



Pastor and Mrs. Brandford with Mona Mona students.
Photo courtesy of Stephen Piez.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries, Australia

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries (ATSIM) is a department of the Australian Union Conference which gives priority to the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church among the indigenous peoples of Australia.

Early Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Endeavors

During the earliest years of mission endeavor in the South Pacific, little was done to reach out to Australia's indigenous peoples.¹ It has been suggested that many early Australian Adventists may have been conditioned by the "prevailing climate of public opinion"² and had little sympathy or concern for the indigenous population living on the fringes of towns or in the more remote parts of the continent.³

Early in the twentieth century, an Australia-wide humanitarian movement began to voice concern for the treatment of Australia's indigenous people.⁴ As this movement gained momentum, attitudes began to change. One such article, published in August 1901, called for reform and supported the view that Australia's treatment of its original inhabitants was "a foul blot" that needed to be eradicated without delay.⁵ A number of early Adventists began voluntary outreach to Aboriginal people living in and around their own communities.⁶ This change in thinking was evidenced by an increasing number of articles which were published in church periodicals.

The antecedents of formal ministry among Aboriginal peoples, can be traced to the appointment of Phillip Rudge to evangelistic ministry in Kempsey and the Macleay Valley region in New South Wales, somewhere near the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷ As part of his duties, Rudge began to work among the Aboriginal people from the Burnt Bridge settlement. From there he was transferred to minister to residents from the Barambah Aboriginal Settlement, located near Murgon, Queensland.⁸

Barambah was originally established in 1899 by Salvation Army missionary, William J. Thompson, but was handed over to the Queensland government in 1905. Following this hand-over, the population at Barambah grew as many Aboriginal people from Queensland and New South Wales were removed from their lands under the terms of 'protection legislation' and relocated to the settlement.⁹

Adventist layman, J. H. Cooper, supported by the Murgon Adventist school teacher, Ruth Cozens, began conducting Sunday Bible classes at the Barambah settlement. Shortly thereafter church leaders appointed Phillip Rudge to begin full-time Aboriginal ministry in this location.¹⁰

Rudge submitted frequent letters for publication in the *Australasian Record* during the course of 1912. While his correspondence remained positive, he reported privately to superiors that "many of the most serious hindrances to our present work will be removed when we are able to enter upon our own mission."¹¹ Government authorities would not permit Rudge to live on the reserve or to teach distinctive Adventist standards and beliefs.¹² As a result, church leaders agreed that if something of lasting significance was to be achieved, it needed to have its own mission operation based on its own unique holistic philosophy addressing the physical, educational, and spiritual needs of the people it served.¹³

Monamona Mission

At the 1912 August-September Australasian Union Conference council meetings, it was agreed to establish an Adventist Aboriginal mission in North Queensland.¹⁴ In early January 1913, Rudge traveled to North Queensland with James Brandford (vice-president of Queensland Conference) to inspect possible sites.¹⁵ They met with many Aboriginal people and became increasingly aware of the great hardships most suffered.¹⁶

Together, Rudge and Brandford located a 4000-acre property not far from Kuranda on the banks of the Barron River.¹⁷ The new mission, which became known as Monamona, officially opened its doors towards the end of 1913. The mission school began operation in early 1914 with seven pupils under the tutelage of Miriam Roy.¹⁸ By May, the number had grown to eighteen and included a number of young mothers who were eager to learn to read and write.¹⁹

The new mission commenced operation with the full support of John W. Bleakley, Queensland's chief protector of Aborigines.²⁰ This endorsement was unique as chief protectors from other states were openly antagonistic to church involvement in Aboriginal affairs during the early years of the twentieth century.²¹

The Monamona mission was respected for its achievements. In 1936, the Queensland Director of Health and Medical Services, Dr. Ralph Cilento, making reference to the predominantly vegetarian diet, reported that although there were some deficiencies in iron and protein, "the diet is on the whole, better than that seen in any other Aboriginal institution."²² Some years later when the Adventist Church in Western Australia was seeking funds from the Department of Native Affairs to assist with the building program at Karalundi Aboriginal Mission, the commissioner, Stanley Middleton, with obvious reference to Monamona, acknowledged that "the SDA church had an excellent record in the conduct of native missions."²³

