 25:31 has a grand opening: ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, He will sit on his glorious throne.’

Up until this point, Jesus has been teaching in parables. Now Jesus speaks plainly and openly about his return. Once he came to a tiny village in Judea. Now He comes with the angels of heaven. Once He came in a manger. Now He comes on a throne. Once He came to save. Now He comes to judge. All the nations will be gathered before Him. The nations who worshipped Him and the nations who rejected Him. The nations who welcomed His messengers and the nations who killed His messengers.

We are told that, from his throne, Jesus will separate people from those nations, like a Middle Eastern herdsman sorts out the sheep from the goats at the end of the day. Every person, without exception, from the greatest to the least, will be placed at his right or at his left. Those on his right will hear these words, Matthew 25:34–36:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

But those on his left hear this, Matthew 25:41–43:

Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.

Notice the stark difference. Those on the right are welcomed, those on the left are sent away. Those on the right are blessed, those on the left are cursed. Those on the right receive a kingdom that God has prepared for them since before the world began. Those on the left are sent into a fire prepared, not for human beings, but for the devil and his messengers. Those on the right go to eternal life, those on the left to eternal destruction. You could not have two outcomes, two destinations, more different than these two.

So, what makes the difference? What distinguishes the sheep from the goats? We are told nothing about what these two groups believed, or did not believe. We are told nothing about where they were born. We are not told whether they belonged to a church. We are not told how well they knew their Bibles. We are not told whether they had been to Bible College. We are not told whether they went to Christian conventions. Rather, we are told about what they did, and did not do, for Jesus.

To the sheep, Jesus says, in Matthew 25:35–36:
For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me some-
thing to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me,
I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.[8]

The sheep are taken by surprise. When did they see the Lord in such need and do this for Him? Jesus replies, Matthew 25:40: ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’[8]

And so it is with the goats, look at Matthew 25:42–45:

For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to
drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe
me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, ‘Lord,
when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison,
and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the
least of these, you did not do for me.’[8]

So who are ‘the least of these’ that Jesus speaks about? Are they all people in need, or are they Christians in need, or perhaps Christian missionaries being persecuted for their faith? It’s a good question, but I’m not sure it’s the question that God wants us to ask. Did you notice in the story that both the sheep and the goats are equally surprised to learn that they have met Jesus? I mean, you expect of it of the goats—they are goats after all—but surely the sheep would recognise their shepherd?

Here’s the point: the sheep weren’t sheep because they’d worked out exactly who in particular they should feed and clothe and visit to earn God’s blessing. I mean how could you earn a blessing when it has already been prepared for you before the foundation of the world?

The sheep fed and clothed and visited because they were sheep, because that’s what sheep do. Sheep listen to their shepherd’s voice, they follow in his footsteps. These sheep are following in the footsteps of Jesus, their good shepherd.

Let me remind you what Jesus has already said in this gospel. In Matthew 18:1–5 it says:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the
kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And
he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never
enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is
the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name
welcomes me.’[8]

Have you ever heard anyone say that it’s really their kids or grandkids that run the household? Well, it wasn’t like that in Jesus’s day. Children were without power, they were overlooked and they were at the bottom of the ladder. If you wanted someone to do a favour for you, a child
was the last person to ask. So, if you welcomed a child, it was a sure sign that you were being generous without any strings attached. You weren’t looking for a payback.

It’s the same in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5–7, where Jesus is teaching his disciples about how to give. Don’t be like those hypocrites who give so that other people will notice what they are doing. Don’t make sure people notice how much you put into the church plate, don’t mention to others how much you’ve given. Don’t look for a payback from people. Do all your giving in secret so that only your heavenly father sees what you are doing. Do you see the pattern?

Jesus calls his people to be givers. He calls us to give to everyone and anyone. He calls us to give without expecting anything back in return. Now, it takes faith to believe and act on those words of Jesus. It takes faith to believe that when we give and care we won’t miss out.

The sheep in this story had that kind of faith. They weren’t looking for a payback. After all, a hungry and thirsty person can’t invite you back for dinner. A naked person can’t help you out with money. A sick person can’t do a job for you. A person in prison can’t give you a bed for the night. Yet, these are the kind of people that sheep serve. In doing so, they find themselves serving Jesus, even when they don’t recognise Him at the time.

