



MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.



Bottling apples during the Arts of Home Economy retreat.

News from Manna Gum

We were very encouraged and very humbled by the response to our New Year appeal - we continue to be amazed and blessed by the well of 'eager generosity' (as Paul would say) that is out there. Thank you to all those who have sent support or even just kind words - man does not live by bread alone.

There has been a lot going on over the past few months, and even more coming up. Over February and March Jonathan led a thematic study series on Matthew that mined the rich seams of discipleship, the Kingdom of God and healing and wholeness in the first gospel. At the end of March, Kim, Janet Ray and Tanya and Campbell Holt led a weekend retreat on the arts of home economy at the Holt's property near Numurkah. It was a fantastically productive weekend that resulted in bottled fruit, home made cheeses, bread, pasta, ice-cream and marshmallow, to name a few of the things that went on. Keep your eye out for this opportunity again early next year.

We are in the middle of our eight-week series on the Household Covenant, which has been attended by quite a large and very engaged group. As always, we are finding that there is so much to explore and so little time ... Jonathan has also done a few speaking engagements lately:

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a panel discussion on our use of money at Surrender; a forum on aid and development with Archbishop Philip Freier at Federation Square; and a lunchtime lecture on the church as an alternative economic community at Tabor and Stirling Colleges. We are very excited that in the coming months we will be doing quite a bit of work with particular church communities - we do not really know where this will go, but we are convinced that it is important work, so please pray for us. If you would like Manna Gum to do some thinking with your community, please contact us.

This edition of *Manna Matters* is full of advertising. No we haven't gone over to the dark side - it is all good stuff you can get involved in, so check it out.



A DIFFERENT WAY

A week-long exploration of Christ's call to a new way of living

1 - 8 December 2012



Come and spend a week exploring Christian alternatives in areas of money, employment, consumption, sustainability, family, community, care for creation and serving the poor. The week will be split between time in country Victoria and inner city Melbourne, hanging out with a couple of Christian communities exploring a new way of living. Come and get your hands dirty!

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- Reflection and discussion
- Get your hands dirty
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- Sing & pray

THINGS YOU WILL DISCUSS

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- Family & parenting
- Hospitality & the poor
- Shared living
- Community
- Money & budgeting

THINGS YOU WILL EXPLORE

- Growing food and making compost
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- Stewarding energy and water
- Waste
- Land care and restoration
- Global connections

Cost: \$100

Registrations close 16 November. Places will be limited, so hurry!

To download registration forms or for more info, check the website:

www.mannagum.org.au



The Economics of the Body of Christ

by Jonathan Cornford

If we are honest, many of us would have to admit to a deep ambivalence about church - about the church as an institution, and about the whole Sunday thing. Often this ambivalence is made up of a number of elements, and we are not always clear within ourselves about its sources. There is often discomfort or disappointment about both the history and present reality of the institution that claims to itself the gospel of Jesus. For example, it is hard to overestimate just how deeply and how widely revelations such as those concerning child abuse and subsequent cover-up within the church have shaken people's ability to place some faith and hope in it as an institution. At a much more mundane level, there is, I believe, a widespread disappointment and discomfort that the membership of the church so poorly reflects the character and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

On the other hand, the church, like many other social institutions, is feeling the crunch of rapid cultural change. The core practice of the church - which is simply to gather - has been placed under enormous strain by our modern social geography and the virtual surrender of its members to consumer culture. The dislocation of church membership from geographic locality has transformed the experience of 'belonging' to a church community into yet another act of consumer choice. Moreover, the Sunday service has, for many, become an exercise in frustration and disappointment - for some it has pandered far too much to our consumer predilections, for others it seems irrelevant, and for yet others it is trapped halfway between the two of these. At a much deeper level, and perhaps the most significant, Christianity in the West is undergoing a crisis of faith - just what is the good news of Jesus, how do we understand the identity, death and resurrection of Jesus, and what does all this mean for how we live in the world?

These are, by any measure, a significant raft of issues facing the church, and I do not propose to unravel them all here (it will be an ongoing subject of discussion within this newsletter over time). However, if we are to discuss the church at all, we need to acknowledge that this is our starting point. Rather, my interest here is to examine the essence of the idea of church within the New Testament vision, and particularly what this says about the economic arrangements of Christian communities. What is the church, and what is it called to be in the world?

