



Finke River Mission
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CHRIST IN THE CENTRE

NEWS FROM FINKE RIVER MISSION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

SUMMER 2023-24



Above: More than 150 people attended the confirmation of 12 Areyonga (Utju) students, which coincided with the relaunch of the Unity College service trip.

Gospel in the heart

by Penny Fielke

On 15 October 2023, 12 Areyonga (Utju) students were confirmed by Pastor Malcolm Willcocks and Pastor Paul Calnan at Good Shephard Lutheran Church in Areyonga.

The students are part of the Central Australia Students Learning at Unity College (CASLAU) program that sees them spend six weeks per term at Unity College in Murray Bridge SA, attending school and working towards completing their South Australia Certificate of Education (SACE).

Pastor Paul is one of the local Murray Bridge pastors who has been leading the Areyonga students through their confirmation journey and, assisted by Pastor David Kuss and Unity College staff, helps to support their ongoing faith formation while they are away from community.

More than 150 people attended this important celebration, where these 12 young people openly declared their faith and intention to follow Christ as members of his church.

Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA Executive Director Craig Fielke

visited Areyonga for the first time to attend the event and learn more about the CASLAU program while celebrating the confirmation with the community.

The confirmation coincided with the relaunch of Unity College's service trip, on which nine college students and four staff spent six days in Areyonga, serving in the school, the community shop and aged care services and hosting a community-wide barbecue. The students and staff came not only to serve but to also learn and help bolster the already strong relationship between Areyonga and Unity College.

The Areyonga community welcomed the group with open arms and blessed them with multiple opportunities to learn about Central Australian Indigenous culture, including sampling kangaroo tail and witchetty grubs, for which the Unity College representatives were greatly appreciative.

This initiative demonstrated the amazing potential for collaborations between remote Indigenous communities, Finke River Mission and Lutheran schools, which

we hope will foster a greater understanding of how the gospel is at work across Australia.

Penny Fielke is the CASLAU and Pathways Coordinator at Unity College in Murray Bridge SA.

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New FRM Board chair Marcia Hoffmann, pictured here with LCA NZ Bishop Paul Smith on a recent visit to Central Australia, shares her thoughts on her role so far.

‘Looking forward to the challenges the coming year may bring’

by Marcia Hoffmann

In October 2023, I was privileged to be appointed as chair of the Finke River Mission (FRM) Board. I started the role in early December, with detailed briefings from many Adelaide-based LCA staff and board members.

A visit to Alice Springs followed, where I had the opportunity to attend the ordination of Pastor Malcolm Willcocks. The service was inspirational and a unique demonstration of the partnership between the church and the local community in the FRM area.

Our church has had a proud and long presence in Central Australia and enjoys high community recognition and support for all its endeavours in the region. I took the opportunity to visit Hermannsburg to meet key staff and see the mission operations firsthand. I also met with the principal and college chaplain of Yirara College, toured the college precinct, visited Living Waters Lutheran School, met

with senior staff from Lutheran services in Alice Springs and enjoyed a final evening meal with the church council for Alice Springs Lutheran Church before returning to my home base in Brisbane.

However, like all not-for-profit, charitable and faith-based organisations, the operating environment for our Lutheran church bodies and institutions continues to become ever more complex and expensive to deliver the support and services of the quality that we want to maintain.

In smaller and more remote environments such as Central Australia, it is more important than ever that we all work in partnership and faith to ensure the most efficient and sustainable future for the church and the communities we serve. From my discussions so far, I can see that those of us focused on the Central Australian area are all committed to this outcome.

My long employment history with the Northern Territory Government, dating back to 1977 and, more recently, the Queensland Government, has equipped me with local knowledge, contacts, personal capabilities and community awareness to help make a difference. I am looking forward to the challenges the coming year may bring. Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank Chris Guntner for his outstanding contribution to the work of FRM as acting chair throughout 2023. Chris has worked tirelessly in this capacity, pending the settlement of the chair appointee. Following a well-earned holiday, Chris returns in early 2024 to resume his previous role as board director.

Marcia Hoffmann is the chairperson of the Finke River Mission Board.



Malcolm Willcocks ordained and installed

The ordination and installation of Malcolm Willcocks as a Specific Ministry Pastor took place on 10 December 2023.

