Uniting Church
History and Heritage

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Editorial

The use of online communication tools such as Zoom since the outbreak of COVID-19 has brought about significant changes to many aspects of our lives. Churches have ceased holding in-person services, schooling and working from home have become 'normal' for many people, and participation in meetings, worship services, and discussions has broadened in many cases.

For the disabled members of our society who are able to access the Internet, the increase in online activities has been a boon, as it has broadened the opportunities for involvement in educational and other programs, seminars and meetings that would otherwise be impossible for them to access.

Another barrier that has been broken down by online communication has been that of national and international distances. Recently I attended a seminar that was being held in the United States and a worship service that had participants from all around Australia and New Zealand.

The recovery of our economy and life in general many of us are hoping will build a better world. It won't happen, though, unless each of us is prepared to do our best to promote that better world.

—Robert Renton

This edition

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

It is customary nowadays to begin a meeting with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners and custodians, the First Nation peoples, their elders, and of the lands upon which the meeting is being held. But this is no longer sufficient for an historian, especially a church historian. To tell the story of Australia we can no longer do so without acknowledging that the process of colonisation and the subsequent actions of the white population meant the destruction of culture, dispossession, and the murder of the original inhabitants of the land, and in that process the Christian church played a significant part.

Truth telling is painful but must happen if we are to find a genuine reconciliation with the Aboriginal population today.

President's Notes

Welcome to issue 3 of *Uniting Church Heritage and History*. Since our last issue the world has continued to be challenged by a global pandemic on top of which has been laid Black Lives Matter protests which have forced many countries (including Australia) once again to face their problematic heritage of institutional racism, and the way that past experience continues to shape the present. One aspect of this development has been the removal of statues of such 'worthies' as military generals, slave merchants, and explorers, seen as unwelcome reminders of a racist past. In the midst of these removals have been some rather odd casualties, such as the toppling of a statue in Rochester, New York, of the African-American anti-slavery activist Frederick Douglass. Patterns of memory and memorial practices naturally draw the interest and attention of historians. How, why and what do communities choose to remember? It is sometimes said that the removal of statues is an attempt to erase history, but the preservation of history and heritage do not depend in any really important way on statuary. The removal of statues is also in its own way the making of history, whatever we may feel about its appropriateness.

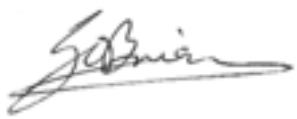
Racially motivated violence in the United States has prompted a fresh consideration of Australia's own involvement in such racist practices as the White Australia policy, the exploitation and virtual slavery (euphemistically referred to as 'indentured labour') of Indigenous and Pasifika peoples, and the stolen wages of Aboriginal stock workers. The ongoing racist attitudes that allow extremely high rates of incarceration of young Indigenous people for misdemeanour 'crimes' and the unacceptably high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody demonstrate that this is not something that lies only in Australia's past but is a present and ongoing concern. In recent discussion around whether Australia has had a history of slavery the claim has been made that convicts in the colonial period were slaves. I want to be careful here, because there is no doubting the reality of the slavery experienced in 'blackbirding' and similar repressive practices. But there are important distinctions to be made between slavery and convictism. Slaves had no citizenship rights, no rights of any kind, and no ownership of property. They were themselves considered property. The children of slaves were born slaves and also had no rights of any kind. Slaves were the legal 'property' of slaveholders and were dealt with as commodities under property law. None of these things applied to convicts. They were British citizens who had rights under law (just as prisoners do today). They could earn a ticket of leave, hire themselves out for labour and own property. Once their sentences were served, they were free citizens and became merchants, architects, politicians, clergymen etc. As John Hirst made clear in *Convict Society and its Enemies* (1983) and *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy* (1988) this was why NSW transitioned easily from a convict settlement to a democracy without anything like a 'slave rebellion.'

One reason it's important not to make the claim that (mostly white) convicts were slaves is because it obscures the much deeper horror entailed in the very real slavery of people of colour. Yes, there has also been white slavery throughout history but what African slaves experienced during the horror of the Atlantic slave trade was far worse than what convicts experienced in that they were not afforded any of the rights under the crown afforded to convicts. They were not even considered to be persons under law. The treatment of African slaves and the treatment of Aboriginal and Pasifika peoples through much of Australia's troubled history share this in common—they were forced into labour while deprived of citizenship, of due legal process, of wages, and of liberty, solely on the basis of race. Everyone's pain is their own and many convicts suffered intolerable cruelty but as a question of scale a few decades of convict settlement is not to compared with 400 years of the slavery of people of colour by Europeans.