The Greek word in the New Testament that is translated as 'church' - *ekklesia* - simply means 'the gathering'. It was a word common in the Greco-Roman world and it was usually used in reference to gatherings related to civic governance - the *ekklesia* denotes a body politic. When the Apostle Paul uses the word 'church', he is very often using the term in its most ordinary sense, referring to specific gatherings of Christians in particular locations - the churches in Galatia or Macedonia or Judea. However, sometimes (particularly in Ephesians and Colossians) when Paul speaks of 'the church', he is referring to something much more than a local gathering; for example: 'He has put all things under [Christ's] feet, and made him, as

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he is above all things, the head of the Church' (Eph 1:22, NJB). Paul doesn't anywhere make entirely clear what he means by this higher concept of 'the church' and interpretations differ significantly along Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox lines. Nevertheless, whatever the interpretation, it is clear that Paul understands followers of Jesus to participate in an essential unity that is far wider and far deeper than any particular gathering they may be associated with.

Paul's understanding of both the essence and the unity of the church is most profoundly captured by his description of it as the body of Christ. When Paul invokes this term, he is not, as is so often presumed, merely using it as a metaphor, nor is he dressing-up an institution in religious language, and neither is he conceiving of some abstract, mystical reality that we can never quite see. Rather, he is saying something much more startling, and much more sobering in its implications. When Paul refers to the body of Christ, he is saying the same thing as the Gospel of John when it tells us that 'the Word became flesh' (Jn 1:14).

The great scandal of Christianity is that God's communication with humanity – the Word (logos) – took the form of a human life, that of a carpenter's son in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire. The Word became flesh because what God wants to say to us concerns flesh. But Paul takes this idea further. He asserts that, following the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the church is now the body of Christ, that it is indeed the continuing incarnation of Jesus.

The truth of the gospel is that the Word *must always* become flesh. When we read the rest of the Bible in this light, we see that the process of Word becoming flesh is actually God's *modus operandi* the whole way through – it is the meaning of Israel, the charism of the prophets, the revelation that is in Jesus, and it is the vocation that is given 'the church'. Indeed, Word becoming flesh is the very process by which scripture comes to us in the first place.

The implications of this are huge. This becomes clear when in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he explains: 'in Christ, God was reconciling the world to

himself, [...] and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us' (2 Cor 5:19). Once again, he is saying the same thing as the Gospel of John when it quotes the resurrected Jesus as saying: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (Jn 21:21). God's work of restoring all things to

their right relationship, of healing all the cracks and divisions in the world, is now our work; and God's method of performing this work is our method. The medium truly is the message. *We* are called to be the message.

The body of Christ then, is that community of people who have given their lives willingly to be the hands and feet of God's work of healing a broken world; it is the vehicle of the Spirit of Christ in the world.

Paul has a profound understanding of God's purposes in choosing this way of working in the world; a way which is by nature plural and diverse. 'For as in one body we have

many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another' (Rom 12:4-5). In his celebrated discourse of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul is at pains to emphasise that the 'weaker' and less well regarded members of this body are actually *essential* to its health, function and purpose. In other letters Paul

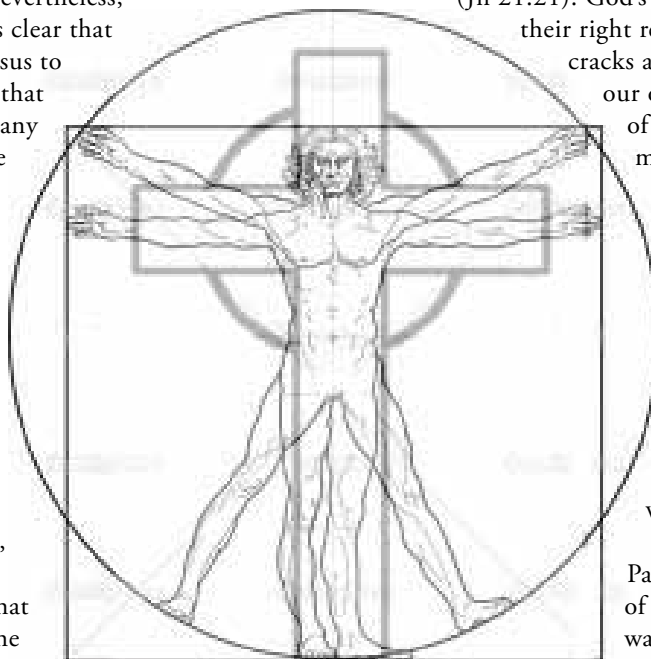
insists that the body of Christ demands the obliteration of social divisions: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' (Gal 3:28)

In other words, the body of Christ is itself to embody

the reconciliation, the healing and wholeness, or more accurately, the holiness, that is intended for humanity. As Stanley Hauerwas is fond of saying, the church does not have a social ethic, the church *is* a social ethic.

