

IN PARTNERSHIP

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Walk Alongside Young Indigenous Leaders

As a teenager, Lonny had no sense of direction. He sought answers through drugs, alcohol, and relationships. "Being a kid, I didn't know where I'd go in the world." When Lonny's aunty invited him to church, he met Uncle Don Hayward. Uncle Don is an Aboriginal Elder who guided Lonny and helped him find a greater purpose in life.

Lonny, a Wirangu and Wongi man, came to faith in 2015. He says, "Uncle Don has been with me the whole journey." It has been a "consistent and encouraging" mentoring friendship ever since.

Uncle Don has walked alongside Lonny.

There have been many significant mentoring relationships within the Churches of Christ movement. Within an Indigenous context, Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls (1906-1988) walked alongside Pastor Sonny Graham. From 1958 to 1961, Sonny was the first Indigenous student at Glen Iris Bible College, Victoria. It was here, during his studies, that Sir Douglas sowed seeds into Sonny's life.

Both are well known for their work advancing Indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and reconciliation in

Australia. As well as shepherding congregations and providing spiritual leadership. Their stories provide valuable insight into Indigenous intergenerational support and collaboration. A testimony to seeds sown and nurtured, now giving hope for the next generation.

The seeds sown and nurtured by Uncle Don in Lonny's life have continued to grow. Lonny is now the associate pastor at the Melbourne Indigenous Church Fellowship. He is also a young leader supported through the Indigenous Ministries Australia (IMA) Pathways program.

IMA Pathways provides support for young Indigenous leaders' development. IMA is a program of Global Mission Partners.

Lonny completed his diploma at Ridley Bible College, Victoria, in 2022. IMA Pathways helped support Lonny by providing access to resources and travel. The Pathways program also sponsored Uncle Don Hayward to attend Lonny's graduation.

Lonny said that having his mentor attend the graduation was, "Wow! A major milestone in my life." With support from his elders and IMA, he said, "Everyone has been there for me."

Lonny believes investing in young Aboriginal leaders is crucial to developing Indigenous communities. "A lot of Aboriginal Elders and pastors are elderly now. We need young fellas to stand up. Young fellas can stand up in sports, work and trades... so who is standing up for faith?" he shared.

Lonny knows the challenges involved in pursuing ministry and training. He left his home in Adelaide, South Australia, to study in Melbourne, Victoria. It was daunting, but he took a leap of faith and found the confidence to take more steps.

Lonny is continuing his studies in ministry this year. He will graduate with a bachelor's degree.

Global Mission Partners seeks to support more young Indigenous people like Lonny. Through initiatives like IMA Pathways and your support, it is possible!

You can invest in the future of Indigenous leadership when you support the Walk for Hope Easter Appeal. Give today and help provide support to people like Lonny.

www.walkforhope.org.au

News & Events

Walk for Hope Easter Appeal

This Easter your gift can help grow seeds of faith in the lives of young Indigenous leaders. Your support will provide resources to emerging leaders like Lonny, a young, Wirangu and Wongi man from South Australia. Help Aboriginal leaders develop their calling to ministry, access culturally appropriate mentoring and enable Christian outreach in Indigenous communities. Let's walk together in hope. Give today at www.walkforhope.com.au

Melbourne Songlines Tour

You can begin or continue a partnership journey alongside Indigenous Christians through the Songlines walking tour in Melbourne. The tour is designed to offer an insight into local Indigenous history and culture. To increase awareness and sensitivity to the social, political, physical and spiritual forces affecting many Indigenous Australians both in the past and today. To arrange a small group tour please contact Sheree on 1800 467 222 or sign up today at www.gmp.org.au/EasterSonglines

In Loving Memory of Dr Francine Ngardarb Riches

We are deeply saddened to share that we have lost one of our respected Aboriginal church leaders and Kimberley Elders, Francine Riches. Along with her husband Tony, they established the Melbourne Indigenous Church Fellowship. Francine provided many years of pastoral and community support in Aboriginal communities around Australia. Francine was also heavily involved in the Arts; this included painting, producing sculptures (Public Art), conducting art therapy sessions, and illustrating children's books. Our deepest condolences go to the Riches family and friends from all of us at Global Mission Partners.