In addition to the successful education program and food gardens, Monamona began a sawmill to help supplement income and provide timber for the building program. This enterprise became a feature of the mission, and by 1950 was supplying sleepers to the state railways. Under the direction of Superintendent William Zanotti, and later Norman Ferris, Monamona improved the general standard of living by transitioning from ration handouts to wages for the eighty-three mill workers. This initiative was the cause of some controversy with the chief protector at the time who maintained that the mission was indulging its workers.²⁴

A condition of operation for Monamona and other Queensland church-run Aboriginal missions was compliance with state policies and directives. As a result, it was required to accept Aboriginal people sent there by the department regardless of the circumstances.²⁵

At that time, Aboriginal people had few rights. However, despite the challenges, many Aboriginal people from the surrounding area chose to make Monamona their permanent home. While not everyone valued their time at the mission, there are a large number who remember it with fondness and acknowledge what the church was attempting to do for them at that time. At the centenary celebrations in September 2013, one former resident shared,

I learnt to love Jesus...I learnt respect; I learnt discipline—just like all the elders here. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the upbringing the Monamona people gave me.²⁶

Western Australian Aboriginal Work

The Adventist Church in Western Australia followed Queensland's lead. At the thirteenth annual session of the conference in November 1914, the Western Australia Church placed a formal request with the Australasian Union Conference to consider undertaking native mission work as soon as practicable.²⁷ The request was repeated again at the 1916 session.²⁸

There is no record of a formal response to this request, but it is likely that the higher body felt the time was not right for the Church to support an additional Aboriginal mission program in Western Australia. This was particularly true following the 1915 appointment of A. O. Neville as Western Australia's chief protector of Aborigines. Initially, Neville cooperated with established church-run missions, but he soon became opposed to their involvement in Aboriginal affairs.²⁹ He argued they had done little to improve the situation of Aboriginal people in their charge.³⁰ Neville is remembered as the prime architect of the infamous government policy of biological absorption, which had as its ultimate goal the merging and eventual disappearance of the Aboriginal race.³¹

Neville was replaced by Francis Bray, who maintained his predecessor's negative attitude towards mission activity. In official correspondence with the superintendent of the United Aboriginal Mission at Mt. Margaret, Bray declared that education for the "natives" was unnecessary and that they were better off without Christianity.³²

The winds of change began to blow in 1948 when Stanley Middleton replaced Francis Bray. Due to his experiences in the territory of Papua New Guinea, Middleton was convinced of the value of mission programs, particularly when adequately funded.³³ As a result, by the end of the 1950s, he had transferred many government settlements to mission control.³⁴

Middleton was progressive. He also lobbied the state government to increase subsidies paid for Aboriginal children. Equality was achieved in 1954 when subsidies paid for Aboriginal children matched those paid for non-Aboriginal children in similar circumstances.³⁵ It would appear Middleton recognized the inherent bias in the system, which had prevented Aboriginal people from receiving an equitable share of resources and the provision of services such as education, health-care, and improved housing arrangements.³⁶

It did not take long for Adventist Church leaders to recognize the change in government policy. In 1952, the secretary-treasurer of the Trans Commonwealth Union Conference wrote to Middleton expressing the church's desire to establish an Aboriginal mission within the state.³⁷

Voice of Prophecy Ministry

Although the Church had been unable to begin a formal Aboriginal mission program in Western Australia, it had maintained its commitment to inland evangelism through the operation of a Voice of Prophecy (VOP) van. This van had three rooms with living quarters and a projectionist room from which meetings and "picture shows" were run in the various places visited.³⁸

In the early 1950s, A. D. Vaughan cared for the VOP van ministry. Vaughan was an orphan and his experiences made him sensitive to the needs of others. As he travelled across the country, what he saw in the towns and communities fueled in him an urgent desire to do something practical to assist the Aboriginal people living in and around the upper Murchison and Western Desert area.³⁹