The Uniting Church does not have a clean record on questions of race. We are the result of a merger between three denominations that were part and parcel of a colonising power that had hugely detrimental effects upon the First Peoples of this continent. In 2009 the 12th Assembly recognised this fact in adopting the Revised Preamble to the Constitution which stated (in part) that 'the uniting churches were largely silent as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who

also had complex systems of trade and inter-relationships. As a result of this denial, relationships were broken, and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the churches was diminished.' Since 1994 the Covenant established with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress has sought to respond to God's call to 'pray and work together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.' That work must continue and remains even more urgent in the midst of a global pandemic in which Black Lives Matter protests are sometimes seen as a public health hazard. The real threat to 'public health' goes to a much deeper spiritual malaise, one that can only be healed in response to God's call to be a reconciled and reconciling people.

Yours,



(Associate Professor Rev. Glen O'Brien, President, UCNHS)

Sanitising history

[An edited version of the Rev. Deacon Sandy Boyce's article written for Pilgrim Uniting Church, Adelaide, where she is a minister.]

"To everything, there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3)

The pulling down, removal and defacing of statues around the world has had mixed reactions—some applauding the eradication of statues of slave traders, some saying the statues need to be retained to remember our history. Toppling statues marks a break with the past, but makes it more difficult to learn from it, and to see how that past still shapes the present.

In 2017, when the statues of Governor Macquarie, Captain Cook and Queen Victoria are defaced, Bill Shorten suggested that additional plaques be made to indicate that contemporary thinking may have moved on. Indigenous Affairs Minister Key Wyatt says, "Statues can remind us of things that were offensive. That's a good thing." …

Amanda Vanstone (https://www.smh.com.au/national/don-t-insult-us-by-saying-what-we-can-and-can-t-watch-20200614-p552ee.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR077z7kZreHtsZdp2AO009lc6NF51w7nwRRprfbHISqQpqBk0Rf_6vohqM#Echobox=1592164735) said:

> Erasing the past, however painful it may be to remember it, is a mistake. Imagine if the German government sought to have all the concentration camps from World War II levelled to the ground. Wisely, they spend millions of dollars maintaining a visible reminder of a terrible past. It is right to say we should never forget the Holocaust. We need to be reminded just how terrible things can happen. We might be able to stop a repeat event. But how can we tell people to never forget something if we never told them in the first place.

Julia Baird (https://www.smh.com.au/national/the-toppling-of-statues-is-enriching-not-erasing-history-and-it-has-thrilled-my-heart-20200612-p5523r.html) writes:

> One of the more perplexing arguments made in recent days is that toppling, relocating or removing old statues amounts to the erasure of history. It is in fact the very opposite: it is history. To seek a fuller understanding of the past is not wrecking, but restoring, salvaging and deepening history. History is not just a set of facts but a series of questions, a mode of enquiry that seeks to comprehend and put flesh on dates, events and places, to understand and include all possible perspectives, all while knowing that, until about 50 years ago, history was almost solely written by white men, about white men. This history was comprised of flawed, incomplete and often deceptive stories that not only excluded vital records, but were

> frequently used for propaganda purposes, and the buffering of myths like: all war is good, mighty and noble, if somewhat sad; the expansion of empire was jolly impressive; all important people sat in parliament or courts; and women and non-white people have not done particularly much of note for millennia. What has happened to statues—rolled into harbours, set aflame on their plinths, defaced with graffiti, hung with signs—is merely the visible form of what historians have been quietly doing to the myths of the past for decades—documenting a more complete account. The time for public reckoning with the ongoing legacy of slavery, the horrors of colonial expansion, and the fact that we have not considered violence against people of colour, or women, to be of particular note, has come. We need to stop thinking about history as a kind of binary 'positive' or 'negative', as either nice or bad, but as something that reflects all of the wild chaos, dark violence, and glorious triumphs of humanity, the story of us all.

The story of us all.