So, I ask myself, who am I looking to serve? Do I only serve people who’ll be able to serve me?

Think about hospitality for a moment. The Bible says that hospitality is important. It is so important that when God’s people are choosing leaders they are to look for people who show hospitality. What does hospitality look like? Where I live, a lot of hospitality is me inviting my neighbours over for dinner, knowing that they’ll probably pay me back by having me over for dinner. However, did you know that the New Testament word for hospitality means love of strangers, not love of friends?

Jesus says, if we just do good to people who’ll do good to us in return, then we’re no better than the pagans. It is when we love people who can’t pay us back, then we’re being a bit like our heavenly father. This is because that’s how God loves us.

Do you think we could ever pay back God for all that He has done for us? How could we ever pay Him back, when everything we see belongs to Him already? No, He loves us because of His grace. He loved us when we were hungry and thirsty and sick and imprisoned in our sin. He clothed us in his righteousness and welcomed us to his table and fed us with the living bread of the Lord Jesus.

Now is the time to love like God, to love those who can’t pay us back, whether they are hungry, sick or in prison. Think for a moment about the people you meet. Ask yourself ‘Who would never pay me back?’ Maybe that is the very person you need to bless.
What about those times when we are the ones who are hungry, or sick or in prison? What about those times when you are weak and feel as though you’ve been overlooked? Here’s the good news for every struggling Christian brother or sister. Jesus knows you, Jesus cares for you, Jesus stands alongside you and Jesus identifies with you. And Jesus will judge the nations on how they treat you.

We sometimes seem to think that Jesus especially likes to spend time with the rich and famous. We make a big fuss when a famous singer attends a Christian conference, we get all excited when a famous actor speaks about their faith. We pray that God will bless us with good health, or with lots of money, because we believe that will make our witness more powerful. We worry that, if we are weak, the gospel will look weak.

Friends, our God does not need our wealth or power or fame to make His gospel powerful! His gospel is powerful because it gives strength to the weak and hope to the hurting, because it saves those who cannot save themselves.

Our Lord Jesus is never ashamed of His hurting family. He is not ashamed of them when they are hungry. He is not ashamed of them when they are thirsty. He is not ashamed of them when they are naked. He is not ashamed of them when they are sick. He is not ashamed of them when they are in prison. He is not ashamed to be called their brother, our brother, your brother.

Friends, what love is this, that our Lord would love us so graciously, when we could offer him nothing in return? People who have been loved like that, love like that. People like William Cooper, who loved people he’d never met, because of the Lord who met him. Now is the time for serving the Lord we cannot see, by taking him at His word and serving those we can see.

May the Lord find us faithful when he returns. Amen.
Matthew 28:1–20

Jesus Has Risen

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you.’

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’

11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, ‘You are to say, “His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.”’ 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’[8]

Tjalkabota Uraiakuraia, a proud Western Arrente man, was just a small boy in 1877, when Lutheran missionaries first entered his country. When he was around 18, Tjalkabota was baptised and took the Christian name Moses. Time was to prove how fitting that name would be.
Moses experienced much tragedy in his life. When he was about 30, he went blind after an outbreak of measles. He, and his wife Sofia, saw the deaths of all their nine children and some grandchildren as well.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his hardships, Moses became a powerful preacher and evangelist. Even without his sight, he travelled far and wide across central Australia bringing God’s message. This is what happened on his first preaching trip:

*When Moses attempted to leave for Horseshoe Bend with the others, the locals begged him to stay. ‘Ingkartai (leader), don’t leave us. This is also your place. Teach us at this place. Don’t leave us… Don’t go and teach at Idracowa. Don’t go and teach at Horseshoe Bend. You can teach at these places later. First you must teach us.’ So, over the next four weeks, he began his new profession and, in so doing, became the first Aboriginal Evangelist travelling in central Australia. At a place called Tnaitnama near Henbury, he recalls that he began with the Commandments: ‘Then I started on the Old Testament with the story of creation. I told them everything as far as Adam. They had a real keen desire for the word of God.’ On the last Sunday of his stay he ‘taught them about Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes.’ They asked him to come again and told him they would go to the Mission: ‘We know that God truly exists.’*[17]*