Alice Springs Lutheran Church hosted this special event, with the ordination conducted by LCA NZ Bishop Paul Smith and the installation by SA-NT Bishop Andrew Brook, supported by colleague pastors from the wider church and the Finke River region.

Malcolm had already been serving as the pastoral support worker in the Pitjantjatjara language area for several years. His ordination and installation allow him to take on the responsibilities and privileges of becoming a pastor for his people and support the wider ministry of Finke River Mission in Central Australia.

Up and running

by Ben Pfeiffer

Before I came to Central Australia, Pastor Paul Albrecht gave me three pieces of advice. The first was to be *kangkintja* – a Western Arrarnta word for a kind and loving man. The second was to be a pastor and trust that people would soon get to know who I was and why I was there. The third was to not let the immensity of the work overwhelm me but to just ‘do what I could’.

Reflecting on my first eight months in Central Australia, I can see the value of his advice. It is an incredible place to live and work. The need is great, but the opportunities are greater. The history and hard work of the Lutheran Church here carries great respect and weight among the Indigenous people, and it is a blessing to be part of.

My wife Meghan, our three children, Luke, Thomas and Katherine, and I moved from Mount Barker in mid-April 2023. I was installed as the pastor at Alice Springs Lutheran Church by former SA-NT Bishop David Altus on 14 May 2023. It was also special that my dad could travel up from Adelaide for the occasion. We spent the early weeks settling into life and ministry and were blessed with excellent weather.

My work in the congregation has been a whirlwind of ministry needs and opportunities. The level of interest in baptisms and confirmations continues to surprise me, and the regularity of funerals, especially for young people, is a constant challenge. I have received wonderful support from church members, Finke River Mission staff and others along the way. I was blessed to attend my first bush course at Titjikala, and my whole family attended Kupriyla Day celebrations at Hermannsburg.

God continues to do amazing things in Central Australia. We struggle for resources, but the appetite for the gospel is strong. People here are proud to be Lutheran. I am proud, too, and humbled at the same time, to be part of this work, which people like Paul and his father, FW Albrecht, were so instrumental in establishing.

Ben Pfeiffer is the pastor of Alice Springs Lutheran Church.

Top right: Ben, pictured with his family, was installed at Alice Springs Lutheran Church in May 2023.

Right: Ben has been kept busy with numerous baptisms.



Proverbs at Alice Well

by Paul Traeger

A Finke River Mission teaching course was held in late September 2023 at Alice Well, 30 kilometres south of Titjikala and 150 kilometres south of Alice Springs. It was on the Book of Proverbs, and we read from the Contemporary English Version of the Bible and translated it on the go. The only exception was when we read from the Pitjantjatjara or Ngaanyatjarra or else read directly from Proverbs quotations in the New Testament (such as Romans 12:20). We had eight sessions of teaching, with each session covering selected parts of roughly four chapters.

We spent time at the beginning explaining what Proverbs is about – particularly, what the various terms mean – with several different words for wisdom and foolishness.

It was explained that Proverbs was written specifically for young men but contains valuable teaching for young women and older people.

Finke River Mission had never taught Proverbs before. Proverbs do not occur very often in the set readings for each Sunday. So, it was all new to the listeners and seemed to make an impact, sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, 'Your joy and your bitterness are your own; no one (except God) can share them with you' (Proverbs 14:10) led to a lot of silent pondering among the listeners. We worked hard at unpacking the many metaphors throughout the book. Some were self-explanatory, such as, 'A loud blessing early in the morning will be taken as a curse' (Proverbs 27:14).

The church leaders seemed to agree that the book was written by a godly and astute observer and describer of human behaviour. One of them said, 'I know people who are just like that!' Other listeners were impressed by the way God was intimately concerned for the daily concerns of ordinary people in their everyday lives.

Please pray that the message of Proverbs will remain in the hearts of those who attended and that it can provide direction to Indigenous young people, who nowadays quite often find themselves in a seemingly trackless world.

Paul Traeger is the FRM Support Worker for the Pintupi-Luritja language area.



Attendees at a teaching course at Alice Well learned about the Book of Proverbs, which was new for many and made an unexpected impact.



Above: There were around 25 attendees at the Kintore teaching course.

'Safe place' the focus of Kintore teaching course

by Paul Traeger

In July 2023, a Finke River Mission teaching course was held at the community of Kintore/Walungurru, 500 kilometres west of Alice Springs. It was on 'safe place' issues and taught by Dave Biar from the Lutheran Church's Professional Standards Department.