It will come as no surprise to *Manna Matters* readers then, that if the church is a social ethic, then its social ethic must also include (how can it not?) its economic life. So what does the economics of the body of Christ look like?

Perhaps the most important thing that needs to be said about the economics of the body of Christ, is that it is to be profoundly different from the economics of the world. In the New Testament, as in the Old, the call to holiness is



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a call to non-conformity:

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Pet 1:13-16)

The last part of this passage is a quote from the Torah (Leviticus 19:2) – the blueprint for ‘the promised land’ - and it is the refrain that explains the detailed vision of Israel as an alternative economic community (see *Manna Matters Nov 2009*). Thus, the call for the body of Christ to embody an alternative economic ethic is not new to the New Testament, but is the calling that has been given to God’s people all along.

The centrality of a new economics to the body of Christ is made fully evident in Acts chapter 2, the account of the birth of the church. The chapter begins with the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit. In the NIV Bible this is described as ‘tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them’ (v.2). Ched Myers has pointed out the Greek in this text uses a very particular term – *diamerizo* – which is properly translated, ‘tongues of fire were distributed among them’. This same term is echoed at the end of Acts 2: ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute [*diamerizo*] the proceeds to all, as any had need.’ Thus the story that narrates the beginning of the church starts with a distribution of the Spirit and ends with a distribution of goods.

What happened in the Jerusalem community in Acts was not communism – relinquishing of private property was not a condition of membership of this community. What happened was much more profound; as Acts chapter 4 explains ‘no one claimed private ownership of any possessions’. What had changed was their attitude and outlook, or to paraphrase Paul, they had been transformed by a renewing of their minds and so no longer conformed to the patterns of the world (see Romans 12:2).

Paul makes clear in his letters that the transformation that comes with receiving the Spirit of Jesus is not some private transaction with God in our hearts, but one that must find its expression in a transformation of our day-to-day lives, meaning all of our acts of production, consumption

and distribution. In Romans 12 he describes offering our ‘bodies as living sacrifices’ – that is, living each day, in the nitty gritty stuff of life, as a counter-cultural expression of God’s love in the world. It is this day-to-day non-conformity for the sake of love, Paul explains, that actually constitutes our true worship of God (v.2).

It is in 2 Corinthians 8 that Paul most fully describes his understanding of the operation of the economy of God within the body of Christ. As within the Jerusalem Community, Paul sees this economy as being based on the freewill (‘eager’) and continual circulation of abundance towards need – ‘The aim is equality’ (v.14). Not surprisingly, Paul’s understanding is explicitly grounded in the story of the manna in the wilderness (see *Manna Matters June 2009*), where “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little” (v.15).

It is self-evident to the New Testament writers that participating in the community of Christ’s spirit leads naturally to a transformation of our economic conduct. As the writer of the first letter of John plainly puts it: ‘How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?’ (3.17). As with Israel in the Old Testament, so with the body of Christ in the New Testament; any community called to witness to the character of the God of the Bible must be an alternative economic community.

Which brings us back to where we started – the widespread and deep ambivalence about church. For it will be clear to any reader that this vision of the body of Christ in the New Testament bears little resemblance to the church of today. The economic lives of Christians in Australia are virtually indistinguishable from the economic lives of everyone else. We are deeply implicated in the destructive economics of our time. Where did we go wrong? How did we get to where we are? Could it be that the crises of the church today are related to our failure to embody the economics of the gospel? What then shall we now do? Stay tuned, because these questions will be the subject of the coming editions of *Manna Matters*.

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A view from Kabul

by Deb Storie



Deb Storie is a much-valued member of Manna Gum's Advisory Council, and up until November last year, she was also Chair of the Board for TEAR Australia. The following reflection, written from Kabul, was her final report in that role.

I wrote my first Chair's Report to the Board of TEAR Australia from my familiar desk in Melbourne while severe weather events battered much of Australia, winds of change shook the Middle East, commentators cast gloom over the economic woes of Europe, and regional authorities and investors 'moved on' poor rural and urban communities in Laos, Cambodia and Burma to make room for 'development'.

I write this, my last Chair's Report, from a less familiar desk in a once-familiar city. The Director of a TEAR Partner Organisation in Afghanistan led yesterday's gathering in Kabul: "We pray for local and foreign governments, perceived as occupiers and tyrants by many and as liberators and friends by a few. May Your Spirit move among them. Lord, we give them into your hands."

I spent last week listening to men, women and children in the Shamali Valley. Children thrilled to be at school and determined to make the most of it. Children unable to attend school yet grateful for other opportunities to learn and socialise. Men whose fields are finally cleared of mines welcome the weight of a plough in their hands again, the scent of freshly turned earth, the mist of their oxen's breath, and the hope of future harvests. Younger men with soft hands and gelled hair wear pens in their pockets, emblems of more urban aspirations. A butcher's apprentice elated that now - his beard gray, his strength insufficient for hard labour, his first family long-buried from hunger

and war - he can at last fulfil a lifelong ambition to learn a trade and leave daily labour behind.