Later, he became pastor of the church at Jay Creek, where he died in 1954. The book about Blind Moses was written by someone who knew him as a child. The author is not a Christian. Keep that in mind, as I read what he says about Moses:

*I was a rather wild young kid, and not much interested in communicating with my elders, but I never met anyone who impressed me more than Moses and haven’t since. He exuded an aura that moved all who came into contact with him. There is an Aranda term for an exceptional man like him: Ingkaarta akngerrapata—Ingkaarta, head man or man with all the wisdom and akngerrapata—a man of extreme wisdom and stature. [17]*

How do you explain how a person would leave such an impression on someone 50 years after they had died? This is more than the power of a human personality. This is the power in a person who has been changed by the spirit of God. This is the power in a person who is caught up in the mission of God.

We have come to the final scene in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus has already said a lot about what his followers must do as they wait for his second coming. We must continue to walk in God’s grace. We must hear and obey God’s word. We must pass on to others the gospel we have received. We must be generous to others just as God has been generous to us.

However, today is different. When Jesus spoke before, His suffering and death was still in the future. Now, the cross and the empty tomb are in the past. Then, He spoke as a suffering servant. Now, He speaks as the Risen Lord. Even so, we are told that some of the 11 disciples
who met with Him on the mountain of Galilee still doubted. Sometimes good news seems too
good to be true.

The disciples could still remember the angry mob who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of
Gethsemane. They could still feel the pain and shame of having left Jesus all alone in His time
of need. They’d heard how He was mocked and whipped, how He was nailed to the cross, how
His lifeless body was taken down and placed in a tomb.

Yes, they had heard other things as well. They’d heard how some women had gone to the
tomb early in the morning. They’d heard how the women had seen an angel who told them
that Jesus had been raised from the dead. All this had happened in just a few days. I think they
were still trying to work it all out.

Jesus does not condemn them. He comes near to them and speaks these words, Matthew
28:18: ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.’

When I was young I would sometimes wish I was king for a day. What changes I would make!
School would finish early. I would be allowed to eat my sweets before my vegetables. The
Parramatta Eels would win the Premiership. Such dreams!

Friends, Jesus is not king for a day. He is king for all time. Jesus is not king of one particular
place or of one particular people. He has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Every galaxy, every continent, every country, every city, every town, every office, every home,
every person. Jesus has authority there. He is king of all. That authority has been given to Jesus
by His heavenly father.

You may remember, when Jesus was in the wilderness, Satan made him an offer, Matthew 4:
‘He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said, ‘I will give you all these things if you
will fall down and worship me.’” [8]

Satan is saying: do it my way. No suffering. No serving others. No cross. You can have every-
thing you deserve and you can have it now!

Jesus knows that this is not His father’s way and it is not His way either, because first He must
suffer. First, He must be rejected. First, He must be killed. First, He must give His life as a ransom
for many. Then, and only then, will He receive all this and more from His father’s hand.

And we are His people. Never forget that—whatever other people might say or think about—
you are the son or daughter of the king. The mission we have is a royal mission.

What is that mission? Matthew 28:19–20, ‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching
them to obey everything I have commanded you’.
We saw in the last Bible study that all the nations will be judged by Jesus. Every human being who has ever lived will stand before Him to receive a curse or a blessing. Yet God is merciful and gracious. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

We wait for Jesus to come back. Meanwhile, He sends His followers to make disciples of those same nations—to announce to them that they have a king. Not a bad king who takes from them and mistreats them. Rather, a good king, a king who speaks the truth, a king who loves them enough to lay down His life for them.

That king gives His people a sign of the death that brings new life. In this period of waiting, the nations are to be baptised in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is because water brings death and water gives life. We are baptised into Jesus's death so that we might be raised to new life.

The nations must be discipled. The nations must be baptised. The nations must also be taught to obey all that Jesus commanded. There is more to mission than helping someone pray a prayer or calling them to come down the front. Yes, those can be helpful ways to begin a relationship with Jesus but, if that's all we offer to people, it's like bringing a baby to birth and then expecting the baby to look after itself.