Apart from the atypical topic, the course was unusual in being the first course attended by both Mei-Li Traeger and rookie 'cookie' John Linke (from Hamilton in Victoria). Mei-Li sat and shared with some of the ladies. John was cheerful and hardworking, both in preparing food and fitting into a situation outside his usual comfort zone. Also different was that the teaching place was a few kilometres away from the feeding (and sleeping) place. The campsite was in a beautiful location, among various healthy desert plants – it had rained recently, and many of them were flowering.

The teaching was valued by the listeners. It looked at vulnerable people in the community and how the Bible says we should care for them. Dave carefully unpacked the material and allowed plenty of time for discussion. However, despite our attempts at predicting any potential cultural problems with the teaching material – Dave, in particular,

had tried to be very careful about this – two issues initially raised questions from the men.

One was on how privacy operates in two different cultures – Indigenous and 'whitefella'. The other issue was about respecting the government, especially in a world where some levels of government can fail to communicate or make serious errors of judgement. After some discussion, we were able to basically work through these matters. (Still, the precise wording of the teaching on privacy may need further revision for future courses.)

Later, the Wednesday afternoon meeting was led by Pastor Simon Dixon. What he said was

balanced, wide-ranging and helpful. Afterwards, we very much appreciated Malcolm Willcocks' clear gospel preaching during the service with holy communion.

Numbers were down slightly due to the course being preceded by the Alice Springs show weekend and, sadly, an unusual number of sorry camps (no less than five) around the community. Early mornings were cold, but by the time the day warmed up, there were around 25 attendees – both men and women – each day.

Paul Traeger is the FRM Support Worker for the Pintupi-Luritja language area.





Remembering Pastor Ronnie MacNamara

by Paul Traeger

Ronnie was born around the early to mid-1940s at Manyira (Bowson's Hole), southwest of Areyonga (north of Tempe Downs Station). His father, Billy MacNamara, was a whitefella of Afghan descent who hailed from Oodnadatta. Billy's father – Ronnie's grandfather – had helped to build the railway from Finke to Alice Springs. Ronnie's mother, Ruby Mpitjana, was an Indigenous woman from the Nyirrpi area (west of Yuendumu).

When he was still a baby, his mother took him to live at Glen Helen Station. Three Indigenous men helped to raise him: Tom Onion Pangarta, Donkey George Pangarta and Jim Palayirrana (his uncle). Later, his mother took him to Hermannsburg, where he attended school.

He left school at 14 and went to Henbury station to work before moving to the Hermannsburg area for work. He worked in several places before settling at Napperby in the 1950s, working on fencing, bore maintenance, yard building and camp cooking.

Around this time, he married his first wife, Mary Golder. They had

two sons, Ronnie and Geoffrey, who have since passed away. Later, he married Agnes Ngala Gibson. They had five children: Freda, Anita, Kylie, Stephen and Anthony. (Anthony has since passed away.) They were all baptised together by Pastor Immanuel Rutjinama.

After working at Napperby for some time, Ronnie senior started travelling with other stockmen, droving cattle and horses through the Granites across the border into Western Australia, where he worked around Halls Creek for a few months. It was around this time, in the 1970s, that his wife passed away. A few years later, he married Rita Ngala and stayed in Napperby.

One day, he was fixing fences at Napperby when someone from the Finke River Mission approached him and asked if he wanted to be a pastor. He said yes. He then worked around Napperby and the adjacent Indigenous community of Laramba as an evangelist. In 1990, his training began in earnest under Pastor Albrecht. He travelled to Mount Allan every four weeks to train with a few other men. He was finally ordained at Laramba

Above: David Strickland (support worker in the Anmatyerr language area), left, and Ronnie MacNamara, right, with the Anmatyerr Mini-Bible.

on 23 February 1992. He was given responsibility for the Lutheran Anmatyerr-speaking congregations of Laramba, Mt Allan (Yuelamu) and Ti Tree (Nturiya) at that time. After a few years, he began focusing on the first two communities after another pastor was installed at Ti Tree.

He later said, 'Being a pastor has become my life, and I hope to continue to serve ... as long as I live'. His people very much appreciated his calm but firm ministry style. Moreover, his experience as a man of God and proficiency in several languages meant his opinions were always respected at Finke River Mission meetings. Around 2000, he advised Finke River Mission that an Anmatyerr Bible translation was urgently needed. The board followed his advice, and so the Anmatyerr language project commenced.

