

# ABM Speakers' Corner



Volume 3, Issue 4, December 2013



## CHRISTMAS AND POSSIBILITY



### Speakers' Prayer

Almighty God, as we engage with our ABM family and friends around Australia, may the gifts that you have taught us give us the confidence to spread your word and bring our work into the hearts of all Australians. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen

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### A CHRISTMAS WELCOME

A very warm welcome to your fourth edition of Speakers' Corner for 2013. Your feedback is always most welcome.

Thank you for your hard work, tireless efforts and support of ABM -we really can't do it without you.

Keeping Christ in Christmas.

*Michael Robinson*

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## Christmas and Possibility

Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace

Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.

(From the Christmas hymn *O Holy Night!*)

It has been found that too often people's vision of what is possible, and therefore how they live in light of that possibility, is easily limited by the circumstances in which they exist. Too often social location, past experience, religious tradition and beliefs, personal ideas and habits, and relationships limit what people can envision as truth. What people envision as truth most often defines the parameters of what people can conceptualize as possible. And how people see the world in terms of truth and possibilities usually determines how they act on a daily basis.

The birth of Jesus came into the midst of a host of impossible conditions. A people suffering under the occupation of a conquering army. A corrupt and collaborating priesthood. A religious system intent on preserving the *status quo*. A woman who could not have children. A virgin teenage girl. Disheartened people who found it difficult to believe that anything could change, and perhaps on some level feared change. And yet, as the prophet Isaiah had said 700 years earlier, God is a God of new things, of new possibilities, of things that we have forgotten how to dream about. Not only was Jesus' birth an embodiment of that newness, his life constantly called us to new possibilities, to new visions of what can be, to ways of living that challenge the dead end wells of impossibility.

"Some men see things as they are and say why. Others dream things that never were and say why not." People of God, Christians, of all people, should be able to envision the world in terms of possibility, to envision a world beyond the limits of our own experiences or doctrines, a world in which righteousness and justice are the norm, a world in which people really do love one another, where "the slave is our brother," and where "all oppression shall cease." It is not because we as human beings are so capable. It is rather because we know and understand that God is a God of newness and possibility in the face of impossibility, evidenced by the birth of Jesus who is the Christ. That vision of newness through God should allow us to live and practice that reality in our daily lives in transformational ways, as God enables us to do so. It should enable us, with God's help, to live in ways that challenge all structures of oppression, all vestiges of injustice, all bastions of prejudice and fear, and to live the Kingdom of God boldly as a present reality.

The Old Testament prophets had such a vision of possibility.

*Isaiah 43:18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 43:19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

And Paul was convinced that in Christ there is nothing short of a new creative act of God at work in people's lives and in the world.

*2 Cor 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

Whatever else the Advent and Christmas seasons might be about, they are about possibility, the profoundly held conviction that how things are is not the way things should be, and that God is at work in the world to bring newness, to bring justice, and to bring peace. If we believe that, truly believe it, perhaps we might learn to envision possibility beyond the bottom of the well. Perhaps we might learn to dream things that never were and ask, with God's help, why not? That vision calls us not just to celebrate freedom from the well, but also to envision God's Kingdom as a present reality, to live out God's new creation in everyday life, to allow God genuinely to transform the world through us.

***Acknowledgements to: Dennis Bratcher***



## ABM AT WORK IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Dubbo, Moree, Terry Hie Hie, Cairns, Yarrabah, Townsville, Darwin, Gunbalanya (formerly Oenpelli), Redfern... just the beginning of the places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican communities exist around this vast continent that I have had opportunity to visit to date. Two facts dominate my experiences:

1. Brothers and sisters in Christ ministering faithfully in all locations to their communities.
2. Resourcing for those ministries is a very, very challenging goal for each diocese, parish and supporting organisation like ABM.

In between times some readings from the ABM library have highlighted that:

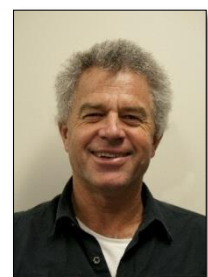
- **statistically** the disadvantage (particularly in health, education employment and housing) that the Indigenous people of Australia have (over 225 years had to accept as their lot is well documented and undeniable.
- **politically** *at best* we have seen innumerable attempts to address the issues only to be often relegislated as one political persuasion replaces the other. *At worst* policies of dispossession (on occasion violent), segregation, government control and the resulting cultural destruction have all too often undone any valuable developments.
- **Religiously** as Loos in White Christ, Black Cross (2007) appears to be saying (my paraphrasing) "[... despite the objective to convert Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) people into a Europeanised compliant sub-caste ... the Church found itself embroiled in emerging broader social issues and changing government policies and .... as the control diminished the Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) people responded more overtly and autonomously.... (and so) their present pilgrimage wherever it might lead needs the contemporary church's support or (it) risk being irrelevant to that journey]"<sup>1</sup>.

