



National Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
Ecumenical Commission

March 2010

### Munguddor Bi Buya

Munguddor Bi Buya is an initiative of NATSIEC which supports and encourages Indigenous Theology.

The name Munguddor Bi Buya is a combination of three words each meaning "light": Munguddor from the Bunjalung Aboriginal language; Bi and Buya from the two languages of the Torres Strait.

### Prayer for Reconciliation and Christian Unity

Creator God, may the power of your grace transform us;

Christ, give us courage and hope to manifest the unity we have in you, and to share our life with each other and the world;

Holy Spirit empower us to work for justice for people and the earth.

God, in your grace, transform the world. Amen



An occasional paper from Munguddor Bi Buya

# Illuminations

## Munguddor Bi-Buya

In 2009, NATSIEC convened the second Munguddor Bi Buya retreat at Ballina in NSW.

The aim of Munguddor Bi Buya is to bring together leading thinkers in Indigenous Theology. It is an opportunity to read from the bible, spend some time reflecting together and separately. The hope is that the reflection and conversation will lead to some thoughts being recorded so that we can disseminate them to a wider audience.

There is a great need for this kind of process. Firstly, there is a need to support, encourage, and make public Indigenous thinking on these matters. Too often it is non-Indigenous people who are writing and publishing on the spirituality and theology of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We have our own theologians and we need to highlight and support them.

Secondly, many of those who are thinking about such matters are also heavily involved in their families, their communities and their churches. They do not often have the opportunity to take time to be away from the

hustle bustle of daily life; to rest, to reflect and to pray. Munguddor Bi Buya provides this opportunity.

The theme for this retreat was healing. We chose this theme as we know that as Australia grapples with Reconciliation what we are really talking about is healing. The question for us, as Indigenous Christians, is what is Jesus telling us about the healing process? Saying Sorry is only one step. What else needs to be done and what does Jesus call us to do to in order to heal?

Each of the participants was given a list of suggested Bible readings on healing. They were asked to choose two or three readings which spoke to them about healing in the context of reconciliation and as an Indigenous Christian.

For many of our leading thinkers writing is not always an easy process. This small group approach helps in that proc-

ess and also allows us to find other ways to record their thoughts.

In this case we also made videos of the participants which you can access through our website [www.ncca.org.au/natsiec](http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec).



*Munguddor Bi Buya participants Left to Right. Front row: Revd. Colleen Mamarika, Ms Betty Pike, Bishop Saibo Mabo. Back row: Graeme Mundine (NATSIEC), Revd. Sealin Garlett.*

**Revd. Sealin Garlett's piece was published in an earlier edition of Illuminations and is available at the NATSIEC website.**

## Betty Pike

As our small group came together here at Ballina for our first conversation it was clear that it was to be strong on listening and hearing about the gift of healing. Healing is something that most people who came to see and hear Jesus were very much in need of.

In one sense we often don't listen until we recognize that we do have a need.

In Aboriginal culture listening was extremely important. Oral cultures depended wholly on the senses for their very survival and safety; listening – hearing – seeing – touching – remembering. When their Elders told their cultural stories it was not merely to entertain it was serious business.

So as we listen and hear each other during this precious time in a relaxed and beautiful atmosphere, we too consider it very serious business to listen to these stories of healing.

My choice of stories to reflect on were John 21: 1-11 and John 2: 1-11. But first, from our various responses to our reflections on healing I began to see there are many facets of healing. For example, physical healing, instant healing, gradual healing, faith healing, spiritual healing. Environmental healing is imperative.

I began to view healing as a very deep well with many stepping stones to take before reaching a state of relief from our pain and suffering. Even in apparent instant healing, some steps are required by the individual or a community. See the Phoenician's woman's daughter Mark 7: 24-30 the paralysed man Mark 2: 1-12. The daughter is helped by the mother to receive healing. The paralysed man is helped by a group to be healed by Jesus.

The stories of healing I chose to reflect on were more in the nature of inner spiritual healing. Hidden healing not always apparent to others.

In John 21: 1-11 I have always felt a strong and wonderful image of our culture revolving around the fire. Here we find men working all night fishing without success. They were returning tired disilluminated and downcast. Having



nothing to show for their labour. (This is often the state of heart in today's Christian workers – where is God in all this they ask)?

Then the fishermen see the light from the fire on the shore and someone sitting there.

It took time for them to recognize Jesus, their friend, but they are dismayed when he tells them to go out again. How they would have inwardly doubted at this suggestion. But in spite of this they put their trust in Him and surprisingly they have an enormous catch.

Healed of their doubt they proceed to enjoy the experience of eating a breakfast cooked by Jesus himself. Imagine their experience of wonder at seeing Jesus, healed of His wounds after his crucifixion, laughing and enjoying a fellowship around the fire. This was the third appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. Again the strong symbol of fire as his presence and the sharing and eating of food (Eucharist) in communion trust overcomes doubt.