Karalundi Mission

Church leaders supported Vaughan and encouraged him to find a suitable location on which to establish an Aboriginal mission.⁴⁰ Vaughan discovered Crystal Brook, fifty-five kilometers north of Meekatharra, Western Australia.⁴¹ This property was adequate for an orchard and vegetable gardens because of an abundant supply of water provided by underground aquifers.⁴² The property was also far enough away from town to be free from its social problems and "contaminating influences," yet it remained close enough for the provision of essential services.⁴³ Church leaders saw in it an opportunity to fulfill their vision of a mission to Aboriginal people.⁴⁴

Initial enquiries were made to ascertain if the Department of Native Affairs would support a mission in this location. The response was positive. Middleton confirmed that "on the station properties west of Meekatharra and in the general Wiluna district there are large numbers of native children who are receiving no education at all [and] that the scope for an active progressive mission situated in the Meekatharra district is almost unlimited."⁴⁵

The Church took possession of the Crystal Brook property in January 1954. Vaughan was appointed as superintendent of the new mission, which was renamed Karalundi later that year. The new name meant "clear water" in a local dialect.⁴⁶ The tiny oasis at Crystal Brook contrasted starkly with the vast surrounding arid landscape. It reminded workers of the water of life spoken of in John's gospel. To many people, Karalundi itself was a "spring of living water" for Aboriginal peoples, bringing to them freedom from fear and the hope of an abundant life with Jesus.⁴⁷

Classes at Karalundi began in September 1954, under the leadership of Stan Louis.⁴⁸ The mission school continued serving the Aboriginal people of the region for the next twenty years until its closure in 1974. During these years, it provided quality education for those who attended. There was an emphasis on developing vocational skills and those that showed academic potential were transitioned on to complete their secondary education at Carmel Adventist College in Perth.⁴⁹

Wiluna Mission

In 1955, the West Australian Conference transferred Vaughan to Wiluna to consider the possibility of establishing a “village community” near Wiluna where the *Mardu* (Western Desert Aboriginal people) could settle and begin a new life after leaving their desert homeland. In his tour of the region, Vaughan was once again saddened by what he saw—people eating out of garbage bins and surviving in extremely poor conditions. He vowed that these people would not be neglected any longer and quickly found a suitable location for the establishment of a new mission.⁵⁰

In consultation with the Department of Native Affairs, a partnership arrangement was proposed. The department provided rations, clothing, and basic accommodation, while the Church provided a superintendent who would live nearby and manage the operation. In August 1955, Vaughan was given the task and it became his role to foster a positive influence among the residents, provide whatever medical attention and supervision was required, and offer spiritual guidance and pastoral care.⁵¹

Under Vaughan’s direction the mission village at Wiluna grew. He maintained that the “demonstration of Christian love to these people is winning them to the kingdom of God,”⁵² through the example of an unselfish life lived in loving service for others.⁵³ His advice to fellow workers was to “always put your trust in these guys,” treat them with respect and entrust them with responsibility.⁵⁴ He also counselled, “never ever think about your losses, always remember your wins.”⁵⁵ Those who took his advice went on to have a successful experience working among Aboriginal people.

With the establishment of the Wiluna Mission and the development of a small lower primary and pre-school in that location, it became a feeder school to Karalundi Mission which was reserved as a “mission training school.”⁵⁶

Mullewa Mission

The Aboriginal work in Western Australia progressed quickly. Another Aboriginal outreach center was established at Mullewa towards the end of 1958 under the direction of Horace and Olive Dodd.⁵⁷ Mullewa did not have a residential program. Rather it was a center of influence which provided a meeting place, and running services and programs for the benefit of the local Aboriginal people living in and around the town. Like Wiluna, the operation at Mullewa supported Karalundi and many of the town’s young people were influenced to send their children to the mission boarding school to gain a Christian education.⁵⁸

North New South Wales Aboriginal Work

In addition to mission programs in North Queensland and Western Australia, the Adventist Church was also involved in Aboriginal ministry in New South Wales. After a short term at Monamona, Phillip Rudge made the decision to leave in 1914 due to his wife’s ill health.⁵⁹ The Australasian Union Conference appointed him to begin Aboriginal mission work on the north coast of New South Wales. Rudge based himself in Kempsey, where his work had seen earlier successes, and began running tent meetings throughout the region. Rudge reported that “after a few months of hard work we began to understand better how to labour for the coloured people.”⁶⁰ An organized church was eventually established, known as the Macleay River Aboriginal Church of Seventh-day Adventists. The church had an initial membership of fourteen First Australian people.⁶¹ During his time in the region, Rudge achieved modest successes and many descendants of his original converts remain.⁶²