Women, widows and the wives of daily labourers, share their anxieties and hopes: their dread of the approaching winter and determination not to beg; their memories of times when their husbands had work and didn't have to travel so far to find it; and their dream of having a little land of their own, the trees they would plant, the vegetables they would tend, the house they would build, the well they would dig. Meanwhile, they take courage in knowing that they are not alone and, together, save and borrow small sums that, used well, make life a little easier. A week listening to stories of resilience, courage and hope, each story shadowed by real and ever present danger. Mulberry buds promised fruit in Spring but shrivelled thirsty before Summer. Two schools are rocketed at night. A governor asks, with immense courtesy, how the project might reward his cooperation. Labourers wait all week at the employment post and return home with empty hands and empty stomachs. A missile strikes a village far away. The earth shakes but there is no earthquake. The speakers pause, listen, remember, and resume speaking. They speak of hope in language laced with the leaven of uncertainty: If the rains fail again ... If the guns return ... If the rich and powerful notice ... Notice what? Our vineyard ... Our oxen ... Our children ... If the rains come too little or too late ... If the guns return to our part of the country ... If those who have much take from those who

have not the little they have ... If these things come to pass we cannot tend our crops and our flocks, cannot look for work, cannot go to school, cannot meet with friends to encourage each other and save and plan together. Dreams shrivel like mulberry buds before Summer.

Remember the words of Micah:

He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
but they shall all sit under their own vines and under
their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.
Micah 4:3-4

And 800 years later on, the words of Jesus:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be
comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for
they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called
children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice's sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:3-10

Conflict, drought, fear. Peace, climate, justice. Realities and dreams that echo the words of prophets: Blessed are the peacemakers ... children of God.

Postscript from a Conference in Kabul

A woman remembers being evacuated from Northern Afghanistan with her family following the Koran burning earlier this year. The evacuation plane shares the sky with other planes undertaking 'active engagement'. One pilot lifts one family to safety. Other pilots drop death on other families. This woman and her family are British. That means that their country is involved. She speaks of the children her children play with, Afghan children, their best friends. She doesn't elaborate. She doesn't have to; her face speaks volumes. Sometimes you burn with anger because the country you love, your own country, does such despicable things. Sometimes it is easier to love our enemies and pray for those that persecute us than it is to forgive our friends for persecuting those God calls us to love and pray for - especially the children.

It takes more than one miracle for wars born of fear and greed and arrogance to end. But we believe in miracles. The light has shone in the darkness and the darkness shall not overcome. Emmanuel - God with us. Amen.

The Shamali valley. Photo: Deb Storie





Economics of Remote Aboriginal Communities

Part 1 - History

by Tim Trudgen

The following article has been reproduced from the 'Why Warriors' blog (blog.whywarriors.com.au) and is the first part in a series of articles. Manna Matters will run the full series over coming editions.

There has been much discussion over the last few years about economic development, ever since the Howard Government turned its attention to the capitalist potential of Indigenous communities and Aboriginal lands. As a result, policy and funding affecting Indigenous peoples have had a decided focus on economic development. The so called "economic rationalisation" policies that resulted (many of which were introduced with the trojan horse called the Northern Territory Emergency Response), emphasised Indigenous employment, included attempts to remove welfare (payments) for work programs, and included the privatisation of Aboriginal housing and land. The Labor Government has roughly continued with this approach, supporting the dismantling of local community councils and increasing the emphasis on workforce readiness.

But before any of these various policies appeared, people from the dominant culture (us!) who work closely with Indigenous communities have long recognised the need to support economic development. Entities and programs devoted to business or enterprise development with Indigenous people began to noticeably increase in number since around 2003. However, long before this, the Yolŋu people themselves had always worked towards economic independence. As part of what Berndt (2004) called the "adjustment movement" of the 1950's, Yolŋu leaders took actions that they saw as a way of gaining independence, control to "exploit their own resources", and to demand access to better education and skills training. These actions were highly misunderstood by people from the dominant culture. As a result, today the question of how to achieve economic independence still weighs heavily on the minds of Yolŋu leaders.

Why Warriors is an initiative that has been working to find ways to support Yolŋu people in economic development since we started in 2000. Recently we started the Arnhem Human Enterprise Development (AHED) Project as a community-based service to facilitate economic development controlled by the people. It is from this experience that I would like to explain some of the dynamics at play in the economics in the remote communities of Arnhem Land. Not surprisingly, this discussion centres on the role of social security or welfare payments – the in-pouring of government monies. I also make suggestions about how, in the current climate, government monies could be used more appropriately to support local development.