Every newborn believer needs a family to teach them how to grow. You know, there was a time when most people in our communities had some idea of what it meant to live as a Christian, even if they weren't doing it. That time is long past. More and more we are going to see people coming to faith in Christ without any idea of what Jesus says about sex, or money, or prayer, or how they are to treat others. Now, if their faith in Christ is genuine it will show fruit over time. However, they will need the welcome and the encouragement and example of other believers.

Every church, every fellowship, needs to be a place for growing healthy believers.

What a mission this is! We are called to go to the nations. The same nations that killed Jesus. We are to go with nothing more than a message! That's why Jesus's final promise is so amazing. Matthew 20:28 says, ‘And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’[8]

When do you know and feel that Jesus is with you? Some people say, ‘I know that Jesus is with me when I see and hear the beauty of creation’.

Others say, ‘I know that Jesus is with me when I’m worshipping with my Christian brothers and sisters’.

Well, Jesus is with us in creation and when we worship together. But there is one place in particular where Jesus promises to be with us. That is when we are on His mission. Jesus promises to be with His people when they go to the nations in obedience to His command.
So what does that mean for us? When I was growing up, I somehow got the idea that mission was all about what happened in places a long way from me. Mission was for special people who travelled to other countries and learnt new languages. We could support them with our prayers and with our giving, but it was like they were on the footy ground playing while the rest of us watched from the stands.

Now, there was something true there. As we’ve seen, God’s mission is for all the nations, not just for people like us. But it is for people near like us and near us as well.

You see, there are no spectators in God’s mission. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, you are on the field! So, while we need a global vision, we also need local action.

First, the global vision. We live in a time when many Australians are worried about the nations. We hear about the terrible things that are happening in other nations and we worry, sometimes with good reason, recognising that those terrible things could happen here. We want to hide from the nations. We want to keep the nations out. We want to be safe.

I understand that.

However, God has not called His people to be safe. He has called his people to serve and sometimes to suffer. His mission has never been about hiding from the nations—it has always been about going to the nations.

Now, more than ever, we need to keep a big picture of what God is doing in our world. We need to believe that Jesus has a plan for Australia and Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria. We need to believe that plan will not be brought about at the end of a gun, but through the faithful witness of His disciples.

Does the mission of God to the nations have a place in your prayers and plans? Does it have a place in the prayers and plans of your church? Could God be calling someone here in this audience to be his ambassador to the nations?

Alongside that global vision, God calls us to local action. This is because your most important mission field is where you are now. Your town. Your family. Your school. Your workplace. Your sporting club. You are not in any of those places by accident. You are there because God has sent you.

God has sent you there as His missionary and they are the part of the nations that He has called you to disciple and baptise and teach. At the end of these studies, we will go out, just like the disciples went from that mountain in Galilee. Sometimes it’s hard to go. I reckon some of the disciples would have liked to stay on that mountain with Jesus.

Maybe there are some of us who would like to stay in Port Augusta, among so many brothers and sisters. But Jesus calls us to go. He calls us to go to places where not everyone knows and
loves Him. He calls us to go to places where people are hurting. He calls us to go, because that’s how his mission goes forward. And He promises that, when we go, He will be there with us every step of the way, just as he was with Blind Moses.

Yes, Jesus is coming—and what a glorious day that will be! As we wait, there is work for us to do. Keep on walking in God’s grace. Keep on hearing and doing God’s word. Keep on handing over the gospel. Keep on being generous. And keep on mission.

And when we meet again, may we have the blessing of entering into our master’s joy, now and forever. Amen.
Chapter 6: Honouring Indigenous Theology

Indigenous theology brings a deep understanding of how God, our creator, works. This section begins with the AEF Statement of Faith. This statement honours the Bible and is foundational for the fellowship. It is the platform for The Reverend Neville Naden's paper ‘Towards an Indigenous Theology’. Neville's paper reminds us of the centrality of the Bible and that God works all the time—before, and during, colonisation. This paper provides rich reading and questions that will hopefully make people curious about Indigenous theology and Indigenous Christian thinking.

AEF Statement of Faith

The AEF holds to the traditional biblical values and beliefs that were in our first Constitution as the basis for our faith and actions.

