40 years Empowering Indigenous Christians

The first edition of Nungalinya News featured Rev Michael Gumbuli. In this 40th Anniversary edition we will look back at his story and the history of the College, but also focus on the exciting challenges for the College now and into the future.

Nungalinya College was founded in 1973. However, it should be recognised that the work that actually led to the foundation of Nungalinya started long before then.

Originally Nungalinya was a partnership between the Anglican Church and the United Church (which later became the Uniting Church of Australia). The Roman Catholic Church joined as a full partner in 1994. The College was incorporated in 1973, but the actual building of the campus did not commence until 1974. Of course that was the year of Cyclone Tracy and the rebuilding had to start again in 1975.

Since that time hundreds of students have studied at the College including most of the key Indigenous leaders in the churches of the Top End. The College has also in the past had a strong focus on community development and also became well known for its courses and work in Textile Arts.
Gumbuli—The Pioneer

The Reverend Michael Gumbuli was still in his thirties when he was ordained at Ngukurr on the 4th November, 1973; he was ‘the first Anglican ordinand from Arnhem Land’.

This was soon after Dr Keith Cole became the College’s Foundation Principal. Gumbuli’s ordination was an inspiration to many people and, along with the establishment of the College, was seen as the beginning of a new era in the life of God’s church. Gumbuli maintained a strong vision of the importance of the College as a place for training Indigenous leaders. When he retired, he had been a member of the College Board for a record time.

Gumbuli was born on Bickerton Island, then moved to Groote Eylandt with his family. When he finished school, he rowed a canoe to Roper River Mission to work in the mission’s boats. Two faithful men in particular, Barnabas Roberts and his son Silas, encouraged the young Gumbuli, who soon became one of the community’s leaders.

In the early 1970s, some of the older women at Ngukurr suggested that rather than having another European chaplain, Gumbuli could do the job. This led to him being the leader of the church there for 30 years.

As the first Aboriginal Anglican leader in Arnhem Land, Gumbuli faced many difficult questions as traditional culture met European culture. He was convinced that the only solution was to find out what the Bible had to say. For this to happen, he wanted people to be able to read the Bible in their own language, and he became known as the ‘Patriarch’ of the Kriol Bible Translation Project. People needed to read the Bible and then make up their own mind.

For Gumbuli, Aboriginal Christians need to be 100% Christian and 100% Aboriginal; they weren’t to be mere copies of European Christians. He gained widespread support in south-eastern Arnhem Land for developing a genuine Aboriginal Christian way of conducting funerals, allowing traditional practices but ensuring that God’s ways were never compromised.

Gumbuli married Dixie Daniels in 1959 and they had a large family. Dixie was a tireless worker in the church and a talented Bible translator. She passed on in 2001.

In 2010, Gumbuli was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his contribution to the Church and community. A true pioneer, he now lives in retirement at Ngukurr.

Gumbuli’s story is now an award winning book by Murray Seiffert, the author of this article.
Rev Canon Barry Butler still working …

The Rev Barry Butler arrived in the Northern Territory in 1953 as a missionary at Ngukurr and Numbulwar and worked there until 1964.

He remembers the beginnings of Nungalinya when in 1965 the Anglicans joined with the Methodists (now Uniting Church of Australia) to establish a College to train Aboriginal men and women for ministry. The Joint Church and Training Centre Committee was formed and the Government was approached to see if they could assist. Although initially the answer was ‘no’, eventually a site on Dripstone Road was made available.

Barry says, “I asked the Larrakia man Bobby Secretary at Bagot if he could give a name for the place. He immediately said ‘Nungalinya’.”

Though now retired, Barry still regularly visits the College and encourages students over morning tea.

“Nungalinya continues now 40 years later as a unique college for Aborigines.”

Principals of the College over the years

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Principal</th>
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<tr>
<td>1973–1978</td>
<td>The Rev Dr Keith Cole</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979–1981</td>
<td>The Rev. Dr Robert Bos</td>
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<td>1982–1985</td>
<td>The Rev Dr Anthony Nichols</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>The Rev Dick Udy — Acting Principal</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>The Rev Dr Tony Nichols</td>
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<td>1996–2002</td>
<td>The Rev Wali Fejo</td>
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<td>2003–2007</td>
<td>Ms Dawn Cardona</td>
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<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>Sr Mary Louise Slattery — Acting Principal</td>
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<td>2008–2010</td>
<td>The Rev Dr L Lee Levett-Olson</td>
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<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>Mr Ian Louttit — Acting Principal</td>
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<td>2011–</td>
<td>Dr Jude Long</td>
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Passing of Pioneers

2012 sadly saw the passing of two of the pioneer principals of Nungalinya—the Rev Dr Keith Cole, and Rev Wali Fejo. Keith was the founding principal of Nungalinya in 1973 and served until 1978. Of course he had to face the immense challenge of Cyclone Tracy which destroyed the newly constructed buildings at the College in 1974, but had the perseverance and vision to continue.

Rev Wali Fejo was the first Aboriginal principal of the College. A local Larrakia man, his appointment was immensely significant for the College. He was principal from 1996 to 2002. At the time of his death he was in conversations with the College about how he might return and continue his ministry. His passing was a great loss.
The College’s New Look …

As we celebrate this significant anniversary, we have marked the next step in our journey as a College by a new “look”. For those of you who are long term supporters of the College, you will notice that we have modified our logo and motto. The new logo more clearly identifies the College as a Christian College for Indigenous people. The colours represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, while the addition of the cross to the omega more clearly demonstrates the Christian focus of the College.