What might this look like in considering the history and practices of the Church, and as we consider the biblical narrative—the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian scriptures. What have we referenced, and 'placed on a pedestal'? What has been overlooked? What do we name, reframe, 'tear down', read or do differently? The following insights come from an article by Gretta Vosper (https://progressingspirit.com/2017/10/12/reformers-all/) in which she reflects on Jesus and Martin Luther (though the same could be used for other reformers). She writes:

> Both Jesus and Luther honoured their traditions. Though we long assumed Jesus was Christian, we now know he wasn't; he was a Jew. Luther learned the only acceptable religion of his day, a Rome-centred Catholicism. They were steeped in their traditional religions, born into and formed by them. Like everyone around them, they were supposed to fit in. Their education, far above the level of the average believer, was supposed to further hone their beliefs. It was not supposed to expose the little hypocrisies and gross abuses that had been so artfully woven into the everyday business of religion. Once noticed, however, the normal way of doing things became unacceptable. There were no options for Jesus or Luther but those that would bring about catastrophic change in their religious traditions. Even as others fought to maintain the status quo, forcing banishment or conspiring toward more final solutions, the Reformers laid out and presented their arguments. And the world changed.
>
> We stand on the shoulders of great men and women. Countless Reformers dared challenge the norms of their day – religious, political, economic, and social. And they did it at great cost. We are grateful to them for their struggles, for their lives, for their blood, and for the first discomfort noticed that set them on their course. They created the world in which we live, the freedoms we cherish, the perspectives we are welcome to embrace or refuse, the right to make our own decisions, whether wise or foolish. They set in course the possibilities from which we have chosen our new realities and so have become, with them, co-creators of the world we know.
>
> They also, however, created gross disparities and abuses that yet plague humanity and the planet: the economic enslavement of whole nations for the provision of privileges assumed by others; the legal jargons that entrap indigenous peoples in politically ritualised battles for sovereignty; the lines that set out who is worthy of the right to choose their own lifestyle and who is not; the notion that humanity is separate and above the natural world rather than enfolded within and vulnerable to it; the entertainments by which we anaesthetise ourselves to the truths that quake around us; the cruelties endured by herded, caged, and crated animals so we might pleasure our taste buds and sooth our sun-scarred skin. And we, in making our choices, remain co-creators, complicit in a litany of normals that, had we the heart of Jesus or Luther or the millions of unnamed men and women who have poured their lives out in the pursuit of justice and compassion and the building up of love in the world, would make every one of us a Reformer. (Continued on p. 12)

Wesleyan Methodist Ministry with the Chinese in the Top End of the Northern Territory

Compiled by the Rev. Steve Orme

After several failed attempts at settlement on the Northern Coast by the British colonisers of the Australian continent, the colonial government of South Australia succeeded in 1869 when Surveyor General Goyder mapped out the town of Palmerston on Port Darwin. After malaria thwarted an attempt by the Congregational Church to commence ministry in Palmerston (later to be renamed Darwin), the Wesleyan Missionary Society of South Australia sent a young newly ordained minister, Archibald Bogle in 1873 to establish a cause.

When digging holes for the poles for the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Port Darwin in 1871, workers discovered gold at Pine Creek about 200 kilometres south of Port Darwin. To exploit the resource, cheap Chinese labour was allowed into the colony, first from Singapore then from south-east China through Hong Kong and Canton (now Guangzhou). The building of the railway from Port Darwin to Pine Creek in the 1880s brought more Chinese to the area. By 1889 there were close to 7,000 Chinese in the Top End compared with less than 2,000 Europeans. (No count was taken of the Aboriginal people in the area.)

Reports from ministers in the Palmerston Circuit during the 1880s had stressed the need for ministry with the Chinese. An attempt by the congregation to teach English to the Chinese was abandoned due to opposition from the European population. In 1885, the minister in Palmerston at the time, the Rev. J. Bradbury wrote after a visit inland from Port Darwin:

> …there are scores and hundreds of Chinese where Europeans once dwelt… there is a great field for Christian labour among these Celestials, which can be done best by one of their own race. Victoria and New South Wales have no better field. There are some Christian ministers at work there, why not here? To convert them to Christ is the best way to reach the massive Mongolian Empire… Many of these people leave the Territory for China after several years residence, to send them back Christians would be a grand means of spreading the Gospel of our Blessed Redeemer. [Quoted in A. Palmer, *Palmerston to Darwin*, Frontier Publishing Inc., 58]

The Wesleyans had engaged in ministry with the Chinese in the gold fields of Victoria and New South Wales from the 1850s. In 1870s, a European Superintendent for the Chinese Mission in Victoria was sought. A young minister, Edward Youngman offered and was sent to Canton in China for two years to learn the Chinese language and culture in preparation for the work. He returned to Victoria to take up the position in 1880.