History in brief

Let's not forget that the Yolŋu people had a functional economy and system of trade prior to the arrival of Europeans. In fact, the international trade relationship that existed between the Yolŋu and the Macassans (from today's Indonesia) was highly prized by the British who attempted



Timothy Dhimala with AHED facilitator Ben Pangas discussing Timothy's market garden enterprise amongst the banana plantation.

to monopolise this trade. When the Macassans refused to trade on British terms and continued to trade with the Yolŋu, eventually the South Australian Government prevented the Macassans from returning. Prior to European arrival when Aboriginal trade routes extended right across Australia, Macassan iron and steel was traded right through to the southern states. Once this international trade was taken away from the Yolŋu, they were pushed onto the missions or cattle stations and could only work for rations. In Galiwin'ku, in addition to the usual rations, people received weekly monetary payments enough to buy a tin of syrup. Wages then gradually increased to about 10 pounds a week in Arnhem Land – still much lower than the award wage. The compulsory introduction of award wages that followed saw a dramatic increase in income for workers in the Arnhem Land communities – but it also resulted in a significant drop in the number of workers who could be paid on the existing income of the then missions. It was similar or worse on the cattle stations, resulting in a rise in unemployment all around. Families thus learnt in many cases to survive on the income of just one or two workers. However, because the income was considered high compared to the income they received prior to the award, there is little evidence that people felt they were only just surviving on their previous incomes; in fact many felt decidedly rich.

In some places, unemployment benefits were introduced not long after the award wage. The funny thing is, it seems that the welfare payments were roughly equivalent to the wages received from the missions in east Arnhem Land prior to award wages. So, suddenly people without work were receiving what was very recently considered a good wage ... and for doing nothing. So in this period

we can see that economic rationalisations and policies were being implemented without considering the local economic circumstances or history. In fact, in Arnhem Land many elders argued against the introduction of welfare payments, because, they argued, it would make people lazy and discourage those who were working. The ill-considered economic policy of this self-determination period did exactly this – it undermined the incentive of the award wage and those who previously were gaining a sense of fulfilment in working hard for their family. The additional impact to this was the influx of government workers and contractors through the 1980s, which ultimately displaced local jobs. As a result local unemployment soared.

Not much has changed since then. The main drivers behind the economy of remote Aboriginal communities has become, and remains, government monies – either in the form of Centrelink payments, or government grants and contracts. It is largely an artificial economy. Understanding this better is

the key to better economic policy for Indigenous communities – but more importantly, it is the key for people from the dominant culture to respond appropriately to local needs and initiatives.

In the next article I will place the economics of these remote communities in the context of the wider Australian economy and Yolngu family life.


Timothy Trudgen is the Managing Director of Why Warriors Pty Ltd. He has worked closely with Indigenous people from North East Arnhem Land (Yolngu), Northern Territory Australia, since 2001. Today he works as a Cross-cultural educator, and as an Enterprise Faciliator to help Yolngu develop their economic and social endeavours.

You can follow the AHED Project's work by signing up to their newsletter at www.whywarriors.com.au/ahed-project/news.php

WHY
WARRIORS

Pty Ltd

"Cross Cultural Solutions
for Working with
Indigenous people"



Would you like to join the AHED Project?

The Arnhem Human Enterprise Development (AHED) Project is the not for profit project of Why Warriors Pty Ltd. Why Warriors' mission is to empower Yolngu and other First Nations people to live out their full potential through restoring control and freedom, providing access to information and building capacity and understanding between Indigenous peoples and the Dominant culture. We are currently seeking people for the following positions:

Community-based financial mentor
Seeking a person with a calling to empower Indigenous people to support small businesses in an Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land, NT, Australia. The preferred applicant will have experience in business and/or accounting and skills in financial management. No prior experience with Indigenous people is necessary, but should have an aptitude for teaching others. Practical training in education, cross-cultural, & language skills will be provided, along with ongoing support.

We are looking for expressions of interest from anyone who might consider a commitment to bookkeeping, financial management and training of local Yolngu bookkeepers in Galiwin'ku NT. This would enable a greater degree of education and knowledge transfer to Indigenous clients and would provide opportunities to enable Indigenous people to fulfil such roles in the future. You would be becoming part of a team here to empower and up-skill Yolngu.