We believe:

a. in the unity of the Godhead, eternally existing in three persons, namely—the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. These being the same in substance and equal in power.

b. in the full Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

c. the Bible, as originally given, is the inspired Word of God completely free from error and is our authority and standard.

d. all men are born sinners and are lost and condemned. They are ‘at enmity with God’ and ‘without strength’ to do the will of God.

e. in the Divine provision of full Salvation by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the shedding of His blood. All who genuinely repent and believe in Jesus are eternally saved from the penalty and power of sin.

f. in the work of the Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion and consecration of a sinner.

g. the Church is the company of all who have been born again of the Holy Spirit and have been formed into one body of which Christ is the Head.

h. in the visible and bodily and personal return of Christ, to take the church out of this world.

i. in the final judgement and eternal punishment of unbelievers in hell.

j. in the eternal consciousness of the soul and the resurrection of the body—the saved to everlasting, Divine fellowship and the unbelievers to everlasting punishment.
k. in the personality of the devil, who will finally be punished in eternal hell prepared by God for him and his fallen angels.

_Towards an Indigenous Theology, by Reverend Neville Naden_

One of the most pressing issues for the Australian Church today is the question around Indigenous theology. How are we to understand theology in the light of our cultural context? Are we able to theologise about God in light of our culture? If so, what should be the boundaries by which we work? Is Indigenous theology important? Do we understand God’s relationship with us through our culture or through a culture that has been introduced?

Graham Paulson, an Aboriginal Baptist minister, says:

*The fact that Christianity in Aboriginal Australia appears to be boxed in by Western European cultures is a fact of history that has to be challenged if Christian faith is to be fully embraced by Indigenous peoples.*[22](p. 310)

Paulson goes on to say:

*If evangelisation means the telling of the story of the gospel as it was acculturated in the western world, and translated into the sub-cultures of denominational religious institutions, then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been very well evangelised. But if the process of evangelising includes the telling of the biblical stories in ways which connect with our deepest spiritual expectations, evoking practices in tune with our own cultures, then we were not well evangelised at all.*[22](p. 310)

What is Paulson saying? He is saying that the gospel presented to Aboriginal people over many years has come to them packaged in a Western European world view. This type of thinking does not contextualise the gospel into an Indigenous framework.

But how are we to understand the Bible? How do we contextualise the gospel into the world view of the First Nations people of this country? Is it possible to take something that has been taught to us from a European world view with the hope of understanding it from an Indigenous world view? Or is the understanding of the gospel only available through the Church that brought it to these shores?

Where is our starting point for addressing these questions and more?
Friends, I am a firm believer that any starting point must begin with the Bible itself. Not only must it begin with the Bible, but the Bible must be the authority by which we measure all things pertaining to understanding theology. Why? Because the Bible contains the source of truth that is reliable at every turn. If the Bible is not our authority, then we can believe whatever we want about God and such belief may not be consistent with biblical truth.

In saying that, where do we start when grappling with this subject of Aboriginal spirituality and theology?

Our starting point is Genesis 1, ‘In the beginning God created’. Our starting point has to be God. He is the eternal existence of life and He is the creator of all that is. It was He who spoke things into being and it was He who has total authority over his creation. The triune God at work in creating all that is. God the creator spoke things into being and thus, we have the world as we have come to know it.

In the first two chapters of Genesis we have creation. In Chapter 3, we have the fall. Adam and Eve are dismissed from the presence of God as a result of their disobedience. In Genesis 4 we see the beginning of family. Cain and Abel are born. We are also exposed to the effects of sin. Cain kills Abel and is cast out of the land in which he lived. We are then exposed to his lineage. At the end of Chapter 4, we are told that Adam and Eve have another son and they name him Seth. Seth then has a son and names him Enoch. We are told it was at that time people began to call on the name of the Lord (verse 26). When we come to Chapter 5, we have a genealogy of Adam’s family line. At the end of Chapter 5, we are told that, after 500 years, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth. Then, in Chapters 6 and 7, sin increases in the world and God sends a flood to wipe out humanity. God regretted that he had made human beings on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled. What did God do? He caused it to rain for 40 days and nights. There was a universal flood. Noah builds a boat and, with his three sons and their wives, enters the ark and were saved. After the flood waters subside, Noah and his family are instructed to leave the ark and to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth. We know that they were fruitful and multiplied, but they remained together as one large family on the plains of Shinar in total disobedience to God’s command. In Chapter 11, we find that they built a tower called Babel. God comes down and confuses the languages and people, who are then dispersed across the face of the earth. God was fulfilling his plan, in spite of the disobedience of the humans he created.