The second story I reflected on was the first miracle that Jesus performed. I see it as one of the most powerful. Again, the healing of despair of the bridal family and being embarrassed at failing in their duty of hospitality by running out of wine (a hidden healing again). But Jesus shows his care and understanding in seemingly simple things. Again, we see the importance of being in communion. Through food and hospitality this story has a powerful image of the future and a stepping stone to the reason of his life on earth; as a healer of all people. His way was so different he had to be seen to be believed. It is also meaningful to me as an Aboriginal woman because Mary appears and is there as an intercessor. Jesus manifests his respect for a woman who silently challenges him. He is restoring women to a significant place in the community.

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**“I began to view healing as a very deep well with many stepping stones to take before reaching a state of relief from our pain and suffering”.**

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## Bishop Saibo Mabo

Ignoring his first rebuff, by him saying “what is this to me?” Mary knows he will do as she asks. She is the most powerful of all women by being the mother of God.

So in this marriage feast of Cana we witness the reason for the coming of Jesus. To give of himself wholly in death and in life. In the Eucharist we believe that he is the life giving healer to be with us always as promised.

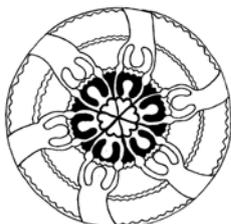
I see in the story the image of the liberation of women in the truest sense. A woman who nourishes, cares and sustains us as she leads us always on our journey toward the creator and our own true country; the Eternal Dreaming.

This is our Dream as Aboriginal people to be finally at home and as one with the Creator of all living things. And to be within the embrace of the spirit of the land our mother.

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Today we had a conversation about fear and authority and there is more to be said about these issues from culture. Something I believe is going to be necessary before true healing can take place is our need to forgive. I think we too need to say ‘Sorry’ that these terrible things have been done to us.

So many were overawed by Kevin Rudd’s powerful apology on that day he had the appearance of being a true Statesman. His historic words changed many lives for ever. I feel it now requires some collective response from our people. I pray that one day the Holy Spirit will heal us and put in our hearts the gift to be able to stay “we forgive you”.



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I come from the island of Mer in the Torres Strait. On my island there are two very important pools of water. One is high on the hill and is looked after by an old lady called Deo. The other one is down near the coast. Deo keeps the pool beautifully clean. She was the only one who knew where the waterhole was because she knew the road leading to it. She protected the water by clearing the leaves and other things. The waterhole was small but it was clear as crystal and it tastes beautiful when you drink it. It has a taste of pure water.

The waterhole always overflowed and it always forms new streams running down from the hill to the villages. It was a good waterhole because it gave health and power to the old woman to live like a young woman. It kept her health secured from any other sickness or diseases.

Everyone uses the other pool, the one on the valley, for washing their bodies, washing their clothes, water for drinking and water for cooking. Nobody cares about that pool. Often it is filled up with dead leaves and with the bodies of frogs that had died and fallen into the pool. It is no wonder that a lot of young women who used that pool started to get sores around their eyes and their mouths. Nobody knew how to fix things, how to make them better. Then something strange happened. A bad man who lived near the pool on the hill started thinking about Deo, the person who cared for the beautiful pool of clear water up on the hill. The old lady seemed younger because she had been using the beautiful clear water for everything so the bad man lusted after her and wanted to marry her. When Deo came down to the valley the man chased her and almost caught her when suddenly the

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young women who had been sick with sores around their eyes and mouth rushed out and helped to protect the old woman by killing the man. They then began to climb the hill to the beautiful pool, and they began to wash themselves in the pure water. Over time the sores on their bodies began to heal, and they began to live a new and better life.

When I was thinking about this story, a story of healing using pure water, I began to think of that great day in Parliament House where the Prime Minister of Australia said "sorry" to the Stolen Generations of our great country. The life we were living before that day was like the life the young women were leading wasn't it? Our life had made us sick, we had sores on the outside of our bodies, and we had them in our hearts as well. The conditions we lived in were just like the life those young girls had led.

I looked around the crowd of people before the ceremony and I could see a little bit of the hurt that had touched everyone there. You could see it on people's faces. I thought to myself "how can this be changed: how can healing take place where there has been so much hurt?" But then our Christian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stood up and said the words, the words we all longed to hear. I could feel the change amongst the people there, the looks on their faces, the words of joy, and the tears of relief. The healing had begun. It was not a quick fix. Just like those young women on my island, healing did not take place straight away; they had to work hard to make it happen. That's the same for you and me, isn't it? But the words of healing were spoken that started a new day for you and me and for our children, and our children's children. Praise God for that!

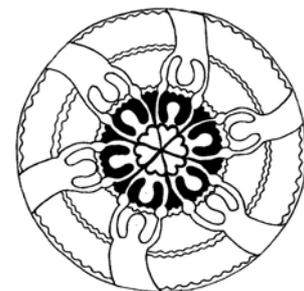
The story of the two waterholes also reminds me of the world today. We have two waterholes and their resources in peoples lives. One is entertainment. Some people are greedy for money; they have new cars ,new houses and boats plus silver and gold that brings wealth for their lives. The question comes for us - what are the results that gives growth for people

today. Well the results are countries fighting each other in wars and people's relationships cut down and they hate each other. Physically people grow weak on today's life. There is no chance to be with Jesus in the presence of the almighty God Yahweh. Because people are drinking from a sandy waterhole.