After a few years, Youngman came to the conclusion that the Chinese could manage their own ministries and did not need a European superintendent. So he resigned and took an appointment to Glen Innes in New South Wales.

When the South Australian Conference was looking for a minister for the Palmerston Circuit in the late 1880s, Youngman came to their attention because of his training and experience in ministry with the Chinese. Youngman was appointed to Palmerston in 1889. He was accompanied by a Chinese catechist from Melbourne, Timothy Loi Foy. Thus began a ten year period of intentional ministry with the Chinese in the Top End. Youngman's task was to support the Chinese catechist in developing a Chinese church. However, the tropical climate was too much for Youngman and he returned south in 1890 but Loi Foy continued in ministry with the Chinese until 1896.

When the Rev. Henry Trewren arrived to commence his ministry in Palmerston in 1896, he reported that Loi Foy was a "worthy young man doing great work among the Chinese". [A. Grant, 59] However, Loi Foy's seven years in the tropics had taken a toll on his health and so he asked to be relieved. His

replacement was an ordained minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Rev. Joseph Tear Tack.

Joseph and Emma Tear Tack and family (Unknown other man)

Tear Tack was born in China but came to Victoria as a young man. He was converted to Christianity through a Presbyterian mission to the Chinese in Victoria but then trained and was ordained as a minister with the Wesleyan Methodists. After ministry in Victoria, in 1884 Tear Tack was appointed to Tingha in the Inverell district of New South Wales as superintendent of the Chinese mission. Tin mining had attracted a number of Chinese to the area. In 1885, he married the Victorian born, Emma Lee Young. They had five children while living and working in the Inverell district. In 1896, with the departure of Loi Foy, he was appointed to the Palmerston Circuit in the Northern Territory to continue the work with the Chinese community there. [See blog "Thoughts on the History and Heritage of Chinese Australia" by Kate Bagnall in *The Tiger's Mouth,* 26 October 2016]

According to Ian Welch ["The Methodist Chinese Mission", Department of Pacific and Asian History Research, School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. 2010], he was not well received by the local Chinese population and baptised only five men in his time in Palmerston. His difficulties were compounded by a severe cyclone in 1897 which destroyed his home. Although the family survived, all their possessions were lost. Tear Tack himself was injured. The family were then accommodated with others in the community.

With the Chinese community suffering the greatest loss of life and, Chinatown, the centre of the community destroyed, ministry was even more difficult. After leaving the north and doing deputation work for the Wesleyan Missionary Society in southern Australia, in 1900 Tear Tack was appointed to

Advance Notice

2020 Annual General Meeting

The Society's next Annual General Meeting will be held online via Zoom on Thursday 10 September, commencing at 4 pm. Those of you who are on email will be sent an invitation with instructions how to use Zoom a few days beforehand.

The **Annual Public Forum** will be held online via Zoom following the AGM, commencing at 7 pm on Thursday 10 September. Sarah Lim, Janice McRandal and Shurlee Swain have all agreed to be part of a panel to discuss the current work of UCA Redress (established to address issues arising out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse) and theological and historical perspectives on the churches' involvement in child sexual abuse in its institutions.

Third Biennial Conference

The Third Biennial Conference of the Society will be held at the Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, N.S.W., 11–13 June 2021. The theme is "Growing Up Uniting". Mark in it your diary!

Annual Fees 2020

Members are reminded that the annual fee is $20, and that 2020's fee are now due. The preferred method of paying is by bank transfer: BSB 032-828 A/c 301985. Please remember to add your name so that your payment is identified, and please send an email to Bob Coote (bandybc@gmail.com). Alternatively, please send a cheque to the Treasurer, PO Box 2, Wentworth Falls, NSW, 2782, including your details.

Cairns in North Queensland where, sadly, he died of heart failure in 1901. [See "Visit of a Chinese Missionary to Lithgow" in *Lithgow Mercury*, 5 June 1900.]