Now, why am I telling you this?

I am telling you this because, prior to the dispersion and the introduction of languages, God was revealing himself to humanity on a universal basis. There were no distinctions made between tribes or nations. Nations were not established until the introduction of languages in Chapter 11. All of humanity was exposed to a creator God. They all spoke the same language and came from the same family. When God introduces languages, the people disperse and they take with them their understanding of God.
In Genesis Chapter 12: 1–3, God calls out Abram (also known as Abraham) from the throngs of humanity. Note what he says:

\[\text{The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’}\]

What was the calling of Abram all about? God wanted to fulfil his plan of redemption through Abraham’s line. Genesis 12:2 says, ‘I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’

From Genesis 12 onwards, we have the unfolding of God’s plan to redeem mankind back to himself, and it was through Abraham’s offspring that this would take place. But was God going to use all of Abraham’s family? No! The promise and fulfillment of this plan would come through Jesus.

In Matthew Chapter 1:2–16, we have a genealogy of Jesus’s life:

\[\text{Abraham was the father of Isaac,}\]
\[\text{Isaac the father of Jacob,}\]
\[\text{Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,}\]
\[\text{Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,}\]
\[\text{Perez the father of Hezron,}\]
\[\text{Hezron the father of Ram,}\]
\[\text{Ram the father of Amminadab,}\]
\[\text{Amminadab the father of Nahshon,}\]
\[\text{Nahshon the father of Salmon,}\]
\[\text{Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,}\]
\[\text{Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,}\]
\[\text{Obed the father of Jesse,}\]
\[\text{and Jesse the father of King David.}\]
\[\text{David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife,}\]
\[\text{Solomon the father of Rehoboam,}\]
\[\text{Rehoboam the father of Abijah,}\]
\[\text{Abijah the father of Asa,}\]
\[\text{Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,}\]
\[\text{Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,}\]
\[\text{Jehoram the father of Uzziah,}\]
\[\text{Uzziah the father of Jotham,}\]
\[\text{Jotham the father of Ahaz,}\]
\[\text{Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,}\]
\[\text{Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,}\]
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
and Josiah the father of Jeconiah[c] and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,
Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.[8]

As we consider the text in Matthew, we find that the promise has continued through Isaac then Jacob, then Judah and so on. You can follow their story by reading the Old Testament scripture.

God was unfolding his plan of redemption. Therefore, in the Bible we have God fulfilling His plan of redemption through one man and his offspring. What of all the other children of Abraham? Remember, prior to Isaac being born, Abraham became the father of Ishmael. Following the birth of Isaac, Abraham became the father of other children by Katurah. But they don’t feature in this plan of redemption. God had a plan in mind, and He knew exactly how He was going to fulfil this plan and who would and wouldn’t be involved.

But what of the other nations? Did God forget about them? Was there no purpose for their existence? Did God disperse them and leave them to their own devices? I would think not. God was still revealing himself to his created humanity. In Chapter 14, we come across a man by the name of Melchizedek. He was a priest of the Most High. God was still speaking to him and his people, whoever they were, and revealing himself to them. Then, in Exodus 2, we come across Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law. He was a priest of Midian. A non-Hebrew, a person who was not of Israel’s (Jacob’s) line. God continued to reveal himself to him.

When we think of our Bible, we tend to understand it from a Hebraic, Greek and Roman mindset, for in it we see Middle Eastern culture being played out. But what about the other cultures of the world? Are there other nations that have encountered God? Of course there are. Abraham gave birth to more sons than Isaac and Ishmael. He had another seven sons to Keturah, one of whom was named Midian. His line were the people of Midian, the Midianites. We need to remember that the promise was through Abraham, Isaac, then Jacob and then through Judah and the list goes on. But did God forget the others? Of course not. In Exodus 2, God is still having a relationship with Midian’s family.
So how are we to understand the other cultures of the world? Did God allow their cultures to develop and was He still revealing himself to the other nations outside the Israelite family? Of course He was. But what about their cultures and belief systems? How are we to approach them? Well, I believe that the Bible, as it stands, is the authority upon which God has had a relationship with the Hebrew people. I also believe that it has to be the yardstick by which we vet all our understanding of who God is. He is the creator, He is the eternal existence of life and He is the beginning and the end. There is no other God but He. Note, Hebrews 1:

\[
\text{God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. [1]}
\]