He slowed down somewhat as age and health issues came to the fore. But he never stopped being concerned for the spiritual welfare of Anmatyerr people.

Paul Traeger is the FRM Support Worker for the Pintupi-Luritja language area.



Above: Wesley Meurant was installed as the new principal of Yirara College on 31 July 2023.

Yirara College welcomes new principal

by Sam Ballard

Yirara College has appointed a new principal, Mr Wesley Meurant. With the utmost heartfelt thanks, we say farewell to Mr Chris England and send well wishes for his next journey in life.

Wesley comes from Brisbane, Queensland, with more than 20 years of experience in the Lutheran education system. He is a keen linguist with a deep interest in remote communities in the Northern Territory.

The Yirara community celebrated 50 years of education this year. The celebrations were kickstarted with the official installation of Wesley, conducted by Ingkaarta Basil Schild and supported by guests from all over Australia. Previous and current staff, past and present students, family, friends and the college board members were in attendance to recognise and be a part of this special occasion.

We congratulate Wesley on his appointment and welcome him to the college community.

Philippians 4:13: 'I can do all this through him who gives me strength.'

Sam Ballard is the Executive Assistant to the Principal at Yirara College.



Young and old come together

by Ben Pfeiffer

Living Waters Lutheran School and the Old Timer's Home in Alice Springs have made a connection, with Foundation classes visiting the residents at Flynn Lodge on a fortnightly basis. Their first visit was on 10 May 2023, when they enjoyed colouring in and singing a song for the residents. Throughout 2023, the students and residents have made their connection stronger while painting, crafting, singing and sharing morning tea.

The Old Timer's residents have also visited the Foundation students at school. They came for the 2023 NAIDOC Day celebrations at the end of Term 2 and then helped the class celebrate 100 days of being at big school in Term 3, with the students dressing up as 100-year-olds and playing games (including a very slow game of 100-year-old musical chairs). Living Waters were also looking forward to having the residents attend their end-of-year celebrations.

These interactions are very rewarding for both the students and residents alike, building social skills for the students and bringing joy to the residents. Living Waters will continue to support the connection, with the students continuing visits in 2024 as Year 1s.

(Edited from a piece published in the Alice Springs paper, *The Centralian Today*, 30 November 2023)

Ben Pfeiffer is the pastor of Alice Springs Lutheran Church.

For your prayers

- Pastors to fill the vacancies in and around Alice Springs (Ampilawatja and the Alyawarr area, Ti Tree and the Anmatyerr area, Hermannsburg and the Western Arrarnta area, Assistant Bishop for the Northern Territory, and town camps ministry with the Alice Springs Lutheran Church)
- Staff for Yirara College and the FRM Hermannsburg Store
- Safe holiday travels, rest and refreshment for Pastor Paul and Mei-Li Traeger
- Aboriginal pastors, evangelists and church leaders
- Seraphina to be available for work on the back translation of Genesis
- Lutheran families in the communities as they try to guide their children in the paths of life and truth
- Ryan, Gabriel and Savior, who have all been recently confirmed, and for their progress and encouragement in their training
- Anmatyerr congregations during the quiet period over the summer holidays and that they would keep gathering together and encouraging each other
- David Strickland's aged mother, feeling isolated in an aged-care community in Perth

A trip to Hermannsburg

After arriving in Alice Springs for the ordination of Malcolm Willcocks on 10 December 2023, LCA NZ Bishop Paul Smith and SA-NT Bishop Andrew Brook took a trip out to Hermannsburg to meet people and have a look around.

Left: The two bishops outside the 1896 Hermannsburg church

Right: Outside the current Hermannsburg church, Pastor Marcus Wheeler, SA-NT Bishop Andrew Brook, Pastor Rodney Malbunka and Pastor Neville Doecke discuss church issues.



**WE NEED
YOUR HELP**

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SUMMER 2023-24

Our Indigenous leaders in Central Australia desire the skills, resources, support and opportunities to serve their growing congregations.

They are asking for more Christian teaching and training, resources in their own language, equipment to run singalongs, and personal support than we have the capacity to give. We need your help!

Donations can be made as follows:

Online: finkerivermission.lca.org.au

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