Miriwinni Gardens

In the years that followed, there was little targeted work for Aboriginal people until the early 1960s when Edward Rosendahl was transferred to Armidale and began working in the area. A number of those Rosendahl met were related to Rudge’s earlier contacts. These people grew to appreciate Rosendahl and finally approached him with the request that the church start a school for their children. As a result, a boarding school was started at Five Day Creek in 1967. It was established in a disused sawmill and old houses nearby were converted into dormitories. The school was largely self-supporting. Unfortunately, it struggled financially and faced considerable opposition from the state education area inspector.⁶³

Rosendahl spent most of his time gathering funds to continue the operation and develop the school program. The school ran for approximately four years, but following a government inspection in 1970, which reported that facilities needed to be upgraded in order for the operation to continue, church leaders took action to close the school.⁶⁴

According to local reports, Rosendahl was unhappy with this decision. In response, he requested transfer out of the district; however, before leaving he told the people that he would be retiring soon and made the promise that he would return to help them re-establish the school at that time.⁶⁵

The End of the Mission Era

Beginning the 1960s, many church-run missions for indigenous Australians faced significant difficulties maintaining under-funded programs in the face of increasing government demands and the changing expectations of those they served. It was a new era. Aboriginal people were becoming more aware of their rights. In the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people were included in the national census and shortly after gained the right to vote. The people's needs were changing and not all church-run programs were able to adapt to the shifting social milieu. Making it even harder was that the government made the missions a convenient scapegoat for the failures of its past policies.⁶⁶

Monamona was the first to close. When its sawmill burned down in 1957, the Department of Native Affairs did not supply any funds to assist with the re-building program. This was possibly due to their foreknowledge of a hydro-electric scheme that was proposed to start within a few years which would precipitate the state government taking over the Monamona mission in January 1962.⁶⁷

The people argued that if they could not stay on the outskirts of Monomona reserve, they should be settled back onto their tribal land near Mareeba. The government never agreed to their proposal. The church remained at Monamona until December 1962 after which most people moved into the Kuranda area.⁶⁸ Since that time, the church has maintained a community-oriented program for indigenous people based at the Kuranda Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁶⁹

Following the closure of the short-lived Mirriwinni Gardens boarding school at Five Day Creek in 1970, the Karalundi and Wiluna missions were the next to close, one after the other in 1974.⁷⁰ It was a difficult time for the Aboriginal people of the area.⁷¹ No worker or minister remained to assist their transition to a new life.⁷²

Church mission programs laid the foundations upon which growth could occur. With the closure of the mission schools a number of parents reported that "education was better when the missions were responsible, but since the government took over, our people's education has gone back".⁷³

The Birth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries (ATSIM)

With the closure of the Aboriginal institutions, most conferences agreed to redirect funds into ongoing pastoral work in the effected regions. Unfortunately, this did not work as well as it could have because of the varying levels of commitment demonstrated by the changing leadership in each conference. In Western Australia, funds designated by one outgoing president to support a church-based pastoral ministry in the Meekatharra and Wiluna area were used by the incoming president to build a new office complex and to maintain aviation ministry in the northwest part of the state.⁷⁴

In 1975, Ronald Taylor became secretary of the South Pacific Division.⁷⁵ Taylor was a missionary at heart and took seriously the words of Matthew 24:14 that the gospel message must go to the entire world. His catchphrase was, "All the work won't be done until ALL the work is done."⁷⁶ Taylor envisioned a Church-sponsored national work, that could not be abandoned by changes in leadership because it was enshrined in church policy. He spoke to the treasurer, Lance Butler, and between them they took the matter to the South Pacific Division executive committee which voted to re-organize Aboriginal outreach. The first thing they did was send out a survey to as many Aboriginal members as possible asking what each wanted the Church to do for them. This was followed up by visits to places such as Kempsey, Mackay, Cairns, Darwin, Alice Springs, and Western Australia. Claude Judd, the Trans-Australia Union Conference president realized that Aboriginal people wanted the Church to establish a department which focused solely on ministry to indigenous Australians.⁷⁷