But what about the various theophanies of the Bible? Where God revealed himself through a burning bush, or a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night? Other theophanies include thunder and lightning (Psalm 18:7–15, Exodus 19:16, Amos 1:2, Zechariah 9:14). Then there are volcanoes (Exodus 19:18, Isa 30:33). In Isaiah 29:5–6 the presence of God is indicated by earthquakes. There are many pictures of God’s existence through what He has created. Just as God revealed himself to the Hebrew nation by using his creation in the Old Testament, He does so to all the other nations of the world. But, how do we know if what has been revealed is of God or not? This is when the Bible comes into play. The Bible records God’s work of redemption for His family.

Can we understand God through what He has created? Of course we can. In Romans 1:18:

\[
\text{For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.[8]}
\]

God was revealing himself to his created humanity through his creation.

I believe that our people developed an understanding of God through what God had created.

John Harris, in his book One Blood, points out:

\[
\text{God was not indiscernible to Aboriginal people, a religious people who sought to relate to their environment in spiritual terms. What the Christians among the white settlers did bring, whether they realised it or not, was the knowledge of Christ.[23](p. 23)}
\]

Aboriginal people had their own Old Testament story to tell. What they didn’t have was the knowledge of Jesus, that second part of the story. God had allowed our people to develop their own cultural identity and understanding of who He was. As with most cultures of the world, including the European culture, Aboriginal culture had to go through a process
of transformation. What frustrates Aboriginal people is that the churches of Australia are so quick to accept the cultures of other people’s groups of the world, but stand in defiance and judgement when it comes to the First Nations peoples of this country.

Friends, if we are to contextualise God’s word into our thinking, the Bible itself has to be the final authority on things pertaining to this topic of Indigenous contextualisation. If we are to grapple with the Christian faith of Aboriginal people in this country, then it stands to reason that the issue of theology is of vital importance. Grappling with the issue of Indigenous theology has to also be a major priority for the Church today, if Aboriginal people are to be encouraged and given their rightful place in the life of the church. This is not to say that the Church has to change its message, rather, it has to change its method. The message has to be the same—the appropriation of the message must be different.

May God bless you all, as you seek to do just that.
Concluding Comments

This book celebrates God’s faithfulness to Aboriginal Christians through the movement of the AEF. It also challenges stereotypes regarding the First Nations people of Australia and their Christian faith. The stories in this book show the amazing capacity of Indigenous people for ministry and their willingness to do what God called them to do—regardless of adversity, opposition and hardship. The uniqueness of the AEF story, outlined in this book, can be seen through Pastor Gerald and Jacqueline Eades’ summary below.

A Celebration of God’s Faithfulness, by Pastor Gerald and Jacqueline Eades

A great gathering took place in 2016, at our national convention in Port Augusta. We gathered to say thank you to the remaining founding members and their wives. We celebrated with a testimonial dinner and shared yarns, laughter and tears. We heard of hardship, determination, commitment and consistency. These men, with their supporting wives, and their stories of crossing the plains to form a most powerful ministry that has touched the lives of many of our dear people right across this great land of ours. This ministry brought men and women together from all parts and states, east and west. They have made Australia a better place.

Candles were lit for former members. This brought an atmosphere of reverent respect. Having remaining dear leaders with us was a great blessing, as was remembering those gone.

The founders were chosen of God. They gave of themselves, asking no questions, being obedient to their call. They wanted a ministry of fellowship. They had very little, yet they covered this land with a message of basic Bible teaching and it was so powerful. The sharing brought such beautiful stories and memories that remain in our hearts today.

Pastor Neville Lilley and others presented the history, then there was a tribute. One of the highlights was the presentation by Dr Maxine Knapp of the history in paper form, or book, to the Foundational Council members, part of which has been reproduced in this publication.
We honour those who were there and were touched as we remembered those gone home to glory. What a powerful ministry, when God raises up men and women who are led by God’s spirit and it becomes a great journey. These AEF members have a place in our history books and when we speak of them today it brings tears to our eyes.