Like Bradbury in the 1880s, Tear Tack had a vision for the mission to the Chinese in Palmerston. He hoped that Chinese converts from the Palmerston Circuit would return to their homeland and become missionaries among their own people. His colleague Trewren shared a similar sentiment. In July 1898 he wrote:

> I think that this is one of the most important missions to the Chinese of Australia. The number of Chinese in the Northern Territory is nearly 4,000. Included in this number are about 200 Chinese women and children. The very important feature of the Mission though, is its proximity to China, being only nine day's steam from Hong Kong. By each boat that arrives and departs, Chinese come and go to China. Hence the Gospel being proclaimed to the men of this country, in the Northern Territory, means that China is receiving direct Christian influence from there as from no other part of Australia. [A. Grant, 61]

Tear Tack was not replaced and the mission to the Chinese in the Top End fell away despite the grand visions of some. This was caused not only by the harsh physical and social conditions of the North Australian environment, but also by major changes beyond Palmerston. The various streams of Methodism in Australia united in 1901 to form the Methodist Church of Australasia. As part of this change, responsibility for the Palmerston Circuit passed from South Australia to Queensland. Federation of the states into the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 saw the introduction of a national White Australia policy by which Chinese migration to Australia ceased. Many Chinese in the Northern Territory returned to China. When the civil administration of the Northern Territory transferred from South Australia to the Commonwealth in 1911, of a population of just over 3,200 non-indigenous people, only about one third were of Chinese origin. It would be forty years before the Methodist Church appointed another Chinese minister to Darwin.

[See also W.L. Blamires and John B. Smith, *The early story of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria,* Wesleyan Book Depot, 1886. The Rev. Edward Youngman's obituary is in the *Brisbane Courier Mail* of 10 April 1926, and the reference to the *Lithgow Mercury* of 5 June 1900 can be found on Trove.]

What motivates missions?

Judith Raftery

[This is an edited version of an article in *Uniting History SA* for September 2019 by Dr Judith Raftery, President of the S.A. society at the time.]

"Aboriginal missions: neglect, failure, atonement and legacy" was the title of the lecture delivered by respected Uniting Church historian, Rev. Dr William Emilsen, at the Effective Living Centre in Adelaide in August 2019.

The focus of William's lecture was broader than individuals or particular missions. It presented analysis about two linked questions: why did missionary activity among Indigenous Australians take a back seat to other missionary activity, especially that which occurred in the Pacific, in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries, and why, given that earlier neglect, did Aboriginal missions become more prominent from about the 1920s onwards?

His answer to the first questions that the earlier Aboriginal missions had been, on the whole, failures, "short and sad" affairs that seemed to many observers to give credence to the 'doomed race' theory that prevailed at the time. This failure was in stark contrast to the success of the Pacific missions, whose hallmarks were mass conversions, revivals and the establishment of self-sustaining Christian communities among the mission populations. While William did not, on this occasion, explore in detail the reasons for these different outcomes, several explanations suggest themselves: for missionaries and mission societies the Pacific Islands were more congenial and 'romantic' sites than many of the Australian sites, which were isolated and highly challenging in terms of climate and material conditions; the social, economic and political patterns of Pacific Island societies may have been more recognisable and easier to negotiate than those of the Aboriginals; and the level of support from established British mission societies may have favoured the Pacific ventures over the Australian ones.

In answering the second question William presented a thesis that was largely new to me, and I suspect, to others present. This was the notion of missions as atonement, reparation and penance for past wrongs. He traced the origins of this back to the eighteenth century, but linked it specifically to the missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. According to this thesis, this second wave of Aboriginal missions responded to new anthropological insights that encouraged respect and protection for other cultures and religions, acknowledge culpability for the churches' past sins of commission and omission, and even foreshadowed more recent understandings of mission, such as 'standing alongside' and 'working for justice'.

Insights and Recollections: Members of the First UCA Assembly held in Sydney June 1977.

The Third Biennial Conference of the National UCA Society will be held at the Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, N.S.W 11-13 June 2021. The theme chosen for papers and conversation will be "Growing Up Uniting".

I am currently undertaking research on the background and recollections of those who were members of the first Assembly held in Sydney June 1977.

Forty three years ago 216 members were present including 70 from each of the three denominations and six from the United Church of North Australia.

If you are interested in assisting with this work I am able to send you a summary of the research to date including the names of those who were present and the church and State they represented.

Your thoughts and recollections about those who were members of the Assembly will make an important contribution to the study.

Rev Dr Dean Eland

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William supported this reading of missions as 'atonement' by reference to the views of such luminaries as Schweitzer, claiming that it had been especially powerful in relation to Africa, and Gandhi, who commended some missions which he believed exemplified the atonement model. William argued that it also applied to the Methodist mission in Arnhem Land in the 1920s, which sought to protect the Indigenous population from the worst effects of colonisation and white intruders.