A working party was formed to explore the best way to achieve this goal. The party included Aboriginal members such as Adventist civil rights pioneer Avy Curley, and church ministers Ron Archer and George Quinlin. After some deliberation, a former missionary pilot in Papua New Guinea, Bruce Roberts, was appointed in 1980 to direct the venture. The working party also agreed that Kempsey would be an excellent location from which to coordinate the ministry.⁷⁸

Kempsey had remained an important place for the church's Aboriginal work. Not only was it central, but many of the families that Pastor Rudge and Rosendahl had worked with remained in the church. It was here that the first ordained Aboriginal pastor, George Quinlin, had been mentored into ministry by Alec Thompson. Quinlan was caring for the Kempsey Aboriginal church at this time and became a very effective advisor to Roberts and his successors, Pastors Eric Davey and Steve Piez.

In addition to the support he received from George Quinlin, Bruce Roberts was assisted by a team of indigenous advisors including Wilfred Levers, Ron Archer, Ken Farmer, Avy Curley, Frank Bobongie, and John Assan.⁷⁹ Although he had many years of successful cross-cultural work in the South Pacific, the church enrolled Roberts in anthropology and race relations studies at Queensland University to assist him in his ministry.⁸⁰ These studies proved helpful and all subsequent non-indigenous ATSIM directors have completed similar degrees or attained post-graduate qualifications.

Initially, Roberts was told to direct his ministry towards Aboriginal Australians. However, he soon became aware that Torres Strait Islanders came under the same acts of parliament as did Aboriginals. As a pilot in Papua New Guinea, he had occasionally flown over the islands when skirting large storms in the southern Papuan region and had a passion to reach out to these people as well. Once he realized Torres Strait Islanders faced many of the same issues, he began lobbying to have these people included in his mandate. Church leaders agreed and the Aboriginal Ministries department became officially known as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries or ATSIM.⁸¹

But not everyone was supportive of the initiative. Old prejudices continued to be evident. It is reported that some leaders opposed the formation of an indigenous ministry department and constantly frustrated the work. At least, one held the unfortunate belief that the Aboriginal race had committed the unpardonable sin and was therefore beyond redemption.⁸²

Roberts met these challenges and did his best to change entrenched attitudes. Despite these difficulties, ATSIM grew. This growth brought with it financial challenges, which were resolved by the decision that ATSIM would be supported from a percentage of tithe contributed by churches across Australia.⁸³ This was a major achievement for ATSIM and with the additional funds it was able to expand its scope to include the employment and training of indigenous field workers.

It quickly became apparent that an assistant was needed. Roberts chose Eric Davey of Western Australia. Davey had a heart for Aboriginal people and in 1986 was appointed as associate ATSIM director, based in Perth. He continued in this role until 1995 when he was appointed national director of ATSIM. Davey served as national director until his retirement in 2006. During his years, administration of ATSIM was moved from the South Pacific Division in Sydney and to the newly formed Australian Union Conference in Melbourne.

Miriwinni

During the years leading up to the establishment of ATSIM, there was renewed interest in Aboriginal ministry within the Kempsey area. When Pastor Edward Rosendahl retired, he kept his promise and returned to the Macleay Valley where he helped the people to re-establish a boarding school at Nulla Nulla Creek. Classes at the new Miriwinni Gardens Aboriginal Academy began in 1977 under the leadership of June Bobongie with the assistance of Fay Oliver.⁸⁴

By the early 1980s, Miriwinni Gardens Aboriginal Academy was acknowledged as an independent Seventh-day Adventist supporting ministry for indigenous children. Fay Oliver took over as principal and remained in charge until the school's closure in 2009 due to financial difficulties.⁸⁵ Miriwinni Gardens operated at Bellbrook for more than thirty years, and it has been estimated that the school successfully educated more than 1500 children from Bellbrook and surrounding communities.⁸⁶

