

IN PARTNERSHIP

July 2019



Some of the W.A. Surrender attendees: (L-R) Judy Dann, Leigh Dann, Margaret Moses-Martin, and Tahneqa Dann

Connecting to Country



For many Indigenous people their relationship with the land is a deep and sacred connection, characterised by reciprocity and respect. Land is more than a commodity or a place where someone resides. It shapes and informs every aspect of their lives, from their law and spirituality through to their culture, family and sense of identity.

In March this year, Indigenous Ministries Australia (IMA) was able to support nine people to attend the Melbourne Surrender conference. Surrender is held on Wurrundjeri land, near what is now the suburb of Belgrave. For many of the attendees it was their first time at such a gathering, providing a unique opportunity to connect with other Indigenous Christian leaders from across the country.

Through the Welcome to Country ceremony, Surrender showed its deep respect and honour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians were called to reflect on the sacredness of place and God's desire for healing between all peoples.

Margaret Moses-Martin, from the Port Hedland church, gave a moving response to the welcome that she received on Wurundjeri land from Aunty Joy Murphy, acknowledging both her family connection to the people of the Pilbara and to the Noongar people of the South West. "Tears have been just rolling from my

eyes all afternoon. I respect you for coming and it means much to me..."

For many Indigenous Australians, Welcome to Country is not simply marking an arrival. It reflects their relationship with the land. In a recent film documentary, Dena Gower, one of IMA's Council members, shared about her special connection to the land along the banks of the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River, Perth).

"I wonder what it was like when my mob were here. Their spirits were free and happy. They didn't have any noise...just the noise of the language and the people. I get a real sense of peace from the river. People have to understand that our connection to the land is real, it's not something we make up. Because when you put your feet in the sand or your hands in the water of the river you are a part of it, you're connecting to it. I think what Australia needs to learn is that the land does so much – it feeds us, it shelters us, it gives us finances, it takes care of our children. The land gives so much back to us. It's like if you go into somebody's garden and you look at their garden and think 'wow, that's beautiful, how did you look after that? That rose is growing lovely, oh look at the fruit tree'... It's like with us, when you come with us, wow that river's beautiful, how did you look after it, then we'll tell you."

Knowing the significance of land as a relationship and culture to Indigenous Australians helps non-Indigenous people understand why Welcome

to Country is important – culturally and spiritually. It gives a deeper understanding to why the forced removal of Indigenous people from their land was a devastating process.

In their piece, "The importance of land", Australians Together say "for many Indigenous people, colonisation did more than steal their land, it stole their very identity. Despite this history, many Indigenous people today maintain a close connection to their Country."

We encourage you to watch and share the Indigenous Ministries Australia video clip 'Welcome to Country', and consider reading Chris Budden's Following Jesus in Invaded Spaces: Doing Theology on Aboriginal land or Aboriginal historian Bruce Pascoe's, Dark Emu, to find out more about this topic.

You can also find a Thanksgiving Study Kit at www.gmp.org.au/IMAKits which contains resources to help you talk about this at your church.

Colin Battersby,
Partnership Coordinator, WA

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News & Events



NAIDOC Week 7-14 July

This year's theme is "Voice. Treaty. Truth. Let's work together for a shared future." This seeks to encourage all Australians to recognise the desire of Indigenous Australians to have a fair role and voice in decision making in our wonderful country so that we can all move forward together.

Join us at IMA in celebrating NAIDOC week this year in your church and community! There's heaps you can do including running a church service using our new Church Resource Kit, or join with a NAIDOC week event in your local area: www.naidoc.org.au/get-involved/naidoc-week-events More details in the article on the back of this In Partnership.

Kate and Dave Powell

A big GMP congratulations to Dave Powell and Kate Appleby who were married in January! They have concluded their roles with GMP as IMA Chaplains in the Kimberly, WA. We are thankful for their ministry and pray for the very best as God leads them in their next season of married life together.

Safe Water September

Safe Water September has launched for 2019! Globally, 1 in 9 people still don't have access to safe water close to home. We want to change this, and we challenge you to join us! For the month of September, drink nothing but water and raise funds for safe water projects in Zimbabwe and Vanuatu. Find out more and sign up today at: SafeWaterSeptember.org.au



"Rebuilding the walls was a physical response to the destruction of Jerusalem. In doing so people's lives, outlook and perspectives were transformed."

The Common Good

I was listening to a sermon on the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. We were hearing about the courage of Nehemiah and the way he spoke to the King. In some ways, getting permission was the easy part. The challenge lay ahead. In the rebuilding, the Jews, priests, nobles, officials and workers all needed to play their part.

Nehemiah addresses them. They listen, respond, act and say, "Let us start building". The writer then comments, "So they committed themselves to the common good" (Nehemiah 2:18 NRSV). Opposition follows, they are mocked and ridiculed by others and the work begins. What a motivation committed to the common good.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says the same about the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit — that the gifts are for the 'common good' (1 Corinthians 12:7).

I reflected...What does it mean today when we affirm a commitment to the common good? It takes us outside of ourselves and into the realm of investing in the experience of others so that their well-being is lifted, and their experience of life is transformed. The common good also implies that we are part of positive change as well. We benefit as others benefit. Their well-being and ours are fundamentally linked. To invest in the common good is

to invest in a new experience of community.

So, what does such a commitment mean today? Where could it lead us? Can we say that as we enter into a journey of compassion and justice with our Indigenous sisters and brothers we are doing so for the common good? Australia will not be whole until our First Peoples have justice, are healed, and experience trust and hope. Australia's Indigenous people are the most incarcerated on earth, and as one Christian Indigenous leader said, "We are not bad people"! The common good is built in every small step we take towards reconciliation.