Left: Carly and the ICCM Team (Jericho far left). Right: Lyric working at a computer.

Discovering the Heart Behind Education

Carly and her daughter travelled through the heavy traffic of Manila. Observing sights, sounds, and smells, they described the experience as a "sensory overload." They were heading to the International Christian College of Manila (ICCM).

Arthur Santiago, ICCM Chair of the Board, drove Carly and her daughter on their journey. He looked after them with mangos, water and friendly conversation. Upon arriving at the college, the staff greeted them kindly with more offers of food and drink. "I could tell that they were incredibly servant-hearted. A theme that runs deep amongst the Filipino people," Carly said.

Carly is familiar with Filipino hospitality, having visited there three times before. Yet, this was her first time meeting these international church partners as the National Church Relationships Manager for Global Mission Partners.

Carly expected to hear stories of academic excellence and church planting. But the theme of hospitality continued, and Carly discovered the heart of the college. She explained that it was more like "an intentional and supportive family home. Role modelling the teaching, the compassion, and the love of Christ."

Jericho, known as Jecoy, is a graduate of ICCM. He gave Carly and her daughter a tour of the facilities. He is now a professor there. "As he walked and talked us through each area of ICCM, you could hear his love for the place," Carly shared. She learned that many part-time staff volunteered extra

hours to help the students.

"They are a Bible college and offer theological training to develop pastors and strong Christian leaders. However, they also focus on providing their students with a sustainable future. Equipping them through an education course and shaping them into some of the most wonderful teachers in the country," Carly explained.

One fourth-year student that Carly met was endeavouring to finish her studies well. "Lyric was working away on the computer during our tour, and I stopped to say 'hello' as I passed by. It was during their free time, yet she was still working away. I asked her how she felt about finishing her course and her hopes for after graduation. She smiled and asked for prayer over that."

It was then time for Carly and her daughter to say goodbye. The welcoming atmosphere and servanthood of the staff impressed them the most.

"The trip back to Manila airport seemed shorter, the traffic lighter and the sounds quieter. Or perhaps it was due to the new familiarity I had found." Carly shared how the new friendships and relationships had created a sense of ease. "Compared to the initial journey to an unfamiliar destination," she said.

You can find out more or support the International Christian College of Manila on the Global Mission Partners website here www.gmp.org.au/iccm



SPOTLIGHT

Celebrating Women like Ashwini

International Womens Day 2024

Ashwini invited Danny and Smita to visit her home in the slums of Mumbai, India. Walking past the makeshift dwellings, they saw many children playing in the dirty streets. Ashwini wanted to show Danny and Smita all the children who were not at school. Danny remembers thinking, “Is there something we can do for them?”

Danny and Smita Gaikwad are from Hosanna Ministries, one of Global Mission Partners’ Relief and Development partners. They first met Ashwini when she enrolled in the Hosanna Ministries tailoring course. She has since joined the Hosanna Ministries team as one of the project coordinators.

Ashwini knows what it is like to grow up in the slums. She shared how common it is for girls not to attend school. They stay home with their mothers, learning domestic skills and they might enter an arranged marriage as young as 15-years-old. “The community focuses on the boys’ education. Girls are not important. Boys can then go on to join their father’s business or labour work,” Ashwini said.

Unlike many of the children playing among the rubbish, Ashwini received an education.

“My parents were very supportive and encouraged me to attend school,” Ashwini said.

When asked what might happen to the children on the streets, she described their future: “If they are not learning, then their future is blank.”

Ashwini loves learning. That is why she enrolled in the tailoring course at Hosanna Ministries. Ashwini learned new skills to sew garments for weddings. This skill now provides her with a small income. “I’m using that money for my future education.” Ashwini no longer relies on her parents for financial support.

Ashwini dreams of further education but also wants to further education for others. With the support and guidance of Danny and Smita, Ashwini has started a preschool! Ashwini specifically says, “The education of girls is very important.”