I found these ideas attractive and thought-provoking, but also discomforting. Certainly the work I have done on twentieth century missions among Australian Aboriginals doesn't fit easily into this assessment. I have examined in detail how a denominational Aboriginal Mission Board that established missions in Western Australia in the 1940s understood what it was doing and how it presented this to the faithful in the congregations on whom it relied for support. And I discovered little of atonement and reparation thinking, let alone respect for Aboriginal religion and culture, in that history. This does not surprise me, given what I have learnt from other scholars and other research into Aboriginal missions. [For more on this, see Judith Raftery, *Evangelisation and Social Betterment: four decades of Churches of Christ Aboriginal missions in Western Australia* (Australian Churches of Christ Historical Society, Victoria, 2013), and also Judith Raftery, *Not Part of the Public: non-indigenous policies and practices and the health of indigenous South Australians, 1836–1973* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2006)] It is important to say that missions and missionaries do not deserve the cheap, easy and poorly-informed condemnation that they often get from those with an axe to grind, but sadly they are often not deserving of the atonement and respect claim either.

In 1942, in an effort to garner initial support for the Western Australia missions I investigated, the Churches of Christ Federal Aborigines Mission Board (FAMB) did acknowledge the damaging impact of colonisation on the Indigenous population, and the need for Christians to appreciate the worth and humanity, in God's eyes, of "the aborigine as a man" [*sic*]. But the FAMB, through regular articles in the Churches of Christ national and state journals, also insisted that the problematic and shameful conditions of the Aboriginals were connected to their own primitivity, their deficient, indeed, benighted culture, and their existence "without God" or in thrall to an inadequate understanding of God. While there was some acknowledgment that "the aborigine was not without his religion" it was judged to be a "fearsome religion" and "through fear of death" Aboriginals "were all their lifetime subject to bondage". Conversion to Christianity was the only solution, and it was a solution that promised more than eternal salvation: it also held out the hope of assimilation into western civilisation and a chance for Aboriginals to "take their place" in wider Australian society. This latter goal, which was not clearly distinguished from Christian conversion, was assumed by the missions to be something that Aboriginals aspired to. But, even where this was the case, it was, for most, a vain hope, since from the start, the mission adhered to a contradictory strategy of promoting assimilation through segregated institutions that were characterised by unequal power relations, parsimonious material provision and a limited capacity to provide real opportunities for the Aboriginals to exercise agency or initiative. [See Raftery, *Evangelisation and Social Betterment*, 16–25.] In addition, although it seems that the Churches of Christ missions may have been less culpable in this regard than some others, there is abundant evidence within the historical record that missions were promoters of loss and misery among Aboriginal through the tearing apart of families and the suppression of language and other aspects of cultural life. [Ibid, 31–33.] And there is no avoiding the reality that the complex legacy of much mission activity, and of racist and restrictive government policies and community attitudes that have prevailed in Australia since white settlement, continue to blight many Aboriginal lives and communities today.

However, nothing is ever simple, and William Emilsen has done us a service in pointing out that there have been various strands in what has motivated missionary ventures in the past, including the desire to seek atonement and make reparation. One valuable outcome of his argument is to encourage us to focus on what models of mission prevail today. At our best, we increasingly think and act not in terms of 'missions' with their inevitable connotations of cultural imposition and imbalances of power and

resources, but of partnerships among churches and communities who are collaborating or supporting each other to pursue the 'mission of God'—that is, abundant life for all—in their own context. We are not always at our best of course, but reflecting critically on our history, allowing it to shine a light onto unexamined assumptions and to remind us that there are always new options to pursue, is a pretty good strategy for keeping us on track.

Dr Judith Raftery

Ernabella: a remarkable vision

[In the same edition of *Uniting History S.A.*, Dr Raftery tells the story of the Ernabella mission in the north of South Australia. The photo of the mission at the end is from the S.A. newsletter.]

In 1935, Dr Charles Duguid, Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly of South Australia, proposed the establishment of a mission to Aboriginal people in the Musgrave Ranges in the far north-west of the state. The following extract from Duguid's 1935 Moderator's Address illustrates his vision for the mission and the way in which he tried to sell it to his fellow Presbyterians.