IT Volunteer to join the AHED team
The AHED team is looking for an IT volunteer to join the AHED team on an ongoing basis. The volunteer can be based anywhere in Australia. This position is for 5-10 hours a week, with the need for flexibility to be contacted by the AHED team as needed. Tasks include support for our website, database (Netsuite), event management system, plugins, browsers, troubleshooting, and possible purchases of IT equipment. This is a great opportunity to join a small team of people committed to supporting Yolngu people on a longer term basis.

Volunteer project manager for Why Warriors website redesign
Why Warriors is looking for a volunteer project manager to coordinate the redesign of our website. We need a redesign of the basic layout of our website, and to transition our website to be operating through a content management system. We are looking for a volunteer who can commit to working with us for one year on this project. This is a great opportunity to help Why Warriors and the AHED Project communicate more effectively with the wider Australian community about our work and issues concerning Indigenous people.

IT support for Yolngu entrepreneur
One of AHED's Yolngu clients has requested a volunteer who can support their IT needs. This person will need to be able to visit Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island regularly for face to face IT support with these Yolngu clients. This role provides a unique opportunity to get involved directly with our Yolngu clients.

To talk about any of these opportunities further, please contact carlyn@whywarriors.com.au

On being income managed

by Jessie Pangas

As the mother of a two and a half year old, on a low income with my partner, I am eligible to receive a Parenting Payment from Centrelink, our Australian Department of Human Services. As a family we highly value living simply on a low income with a budget we manage carefully, as well as working hard in a holistic way – i.e. not just in paid employment. This Parenting Payment has been of great benefit to us in allowing me to care for our son in keeping with our lifestyle values, while working in a voluntary capacity where I can. So you can imagine my surprise when I received a letter from Centrelink informing me that I was to be compulsorily income managed.

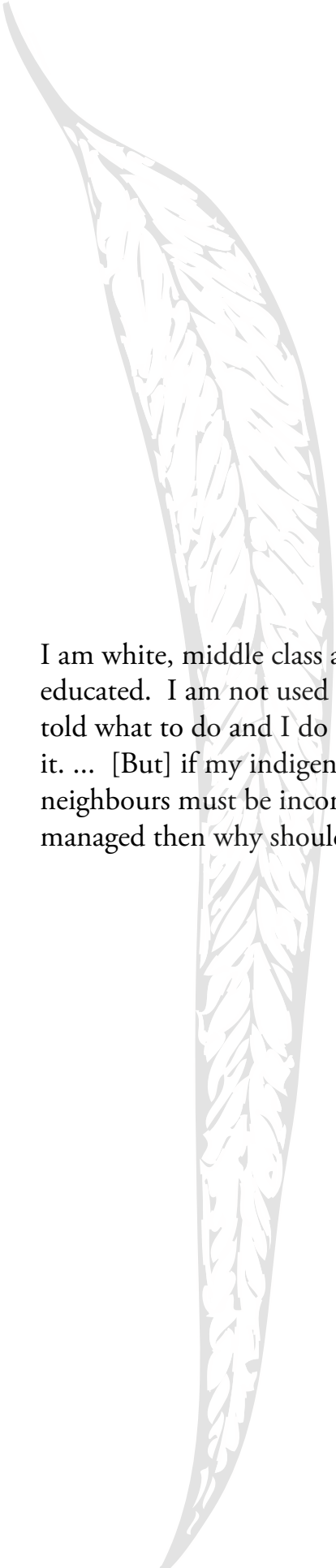
What an odd experience! I found myself looking over my own shoulder, not quite sure how to react. My ego was of course immediately affronted. What do you mean you don't think I can manage my own finances? Who gives you the right to decide that? And, how do you decide that? The fact is, I am quite proud of the way I manage my finances, and do not care for anyone else to interfere with that. But then of course, I am receiving a payment from the Government, so is it their right to decide what I do with it? Or, is it my right to receive that payment because in this country we have committed to a decent income for all and value the work that parents do in looking after their children?

There is one more thing – I am white, middle-class and educated. I am not used to being told what to do and I do not like it. It just so happens that my family and I have recently relocated to a remote indigenous community and consequently are living in an area where income management is compulsory. So, if my indigenous neighbours must be income managed then why shouldn't I?

In 2007 income management, amongst other measures, was introduced as part of the Federal Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER or more commonly known as the Intervention), targeting all Commonwealth income recipients in 73 Northern Territory indigenous communities, quarantining half of their payments, specifying what the money was not to be used for and where it could be spent.

The purpose? Supposedly to help families better manage their money and look after their children. The inherent assumption? That indigenous income recipients cannot manage money or their families. How insulting, paternalistic, racist – and just annoying.