Our new motto “Empowering Indigenous Christians” was the result of discussions at Board level and was strongly endorsed by the Board. As has been the case right from the beginning of the College, the focus of the College is empowerment of Indigenous people. However, things have changed in the last 40 years and there are now many educational opportunities for Indigenous people that were not available in the past. The specific role of Nungalinya as it heads for the future goes back to its roots. Its initial purpose was to provide training for Indigenous Christians to be equipped for ministry in their churches and communities. That is not to say we are not teaching other things, but the primary goal of the College is to empower and support the Indigenous church.

We trust that over the next 40 years Nungalinya College will continue to play an integral role in training and equipping the next generation of Indigenous leaders. Your prayers and support for this vital ministry are greatly appreciated.

Empowering Indigenous Christians
In 2011 the College was fortunate to receive a large grant from the Federal Government Indigenous Infrastructure Fund to assist with building a Media Production Centre. Construction finished on time and within budget at the end of 2012 and this year the first classes commenced. Part of the centre is a performance space, which also serves as the venue for morning chapels.

The first course to be offered is the Certificate II in Media and Discipleship (Creative Industries) which focuses on equipping students to use film to tell their faith stories. Twenty eight students in two cohorts will complete the course this year. We plan to finish the year with a film festival and graduation.

Next year we will be adding a Certificate II in Music. Many Indigenous Christians are writing Christian songs in their own languages and this course will provide skills in performance and recording to help these songs to be shared more widely. It is so important for Indigenous Christians to be able to worship Jesus in their heart language and this course will be a strategic way to assist with this.

However, while the College received generous funding to build the Centre, no funding is available to pay teacher salaries and course development costs.

*Your support for this important work would be greatly appreciated.*
Courses planned for the future …

We are seeking to provide pathways that will set our students up to succeed. Most students will start with a Certificate I level course called Foundations, which teaches literacy and numeracy, but also provides a Biblical overview and an introduction to the skills students will need for further study or employment.

Our Certificate II level courses use Media to help younger Indigenous Christians grow in their Discipleship and to share their stories and their music. This year we are teaching film, and next year we will be adding music. This of course is possible because of our new Media Production Centre. We hope to encourage and equip younger Indigenous Christians for ministry in their churches.

We continue to teach the Certificate III in Theology although we have modified the way it is being taught to enable students to progress through the course more quickly and in a logical sequence. This is resulting in more students completing and graduating.

Finally we need to provide the next step in that pathway of either a Certificate IV or Diploma in Theology to enable students to continue their growth. This is still a work in progress but is an urgent need within the next two years.

We would also love to be teaching Community Development and Management of Addictions, but at this stage do not have the funding or teachers for this course. The diagram shows the courses we are aiming to teach.

Certificate III Theology & Ministry class
Chapel in the Media Centre

A wonderful bonus of our new Media Centre is that we can hold our daily chapel service in the “performance space”. It is always a highlight for the staff when students lead chapel. With the new equipment in the media centre the students gain valuable experience using microphones when speaking in public. The growth in confidence of the students which has developed through their study is wonderful to see.

Foundations students lead the chapel service

Students watching the Foundations students.

Help us to Empower Indigenous Christians

Our mission, as a Christian College for Indigenous Australians, is to provide students with the foundation to build a better future personally and in their family, church and community. Nungalinya is growing and we need your help to sustain this growth and provide more services for training Indigenous Christian Leaders.

Please join us and further our mission through your prayers and financial support.

Please find enclosed my gift of:

☐ $50  ☐ $150  ☐ $100  ☐ Or $______________

Payment by:

☐ Cheque  ☐ Visa  ☐ Mastercard  ☐ Bank Transfer

Expires: ______ / ______

Signature: ____________________________

To be paid:

☐ Monthly  ☐ Quarterly  ☐ Half Yearly  ☐ Once

Name:

______________________________

Address ________________________________

State  Postcode

Phone: ____________________, Mobile: ____________________

Email: ____________________________

☐ Please send me A Friends of Nungalinya package

Please send me information about:

☐ Direct Debit  ☐ Regular giving  ☐ Bequests

Bank Transfer

BSB: 065-903  Account: 00090011

Please include your name and/or donor number in the reference field.
iPads a Great Success

We have started using iPads in our Foundations classes this year and the students love them! They particularly enjoy finding their home communities on Google Earth. We find the iPads much easier for students to use than desktop computers and they are also becoming more common out in communities. We are continuing to explore how best to use technology in our teaching across the different courses.

Crèche Kids

Our crèche for the students’ pre-school children is continuing this year (thanks to Anglican Deaconess Ministries). We have been greatly blessed by having two Indigenous carers join our staff. This has really helped both the children and their parents to feel more comfortable.

Please Pray

- Give thanks for the 360 students enrolling in courses this year
- Pray for the Staff and Administration for strength and guidance in coping with the increased intake of students
- Give thanks for new staff and pray for a new teacher for the Certificate II in Music
- Pray for the ongoing property development and for sufficient funding for the new hostel wing
- Pray for the development of new leaders for the Indigenous church

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