> [He discussed in some detail] the condition of the native people, once in our midst but now on the fringe of our white civilisation … I am forced to admit that in the 150 years since the white man came to this continent no real and sustained effort has been made by the governments of the ruling race to understand the native or to help these people to understand us…
>
> The health of the natives in the northern parts of South Australia is serious and the only hope is to get them away from the townships and as far as possible from contact with white men. There never has been a medical missionary in Australia, and yet never did a people need one so much as our natives do today. … My plan is for the Presbyterian Church to lead the way by starting a mission out from the line, say 150 to 200 miles west in the vicinity of the Musgrave Ranges and east of the Great Aboriginal Reserve. To rid this so-called reserve of financially interested white men and to keep the natives in it would be outpost work of the scheme suggested by me… It is not only the soul of the native that needs

The objectives of the Society are:

To promote and advance the study of history of the UCA and its predecessor churches.

To encourage and facilitate research into and publication of the history of the UCA and its predecessor churches.

To organise conferences, public lectures and workshops.

To establish connections with other national and international history organisations.

To award prizes and scholarships which advance public knowledge of UCA history, including the Geoff Barnes Memorial Prize for excellence in church history.

To draw to the attention of the Assembly significant dates, events and people in the history of the UCA and its predecessor churches, with the aspiration that appropriate resources may be provided for the celebration of or reflection on their relevance to the contemporary life of the UCA.

To do all things necessary, including fund-raising, to enable the UCNHS to meet these objectives.

★ The Board

The Society has a Board that consists of the Rev. Dr Glen O'Brien (President, Vic.), Dr Judith Raftery (Secretary, S.A.), Mr Bob Coote (Treasurer, N.S.W.), the Rev. Dr Julia Pitman (Qld), the Rev. Steve Orme (N.T,), Dr Patricia Curthoys (N.S.W.), the Rev. Dr Alison Longworth (W.A.), the Rev. Dr William Emilsen (Past President, N.S.W.), and the Rev. Robert Renton (Vic./Tas.).

We meet via Zoom approximately every two months.

★ Membership

Membership of the Society is open to all interested in history and the history of the Uniting Church and its preceding denominations in particular.

As a member you support the preservation and promotion of the history of the UCA and facilitate further research and reflection into that history.

Cost is $20 annually, paid directly into the Society's account BSB 032-828 A/c 301985 (remember to include your name) or sent to the Hon. Treasurer, PO Box 2, Wentworth Falls, NSW 2782.

> attention, it is the whole man and whoever takes up the work will need to understand the ways of the people among whom he is placed. We can learn much from the native and the native much from us. With good laws and proper enlightenment the two cultures will prove complementary…
>
> Four and a half years' close study of the Aboriginal problem has led me to doubt whether anything more alien to the spirit of Christ exists than the authorised and permitted treatment of the natives of Australia by us white people. It is the bounden duty of the Christian Church so to rouse the people and keep them roused that our Government will be forced to treat the Aborigines as human beings. (*Presbyterian Banner*, April 1935, 6–10)

At that time, South Australian Presbyterians were hardly in an expansive mood: they were preoccupied with debt, already struggling to maintain a missionary in the New Hebrides and another in Korea, and to keep up their contribution to the Australian Inland Mission and Aboriginal missions in Western Australia and Queensland. Nevertheless, they accepted Duguid's challenge and the 1936 Assembly undertook to establish a new mission in the Musgraves, on a former station called Ernabella.