Reconciliation is the foundation of the Christian message. Jesus crossing cultural boundaries in addressing the woman at the well (John 4: 1-42) is the ultimate purpose of the ministries. Given the woman had had five husbands and possibly numerous children to different fathers, life at home was probably fairly chaotic. Yet she took His message of salvation back from her encounter with Him and many became believers discovering hope and strength. It is clear that most ministry I have seen is within chaotic situations yet it is the message of the Cross that when made culturally relevant provides light for the journey for those who accept its offer.

My role in being an encourager to brothers and sisters across Australia in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will hopefully coordinate progress along the journey of reconciliation. I hope to contribute through ABM to reconciliation on one level as we aim toward the National Anglican Church having an increasing role in bridging the dreadful gap that has sorrowfully developed in Australian society. I also believe and want to be part of ABM offering reconciliation at the higher level of the Incarnation and its ultimate hope for all people.

I urge you if you have read this far to think about ways that 'you in your small corner' can assist in reconciliation goals locally, in your diocese and even nationally. Let me know if you want a bit of a hand to pray, think and plan that into supportive action.

Mal MacCallum mob 0402208146, email [reconciliation@ABM.asn.au](mailto:reconciliation@ABM.asn.au)  
Reconciliation Coordinator



<sup>1</sup>N. Loos *White Christ Black Cross* (2007) Aboriginal Studies Press.



## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

The **Twelve Days of Christmas** is probably the most misunderstood part of the church year among Christians who are not part of liturgical church traditions. Contrary to much popular belief, these are not the twelve days *before* Christmas, but in most of the Western Church are the twelve days from Christmas until the beginning of [Epiphany](#) (January 6th; the 12 days count from December 25th until January 5th). In some traditions, the first day of Christmas begins on the evening of December 25th with the following day considered the First Day of Christmas (December 26th). In these traditions, the twelve days begin December 26 and include Epiphany on January 6.

The origin and counting of the Twelve Days is complicated, and is related to differences in calendars, church traditions, and ways to observe this holy day in various cultures (see [Christmas](#)). In the Western church, Epiphany is usually celebrated as the time the Wise Men or Magi arrived to present gifts to the young Jesus (Matt. 2:1-12). Traditionally there were three Magi, probably from the fact of three gifts, even though the biblical narrative never says how many Magi came. In some cultures, especially Hispanic and Latin American culture, January 6th is observed as Three Kings Day, or simply the Day of the Kings (Span: *la Fiesta de Reyes, el Dia de los Tres Reyes, or el Dia de los Reyes Magos*; Dutch: *Driekoningendag*). Even though December 25th is celebrated as Christmas in these cultures, January 6th is often the day for giving gifts. In some places it is traditional to give Christmas gifts for each of the Twelve Days of Christmas. Since Eastern Orthodox traditions use a different religious calendar, they celebrate Christmas on January 7th and observe Epiphany or Theophany on January 19th.

By the 16th century, some European and Scandinavian cultures had combined the **Twelve Days of Christmas** with (sometimes pagan) festivals celebrating the changing of the year. These were usually associated with driving away evil spirits for the start of the new year.

**Acknowledgements to: Dennis Bratcher**

### Contact List

*This list only contains people who have given ABM written permission to have their contact details published.*

*To be included, please e-mail your details to Michael Robinson (see address below).*

<i>Bendigo</i>	<i>Mrs Myrtle Shay</i>
<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>The Rev'd Ken Spreadborough</i>
<i>Bunbury</i>	<i>The Rev'd Bill Byleveld</i>
<i>Canberra</i>	<i>The Rev'd Rebecca Newland</i>
<i>Grafton</i>	<i>Helen Newton</i>
<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Mr Brett Collins</i>
<i>Newcastle</i>	<i>The Rev'd Canon Katherine Bowyer</i>
<i>Perth</i>	<i>The Ven. Lionel Snell</i>
<i>Rockhampton</i>	<i>Mrs Sybil Pawley</i>
<i>SA Province</i>	<i>The Right Rev'd David McCall</i>
<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Mrs Edwina Waddy</i>
<i>Tasmania</i>	<i>The Rev'd Warwick Cuthbertson</i>

### List of Resources

#### For Education and Publicity

- Prayer Diary
- Project Book
- Annual Report
- ABM DVDs
- Partner Brochures
- Magnets
- Posters (Marks of Mission, Country overview)
- Banners

#### For Fundraising

- Duplex (Giving) envelopes
- Purses
- Bequest Forms
- Crosses
- Prayer Diaries
- Project Book
- Partners' Magazine

### CONTACT US AT ABM

#### Office Telephone -

Michael Robinson  
*Speaker's Program Co-Ordinator*  
 Christopher Brooks  
*Marketing and Communications*  
 Vivienne For  
*Communications Co-Ordinator*  
 Lorraine Forster  
*Committee Support Officer*  
 Denise Wilson  
*Receptionist*

02 9264 1021

[speakers@abm.asn.au](mailto:speakers@abm.asn.au)

[marketing@abm.asn.au](mailto:marketing@abm.asn.au)

[communications@abm.asn.au](mailto:communications@abm.asn.au)

[committee.support@abm.asn.au](mailto:committee.support@abm.asn.au)

[info@abm.asn.au](mailto:info@abm.asn.au)