There is so much we can write, and it's a blessing to know God laid this ministry in the heart of dedicated men and women. We say thank you for our Federal Council men and their wives and the many others who put their hands up and helped. Folk travelled from many parts to stay for the blessed convention. It was a great joy during the week to hear the singing, messages and testimonies. Our God was glorified in every way.

We saluted our Foundational Members and we said thank you to those who have passed on to be with our Lord Jesus. We acknowledge those who have gone—their testimonies will always remain in our hearts. Our lives have been enriched and the 2016 AEF Convention was a rich blessing in so many ways.
Appendix 1: Part of the Purpose for AEF

The AEF was established for many reasons, including the following purposes:\textsuperscript{83}

- To bring together Evangelical Christian people of Aboriginal and Islander descent from various parts of Australia for united fellowship and service.
- To take the gospel to all Australians, particularly emphasising evangelistic outreach to Aborigines.
- To encourage the establishment and development of local evangelical churches.
- To organise a national convention for the deepening of the spiritual life of Aboriginal Christians.
- To help arrange special, evangelistic, Bible teaching and children’s missions in member Churches.
- To help fellowships and other groups where the gospel is being preached to form local churches.
- To advise and assist local churches linked with the fellowship (when requested).
- To assist Pastors approved by the fellowship to get in touch with local churches that may wish to call them to service.
- To arrange means of cooperation between Churches that have already been formed so they can help and encourage one another.
- To encourage each member Church to have an increasing missionary interest and a greater burden to reach out in evangelism. [24]

\textsuperscript{83} The editors are grateful to AEF for permission to print part of the AEF Statement of Purposes. We encourage you to read the statement in full at http://www.aef.org.au/aefconstitution.pdf. AEF has also given permission for this information to be used with associated activities and publicity of this book.
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5. Crouch, A 2016, Bless His Holy Name, on-line video, viewed 31 July 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2JOZ9h8MU
By the 1960’s God was raising up Aboriginal Christian leaders, and this book tells us a bit about how He drew these leaders together from across the country for fellowship and support of each other. God gave them a platform from which to demonstrate their leadership in reaching out with the Gospel. It also shows their commitment and dedication to the task, and clearly demonstrates the faithfulness of God in it all. Enjoy!

Pastor Denis Atkinson, AEF Federal Councillor

This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the growth of Indigenous Christianity in Australia. The great strength of the book is hearing the stories of God’s work in the lives of so many Aboriginal Christian people in the past and seeing that this work continues today.

Dr Jude Long, Principal, Nungalinya College, Darwin, Australia

This is a warmly encouraging book, enriched by the stories of so many men and women who responded to the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ upon their lives. It opens up to us a generation of truly remarkable Christian people who provided leadership within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The book is an important contribution to our understanding of the history of the Church in Australia.

Stuart Coulton, Principal, Sydney Missionary and Bible College (SMBC), Sydney, Australia

This book is an invitation to all its readers to join with the AEF members in celebrating God’s faithfulness to His people. It is the story of men and women from all over Australia brought together by our Lord and shows the grace of God at work in their lives, individually and in community. Read it and be encouraged.

Fred (Chairman) and Jill Chilton, The Bush Church Aid Society

What a delight to read this interesting and inspiring account of the history, growth, and ministry of this Indigenous work of God! May God raise up future generations of Christ-focused and gospel bearing Indigenous leaders, for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and churches, for the benefit of Australia as a whole, and for his glory.

Revd Dr Peter Adam, OAM, Vicar Emeritus of St Jude’s Carlton, Melbourne, Australia

This mesmerising anthology of Indigenous testimony, teaching and praise to God elegantly introduces us to the thought, experience and practice of evangelical Aboriginal Christians and the ministry of Australia’s Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. Indigenous people and their friends engage with the historical, social and post-colonial issues faced by Aboriginal people, yet with heartfelt love for Christ who seeks to save all people and with joyful optimism about all that God can do for this nation. I heartily commend it to you.

Revd Dr Andrew Cameron, Director, St Marks Theological Centre, Canberra, Australia; Associate Professor, School of Theology, Charles Sturt University, Canberra, Australia