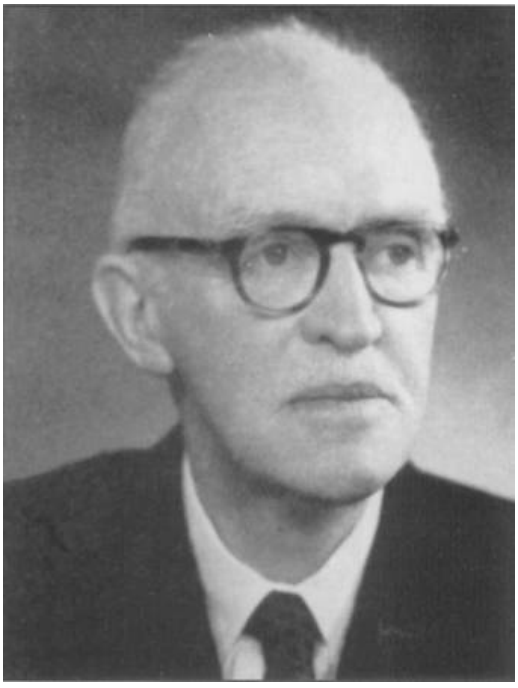
The mission which eventuated at Ernabella has since been widely acknowledged for its progressive thinking, its determination to respect Indigenous culture, and its capacity to act as a buffer between the local Pitjanjatara people and the encroaching white settlement. However, it got off to a rocky start. In fact, the financial precariousness of the South Australian Presbyterian Church, and especially the tension between those who believed support for Ernabella could be maintained only at the cost of the work in Korea, meant that Ernabella, as a specifically South Australian venture, was short-lived. It was taken over by the Australian Board of Missions in 1937, thus becoming the responsibility of the Australian Presbyterian Church, with the South Australian Assembly promising regular support. A lively, if not entirely edifying correspondence on the competing claims of Ernabella and Korea was continued between Duguid and the Rev. N.L.D. Webster, convenor of the Foreign Missions Committee, for some time after the national bail-out. (*Presbyterian Banner*, November 1938, 29; December 1938, 3.) But despite these tensions, the new mission survived.

Not all the earliest reporting on progress at Ernabella reflected Duguid's ideas but focused instead on the nuts and bolts and practical difficulties of getting the mission established. But when Mrs Duguid wrote about a visit there in 1938 she demonstrated that she understood and shared her husband's views: "Ernabella aims at giving the native really Christian contact with white civilisation, and so giving him the opportunity for the fine gradual development for which he is both eager and able". She wrote that freedom was the essence of the spirit of the mission—freedom in relation to dress, to language,

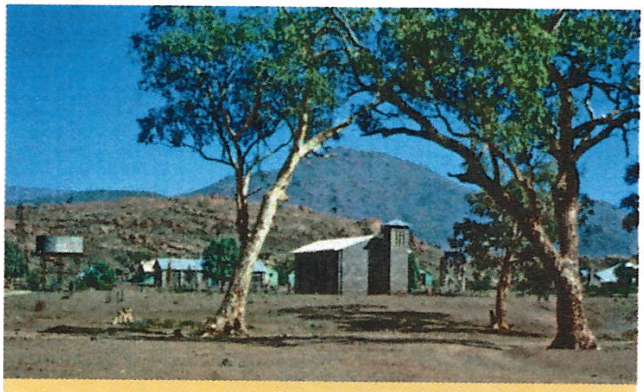
to work, to leaving and "going bush"—and should be observed even when this amounted to practical difficulties for the staff. She did not underestimate the prodigious amount of work to be done or the difficulties presented by the language barrier, but insisted that "the spirit of the mission and the lives of the missionaries must be the sermons".

[Dr Raftery's article concludes with the recognition of the Rev. Dr Bill Edwards AM, who was for many years a missionary at Ernabella, and who won the admiration and love of many for his commitment to the Pitjanjatara/Yankunytjatjara people.

An assessment of how Ernabella fared over succeeding decades and how it implemented and developed Duguid's initial vision has been written by William Edwards in *Mission in the Musgraves: Ernabella Mission 1937–1973, a place of relationships*, (Black Forest SA, UCSAHS, 2012)]



Dr Charles Duguid



Ernabella Mission
From the cover of *Mission in the Musgraves*

(Continued from p. 4)

There is a legacy in the Reformation that I believe belongs in the middle of our work, calling out the power brokers, the hegemonists, the deceivers. Ours is not the work of complacency or settling for imperatives that take decades to conjure only because it takes that long to soothe the sensitivities of those still wielding ecclesial powers that make no difference to the challenges facing our world. Our reforms must be much bolder, our work in the world more creative than what those beyond our walls believe is all we do. It may be that humanity is facing the greatest crises of its too-brief history as it reels with the challenges of global warming and climate change, exponential population growth, and resource depletion. There may be no future moment for us to step up. Now may be all there is. Literally.

Change is our very birthplace. It is our right and responsibility as heirs of the Reformers, to stare down every comfortable "normal" that sings its siren song and refuse to be enchanted by it. It is our right and responsibility to count up every ease and privilege we enjoy and educate ourselves about its source – what makes it possible? Who pays for our pleasures and how? And when we find that "normal" is built on the subjugation of others – our tea, our chocolate, our party-ready shrimp rings – work to redistribute or limit those pleasures until all have access to shelter, security, food, clean water, and the joy of planning for their children's futures.

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