The outcome? Official studies show no clear evidence of the program's benefits outweighing the possible harm. For example, the Menzies Health Research Unit's thorough statistical study of purchases pre and post the introduction of income management in a group of stores showed no statistical evidence of better purchasing patterns after implementation. Apart from making people's finances significantly more complicated, the primary outcome I can see has been to make people feel less empowered and less in control of their lives – something that can only have negative consequences. I do not see any evidence that it has influenced people's spending habits, just as it has not affected mine. People know what they need and want to buy and



I am white, middle class and educated. I am not used to being told what to do and I do not like it. ... [But] if my indigenous neighbours must be income managed then why shouldn't I?



Jessie at the Galiwin'ku grocery store.

so they continue to do so, navigating the system accordingly, eg using the 50% of funds that is income managed to buy their food and pay bills, and if they chose to do so, spending the rest on those things they aren't allowed to buy through income management – cigarettes, gambling, sharing directly with family, etc. It is in effect taking away responsibility from people in making choices about what they do with their income and how they manage their responsibilities. Surely this only increases dependency on welfare systems?

I am also aware that the sharing of the Basics cards, (an EFTPOS type card only accepted in income management approved stores,) is very common and therefore does not prevent the “humbugging” – a term I had never heard used so commonly before moving here, used to refer to the ongoing requests for money from relatives and friends – that the Government seems to think such a problem. People live in extended family groups here and they share their resources. Forcing people to have an extra account with an extra card does not change this.

For myself, my options were to accept income management and apply for a Basics card, which is accepted at all services and shops in this community (the options being so limited anyway), or not accept the payment and try to live off a reduced income whilst we raise our children.

Last week, however, I discovered that it is possible to apply for an exemption from income management. All I had to do was participate in a phone interview consisting of questions such as : “Do I have problems with people asking me for money all the time?” “Do I pay my bills on time?” “Do I save money and put aside money for big bills?” “Do I have a

mortgage?” “Do I have any debts or have I had to apply for any urgent payments or loans from Centrelink?” All of these I answered verbally with no further evidence required to verify my answers. The only documentation I had to provide was a medical certificate of attendance for my son, presumably to show that I take him to the doctor and he is not neglected (if he was of school age I would have needed to provide a record of attendance). What a humiliating process for anyone to have to go through.

I am now exempt from income management for 12 months and must then reapply. I have since learnt, however, that only about 10% of people who apply for exemption are granted it, highlighting my awareness that it was the colour of my skin and upbringing in the dominant culture that made it so easy for me, further confirmed by the embarrassment conveyed by Centrelink staff who I dealt with at the awkwardness of the situation. Moreover, there is a bribe of a \$250 bonus every six months to encourage people to stay on income management voluntarily, which I was offered and refused.

The Government has chosen to further extend the program to what it defines as “appropriate target areas” with higher than average numbers of Commonwealth income recipients. Consequently, the Government now has the power to apply income management anywhere in Australia and from 2012 it will be applied in five new areas in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia at a cost of \$4000 per recipient per year in staff and administration (based on costs in the N.T.).

Why have there been so few objections to this? Is it because it doesn't affect us? I admit that it has been very uncomfortable for me to recognise my own increased interest and indignation at the policy since its imposition on myself. Or, is it our lack of knowledge and understanding that causes us not to act? I think there is also a general sense that we, in the dominant culture, do not really know what is going on in indigenous communities, which is understandable as most of the information we receive is filtered through Government channels and the media, leaving us uncertain as to how to respond. We are told that child, domestic and drug abuse in indigenous communities is rife, that communities are falling apart, that something must be done! For sure, there is gross inequality and disempowerment in indigenous communities but one thing I can tell you, continuing to further disempower people is never the answer.

As dominant culture Australians we must not continue to support policies and programs that continue to disempower indigenous communities, however well-intentioned they may be. We need to ask ourselves – are indigenous people gaining control over their lives through this? Are they being empowered? Or does the power remain with those in the dominant culture?

Jessie Pangas joined the AHED team in Galiwin'ku in July 2011. This article has been re-produced from the 'Why Warriors' blog (blog.whywarriors.com.au).

Reflections from *A Different Way* 2011

Emily Campbell

I went along to *A Different Way* last December with a friend from church, and it truly was one transformative week. I'm a 22-year-old studying nursing/midwifery, and go to Ringwood Church of Christ, and over the past few years I've felt that God has been opening my heart to the life-giving truth found in His Word. It was a beautiful experience to see so many of the things I've been thinking, questioning, talking and reading about being lived out, and discussed so openly.