Good News for Aboriginals and Islanders

Since the beginnings of the nationally coordinated ATSIM program in 1980, a number of achievements stand out. One such achievement was the publication of the *Good News* magazine. According to Bruce Roberts, this was "the most successful thing we did."⁸⁷ The publication began in 1977 as a simple North New South Wales Conference newsletter and was produced by Alec Thompson together with George and Esther Quinlin. Thompson received a donation of \$500 from a Rossmoyne Seventh-day Adventist church member which was used to fund the newsletter.⁸⁸

Under the direction of Roberts, the name was changed to *Good News for Aborigines and Islanders* and was expanded to become an Australia-wide magazine which evangelized and connected a remote membership. Roberts reported that at the first large camp meeting ever held, many of the people who attended said they felt as if they already knew each other because they had seen each other's faces in the *Good News*.⁸⁹ The magazine is now entitled *Good News for Aboriginals and Islanders* and has continued to grow. At the time of writing, it has a distribution of nearly 15,000 across Australia. It continues to focus on re-connecting indigenous Australians as well as providing spiritual guidance and lifestyle advice.

Karalundi

Another significant achievement was the re-opening of Karalundi. The mission school had been closed for a number of years when David and Isabel Dyson began visiting the communities surrounding Karalundi and Wiluna in the early 1980s. After the death of the Dysons in a plane crash, Roberts appointed Stan and Nell Armstrong to a circuit-riding ministry providing spiritual care for the people.⁹⁰

Both the Dysons and the Armstrongs had worked at Karalundi during the mission era. As soon as the Aboriginal

people saw the faces of their former teachers, they began talking about re-opening Karalundi School⁹¹ Aboriginal people gave many reasons for wanting to re-open Karalundi. They expressed concern about the standard of education their children were receiving from the state school system. They were convinced that it was not an education equal to the one they had received from the missions.⁹² Not only did mainstream schools tend to marginalize Aboriginal children, but they also failed to equip them with useful employable skills⁹³

After some discussion, it was agreed that Karalundi would begin as an independent parent-controlled school. The Adventist Church would mentor the operation, providing professional advice and the necessary staff to maintain an Adventist ethos. The establishment of Karalundi is a credit to all Aboriginal people involved. However, the people also recognize that Eric Davey, along with Stan and Nell Armstrong, were key figures in making the school a reality.

When it became common knowledge that the school was re-opening under Aboriginal leadership a number of people were skeptical.⁹⁴ However, the reopened Karalundi has now been in existence for more than thirty years. At the twentieth anniversary celebrations, a former chairperson, John Kyanga, reminded those gathered that when Karalundi reopened government bodies said, “we wouldn’t last two years but here we are twenty years down the track and still going strong.”⁹⁵

Aboriginal parents remain confident about the value of Karalundi. When asked why they continue to send their children to the school, one parent said, “I think Karalundi is a better school than _____ and other government schools because the parents have more say.”⁹⁶ Another pointed to her children and said, “look at _____ he’s working ... and he’s not drinking like some others [who] sit down and drink every day.”⁹⁷ One parent told of her son’s success at finding an apprenticeship and applying himself to the job. She concluded it’s all “thanks to Karalundi.”⁹⁸

Mamarapha College

The need for a practical training program designed specifically for Aboriginal workers was first raised by Phillip Rudge in 1918. In his report to the tenth session of the Australasian Union Conference, he highlighted the need to educate Aboriginal workers to “enable them to reach their own people.”⁹⁹ Pastor Alec Thompson expressed a similar sentiment in his 1978 report to North New South Wales Conference leaders. He reminded his employers of the need for a simple practical training program to equip Aboriginal workers with the skills to reach their own people.¹⁰⁰

The newly formed ATSIM leaders recognized that training Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pastors and Bible workers was a priority. In 1994, Ken Vogel, president of the Western Australian Conference, was approached regarding his opinion for the best way forward.¹⁰¹ Vogel proposed a competency-based model similar to the one used at Omaura Lay Training School in Papua New Guinea where he had worked as principal some years earlier. The model was approved and Vogel, along with retired education director, Max Miller, was asked to prepare the relevant documentation for submission to the government. These two men, along with Eric Davey and a number of others, worked for two years to get national accreditation for the training college and gain registration as a training organization.¹⁰²

Mamarapha College originally began as ATSIM Bible College. Classes officially started in 1997 under the leadership of Gordon Stafford and Lynelda Tippto. Initially, it was anticipated that the program would run for between two to three years—just long enough to train a handful of Aboriginal ministers for church employment.¹⁰³ Twenty-two years later, the achievements of the college far exceeded expectations. Graduates have been employed as full-time pastors, church-sponsored Bible workers, and self-supporting volunteers—all trained for the gospel ministry at Mamarapha College.