The Little Pumpkin Preschool began in Ashwini’s home in 2019. When COVID restrictions eased, she rented a small room in the community. Danny and Smita helped Ashwini renovate the “shabby” interiors. Children no longer play aimlessly on the

streets because they can attend Ashwini’s preschool. “As they grow, we will counsel their parents. To help encourage them to continue their children’s education in local schools,” Danny reports.

Ashwini’s education has motivated her to assist other children, especially girls. She accessed guidance, resources, and skills through Hosanna Ministries. With that support, Ashwini has become a role model in her community, setting an example for her family and friends.

On International Women’s Day (IWD), we celebrate women like Ashwini and partners like Hosanna Ministries, who support the inclusion of women within their projects. The theme of IDW 2024 is ‘Inspire Inclusion.’

Ashwini’s story reminds us of the special role that women play in creating a better world. Her journey can inspire other women to participate in education, empowerment, and community support, to create positive change and transform lives.



The GMP team and IMA guests sharing dinner after the Raising Our Tribal Voice for Justice conference

Hope for an Emerging Generation

Last month, I had the opportunity to attend the Raising Our Tribal Voice for Justice conference hosted by the University of Divinity in Melbourne.

This conference brought together Christian Indigenous theologians, leaders and thinkers from across Australia and the Pacific region, representing many church denominations. Rob Nyhuis, Executive Officer of the Churches of Christ VIC/TAS joined me, representing the Council of Churches of Christ in Australia (CCCA).

I attended the conference to listen and hear what God is doing among our Indigenous brothers and sisters. I was mindful that the Voice referendum was only just behind us. What I heard was ongoing pain, current and from the past, caused by colonialism, church abuse and ongoing cultural suspicion, often among Christians. This was painful for me to hear and acknowledge.

One of the speakers explained that many Indigenous people continue to be asked “Why do you bother going to church when it’s hurt so many Aboriginal people?”

Elverina Johnson, a highly respected Gungganji and Yidinji woman from the Yarrabah Community, Queensland, testified to the audience, “It’s not the institution I have faith in.”

This unwavering faith in God amidst heavy grief is inspiring. Like Job in the Bible, Indigenous Australians have lost land and family and are

experiencing poor health, yet in the face of this, many have Christian roots and are staying surprisingly faithful to God.

One of those with deep Christian roots is former journalist, now Professor Stan Grant, who was a keynote speaker at the conference. Stan titled his message his Four Provocations (echoing the philosopher Kierkegaard perhaps). Stan outlined a Christ-centred response to the current times Indigenous people find themselves in.

It reminded all of us of Jesus’ sacrificial love, that “first we must become nothing” and the “highest act of sovereignty is forgiveness.” This is a gracious gift. That Indigenous people might take inspiration from Jesus, to then extend forgiveness to non-Indigenous people so that we might be reconciled with God and with one another is mind-blowing and gives me hope for the future.

This year’s Walk for Hope Easter Appeal is intended to support that vision of a better reconciled future.

This year, we want to invite all churches in our movement and all its members to consider supporting our Indigenous Ministries Australia (IMA) programs.

As we approach Easter, we aim to raise support for emerging Christian Indigenous leaders through our Pathways program, so they might continue to spread that spirit we heard at the conference - the

message of Jesus’ gracious and sacrificial love.

One of eight young leaders IMA sponsored to attend the conference was Malachi, from the Tweed River region of NSW. He shared something profound and timely with me. Over morning tea, Malachi told me principles wise people he grew up with had taught him that “respect and contribution” are required for a relationship. He said that without one or the other, the relationship is out of balance.

As our churches aim to promote Christian reconciliation and walk in fellowship with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, how might we deepen our respect for Indigenous people, people also made in the image of God? And what will we contribute to this relationship to bring balance?

I came away from this gathering, challenged by the deep rift in our nation, hopeful, thanks to the emerging generation of Indigenous Christians. I was reminded of God’s grace as the leading force for reconciliation. As Stan Grant said, “Hope is tested in suffering and sweetened by forgiveness.”

John Lamerton,
Chief Executive Officer

Read a further reflection from the Raising Our Tribal Voice for Justice conference online at www.gmp.org.au/news.