As we use the gifts that God has blessed us with, as we share and empower others, as we listen without judgement and respond with compassion and warmth, we work for the common good.

Rebuilding the walls was a physical response to the destruction of Jerusalem. In doing so people's lives, outlook and perspectives were transformed. They could trust their environment again. Meaning was found in the rebuilding of their city. Friends, let us be deeply committed to the common good, in Australia and overseas.

John Gilmore,
Executive Officer



Ilker Deli and Brendon Garlett at Dareton Youth and Community Centre

SPOTLIGHT

Being Open to Opportunity

The Dareton Youth and Community Drop-In Centre is a positive and safe place for local Indigenous youth around Dareton, NSW. They warmly welcome anyone in the community, and work with other agencies to run programs like art, sewing and music groups. Recently, a group from Gisborne Church of Christ visited the Centre through their own partnership with the project. Dave Gallus reflects on this visit below.

Reconciliation is a journey that starts at a threshold moment when there is a revelation about your relationship with another person or group of people. That revelation may be mustard-seed small or big-bang large; either way the journey that follows will be challenging, exciting, heart-breaking and life-giving in multi-dimensional ways.

Gisborne Church of Christ is on Wurundjeri country, 65km northwest of Melbourne. For some time we've been exploring how we as a church can engage in reconciliation with the First Peoples of this land now called Australia, both as individuals and

as a congregation. We've been learning how important it is to sit and listen to the stories of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, whether they are easy to hear or difficult to accept.

We recently had the privilege of a small team visiting Sunraysia Indigenous Ministries at Dareton, NSW, on Barkindji country just over the Murray River from Mildura, to spend time with Ilker Deli and the mob at the Dareton Youth And Community Drop-In Centre. There was no plan beyond being there. And that was the essence of our time. To be. To be there. To be open. To be ready for whatever happened. To be looking for the opportunity to participate in Christ's presence. To be fit enough to play pool and table tennis and PlayStation for two hours with the kids who know and trust Ilker and his purpose. To be brave enough to play darts with kids so excited they won't wait for you to clear the dartboard before they throw. To be game enough to share in a feast and join in table-chat about things you don't know about. To be humble about life and not judge by applying media-delivered

stereotypes to kids and teenagers. To be able to see hope where statistics say otherwise.

Thanks so much to Dareton Uniting-Church of Christ, Wentworth Uniting and Mildura Church of Christ for your support to Sunraysia Indigenous Ministries and for welcoming us. And thanks so much to Ilker for sharing your joy and generosity and passion for this ministry Christ has laid on your heart. You gave us so much to mull over on our way home that the 500km trip to Melbourne wasn't long enough. Hopefully, some of the same kids are there next time we come so we can extend the relationships in our journey of learning and reconciliation.

You can also support the Dareton Youth and Community Drop-In Centre through GMP's partnership with them. You can find out more information, and give today, by visiting: www.gmp.org.au/what-we-do/projects/australia/dareton-youth-and-community-centre



Voice. Treaty. Truth. Let's Work Together for a Shared Future.

NAIDOC stands for *National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee*. Learn more about the history of NAIDOC Week at: www.naidoc.org.au/about/history

This year's NAIDOC theme: Voice. Treaty. Truth. has been inspired by the reforms set out in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart: www.1voiceuluru.org/the-statement which outlined the need for a First Nations Voice to the Australian Parliament enshrined in the Constitution, a shared and truthful understanding of our history and the establishment of the Makarrata Commission to "supervise treaty processes and truth-telling."

While the 1967 referendum and the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations mark significant moments when the country has sought to listen to Australia's First Peoples, symbolic gestures of reconciliation are not sufficient to heal the deep wounds that lie at the heart of our nation's psyche. It requires spaces for truth-telling and deep listening.

For many First Peoples, the approach to reconciliation supported by the church rings hollow. The Australian church has often disregarded the agency of First Peoples in the reconciliation process, preferring to impose its "own version" of reconciliation. Hence there is growing suspicion and apathy toward non-Indigenous led

reconciliation agendas. Theologian Robert Schreiter contends that "[f]or a past truly to be overcome, people must come to a common memory of it. Otherwise, the present perpetuates the divisions of the past."¹ For the church to question its own history is to acknowledge the unreliability of its own memory and assume a posture of humility and vulnerability as it listens to uncomfortable counter-histories and counter-memories. Only then will the church in Australia be able to honour and embrace God's incredible gift of the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

NAIDOC Week provides a wonderful opportunity for the faith community to engage in such spaces and to learn from and celebrate the rich culture and history of Australia's First Peoples. As stories are shared and historical assumptions are challenged, the Church in Australia can begin to walk in greater solidarity with Indigenous Australians, in the pursuit of justice and renewed relationship.

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1. Robert Schreiter, *Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 94-5, Kindle.

Events

This year is the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages so, as part of NAIDOC week, IMA will be hosting and supporting various events that celebrate the languages and cultures of Australia's First Peoples.

Charmaine Councillor from the Bunbury Aboriginal Christian Fellowship will be facilitating two interactive singing workshops. Learn about Noongar culture as they practice and then perform gospel songs in Noongar language.

July 7th – Fremantle Church
www.trybooking.com/book/event?eid=508952&

July 8th – Dalkeith Rd Church
www.trybooking.com/book/event?eid=508850&

July 13th – Gospel Concert at Lifestreams Church
www.facebook.com/events/2301091756774445/



IMA Resource Kits

IMA has put together some resources for you to use at your church, to help explore Reconciliation and Thanksgiving with regard to Indigenous Australian land, culture and people. Resource Kits available for download at:

www.gmp.org.au/IMAKits