Ken Vogel reflected that the development of Mamarapha was one of his most fulfilling experiences in ministry.¹⁰⁴ By 2019, the college had a number of training programs ranging from advanced diplomas in pastoral ministry to lifestyle health promotion. The courses became popular with both Adventist and non-Adventist indigenous groups. Many of the non-Adventist students were baptized during the course of their studies and returned home as empowered lay workers spreading the good news of the Adventist Christian faith to their communities. Because of the witness of these students and the training provided by the college, new work opened up in many remote areas across Australia.¹⁰⁵

A Change of Focus

Eric Davey served as national director of ATSIM until his retirement at the end of 2006. Prior to this, a search committee led by George Quinlin approached Steve Piez, who was employed as national director for Adventist schools in Papua New Guinea at that time. Piez had spent many years working at Karalundi. He accepted the appointment and became the director in January 2007.¹⁰⁶

Atsim had grown under Davey’s leadership and required a new approach to sustain the growth into the future. To this end, Eric Davey and his advisory team, which included associate directors Don Fehlberg and Eddie Hastie, tasked Piez with the responsibility of facilitating the appointment of local ATSIM leadership within each conference to coordinate the work in those regions. It was further agreed that there was to be an emphasis on the development of new ministry resources along with revised strategies for reaching the vast interior of the Australian continent.

A Coming of Age

Stephen Piez served as director of ATSIM for eleven years. During that time, ATSIM directors were appointed in every conference except Tasmania, and centers of influence were established in strategic locations in order to facilitate the work of circuit-riding ministers responsible for evangelizing remote regions across the country. Many resources were also produced. These included the full color *Easy Reading Family Edition* of the Bible, developed in partnership with the Bible Society of Australia. The ATSIM team also produced a number of Bible study series for use in conjunction with the new Bible.¹⁰⁷

Following the death of George Quinlin in February 2008, and the resignation of Eddie Hastie in May that year, Piez began to work more closely with Darren Garlett, an Aboriginal pastor from Western Australia. Garlett was formally appointed as advisor-to-the-director at the year-end ATSIM meetings.¹⁰⁸

The ATSIM team recognized there was a need for further training of its indigenous workers across Australia so that Aboriginal workers would be qualified to fill future vacancies. To this end, Garlett, a pioneer student of Mamarapha, was offered a full scholarship to undertake degree level studies in theology at Avondale College. At the completion of his studies, he was appointed ministry coordinator at Mamarapha College and served in that capacity until December 2017.

During his time employed as a church pastor, chaplain, ATSIM advisor, and Mamarapha ministry coordinator, Garlett developed a broad understanding of the national ATSIM work and the unique needs of this specialized ministry. At the end of 2017, he became the first Aboriginal to be appointed national ATSIM director.¹⁰⁹

During 2017, Mamarapha College also celebrated twenty-one years of operation. In his final *Good News* editorial, Piez reminded readers that in many cultures the age of twenty-one represented a coming-of-age. He went on to conclude, that Mamarapha College and ATSIM had certainly come-of-age with the appointment of Darren Garlett, an Aboriginal pastor, as the national director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries, and with the appointment of Pastor David Garrard, another ex-Mamarapha student, to the role of Mamarapha College principal.

Conclusion

Perhaps the Adventist Church's most valuable contribution has been the provision of Christian education. Christian schools and training programs, coupled with the ministry of trained people over many years, has resulted in the majority of indigenous Australians continuing to affiliate with Christianity in a post-Christian age. This spiritual orientation, along with their respect for the Bible, has meant that many Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are attracted to the Bible-based teachings of the Adventist Church.

At the time of writing, ATSIM is widely recognized as the fastest growing ministry in Australia. This should energize the Church and provide the impetus to improve methods of effective ministry.

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