There was a huge mix of activities; it was great having practical aspects to every day (such as planting buckwheat, pulling apart computer keyboards at the Green Collect warehouse and harvesting many delicious raspberries!), and really be a part of the experience instead of passively observing and listening. I loved having a taste of what intentionally sharing life with others can look and feel like. My head was full all the time, but with such good things to be thinking about! Every day we spent time opening the Bible, in silence, worship and prayer together, which was such a vital part. I found that I left *A Different Way* with more questions. Being surrounded by people to talk things through with, hear different insights and realise through their stories that when we take risks for God and are moved to loving others in all that we do, there will always be new and old questions to grapple with, and things to learn and discover, was really encouraging.

I found that the week helped me become more aware of my actions and the local and global effect seemingly small decisions can have on others, and the importance of personally caring for God's creation. I also grew a greater

appreciation for the way my parents have been an example of this to me all along. A commitment that was sparked from *A Different Way* was to only shop at Op' Shops this year to help me not get lured into a realm of comfort, consumerism and apathy. A few years ago I would have seen something like this as a big sacrifice and struggle, but now it just makes sense, and is all intertwined. I'm

I'm learning through actually taking small steps, that when we try to live from a place of God's grace, the motivator changes from guilt to a love for God and others, and that's where the freedom is found.

learning through actually taking small steps, that when we try to live from a place of God's grace, the motivator changes from guilt to a love for God and others, and that's where the freedom is found.

There were so many glimpses of what life looks and feels like when we partner with God to be a part of His upside down Kingdom. Hearing from different people over meals and seeing different expressions of the gospel being lived out both in the Cudgee and Footscray communities, and being open to hearing from God about how I can be a part of it all where I am, was all really exciting. Despite some of the group journeying for so long, I found everyone to be so humble, and keen to hear from me too. I was blown away by the hospitality, honesty, realness, and hope in the lives of those sharing the experience of the course, and those who opened up their homes and lives to us. Before going along to *A Different Way* I was a little worried I would leave feeling overwhelmed by all the changes I could and should make. Instead my experience since being home has been shaped around the truth that Paul shares in Ephesians 3 that God doesn't work through pushing us around, but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.



Clockwise: Emily with a vegie seedling about to be planted; Wendy collecting compost for the garden; a reflective prayer moment at Childers Cove.

Bronwyn Morris

Moses never lived to see the promised land God gave Israel...but he did leave them with quite a choice before he died: "See I set before you life and death. Choose life." Jesus must've thought Moses was onto something - he echoed this sentiment when he said "I have come that you may have life, and life in all its fullness."

I can't stop longing to know what real Life is like. Obviously it's more than sustaining a pulse, or neither Moses nor Jesus would have bothered to say what they said. Late last year a group of 10 or so of us were privileged to spend the week together, asking the question "What does this Life look like?" Led by Kim & Jon Cornford & Elvira and Greg Hewson, we explored many different angles to the question.

Eye-opening Bible studies were followed by practical logistics as we unpacked what this life in Christ, this new vision of a new Kingdom, has the potential to look like in real terms.

Questions were asked: if our discipleship is a journey, what do we need to leave behind? What are we being saved from, and being saved to? How do we work out our salvation in real life? How do we renew our minds? How can we create a new culture for this new Kingdom? There was resounding evidence to suggest that we are not called to any of this alone, but God always has and always will work through us together as His body to bring about His Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven". And this Kingdom seemed to have a lot to do with us finding life together, in all of its abundance.

I've been left with the question, what is good work for someone who is on a disability pension and who has been told they have no use in a society based on our economy? What is the biblical understanding of good work, and how can this bring about abundant life for these fellow brothers and sisters?

Jesus' vision for a new Kingdom appears to include such practical things as what we do with our time and money; how we look after creation; what we focus our eyes on; how we respond to the needs of others; what we consider to be 'good work'. I was particularly challenged by this last one. Coming from a faith community that embraces many with disabilities of one kind or another, I've been

left with the question, what is good work for someone who is on a disability pension and who has been told they have no use in a society based on our economy? What is the biblical understanding of good work, and how can this bring about abundant life for these fellow brothers and sisters?

A few years ago Jon wrote the following...

"...our task is not to imagine a society which is perfectly loving, just, truthful, free, communal and responsible; our task is to ask what love, truth and justice require of us now, and in which direction the principles of freedom, community and responsibility guide us now." (from "Longing for a Better Country" by Jonathan Cornford)

The week spent on *A Different Way* was for me a week that took that task and gave it hands and feet. My sincere thanks to Kim and Jon, Greg and Elvira, and the other course participants who shared their stories, experience, and hope for a new vision in Christ together.



From left: Stephen weeding with a hoe; Greg and Phil barbecuing home-grown vegies and pork; Bronwyn and others painting a vision of the good life.



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