The other waterhole is from the solid rock which is of God. The people who drink from it are the ones who are faithful. They have committed their life and become humble and obedient to God's will. Also, they are people who always listen and obey and show their lives to others how they were saved from that filthy habit. Because they abide in the shelter of the Yahweh The Almighty. Their health is strong and they are alive in the church of God.

The water they drink from the hilltop is always full and flows out and forms many other streams and it has a clean beautiful taste. This water is the Holy Spirit that washes the sins of the world and it strengthens peoples' lives so that their faith can stand strong and fight against the word of the flesh and the devil. The Living stream only flows from the Church of God and it dwells there.

After Jesus ascended into heaven he promised his disciples "I will go to the Father but I will send a comforter to help you and guide wherever you may be, and this is God the Holy Spirit. He will teach you to observe all things, you will be my witnesses for others in the world, you will testify for me because the Holy Spirit gave you wisdom knowledge and understanding; He will teach you that. He will make you strong and not weak.



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**"Our life had made us sick, we had sores on the outside of our bodies, and we had them in our hearts as well".**

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## Revd. Colleen Mamarika



Who am I?

I am an Aboriginal.

Where do I belong? I belong to this land. This land is my motherland. I was born of my land and it's important to me because I have the name of the land and I belong to the land.

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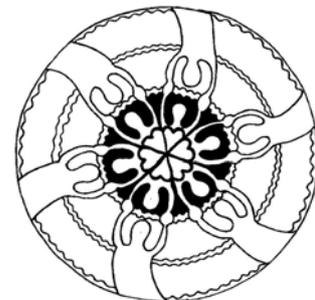
I tell the history stories because they are all about the people. Our history stories are all about our people who walked on this land and protected this land and cared about this creation. Our people knew how to look after this land because God the Creator gave them this responsibility to look after the animals and to guide this land. In the mornings women went hunting to look for bush foods and the men went out fishing and turtle hunting. When they came back home they cooked the food they gathered. When everything was cooked they called in other clans to share the meals with them.

This is our history story. When I tell the history stories I feel God is with me and I have to teach. I have to tell the stories for the future. The stories of how the people walked on this land. They were guided by the Creator God who lived among our people and gave us words to pass on to our children about how the great spirit of God made this land and walked and planted everything in this land. Through their stories they felt the Spirit of God was with them. Telling stories sitting around the campfire and sharing the words with each other is very important. When we see the symbol of people sitting around the campfire we see the symbol of the fire which is the Holy Spirit guiding and fulfilling them and giving them authority. God is with them. This is the story of my people who walked and left the footprint so

we will remember their stories so we can pass it on to others.

In the early time our Ancestors used to sit together around the campfires and start to tell stories by word. They didn't use a pencil or a paper but they passed the word by their mouths to share the message. When they were sitting under the stars and the moon they knew that God had given them words to pass on, and on to other generations. The stories were given by the Creator God. Understanding God by looking at the things he made that God was here with them. Today Aboriginal people still remember the stories from our grand grand fathers. God walked with his people from place to place by the power of the Holy Spirit, leading them and guiding them

I was thinking about the land. The land represents the people, our culture, the dreamings and ceremonies. I think it is like a tree, with all the roots. The roots of the land connecting to us. When we look at all the cultures there are roots going in other directions. When we think about land it's important that we are representing ourselves as Human Beings. When we think about the land we see how God is so big and we are all related to each other and are sharing our stories. Our culture we are one family.



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**Resources are now available  
for the Week of Prayer for  
Reconciliation.**

Prayer Booklet with readings and  
reflections for each day of the  
week of prayer.

**Visit NATSIEC's**

**Website for these**

**resources:**

[www.ncca.org.au/natsiec](http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec)

## **2009 CHRIST AND CULTURE: CHRIST THROUGH CULTURE**

### **CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

If you want to understand more about Indigenous theology and spirituality then this is the publication for you!

In 2009, NATSIEC held the second Christ and Culture Conference in Ballina, NSW. The conference was an exploration of Indigenous theology, what it is and the unique contribution Indigenous spirituality makes to an Australian theology. Other sessions included: looking at the experience of 100 years of mission in Australia: examining what the Community of Church of the future would look like; the importance of story telling; and how we bring Indigenous culture into our ministry. Also discussed was how to strengthen our networks and work better together.

With International theologians, Dr Wati Longchar and Dr Limatula Logkumer, adding their voice to local theologians such as Evelyn Parkin this collection of papers, and presentations, is a valuable addition to the body of knowledge on Indigenous theology and spirituality. Other contributors were renowned futurist Prof. Tony Stephenson, Bishop Greg Thompson and Pastor Harry Walker. Revd. Colleen Mamarika, Revd. Dr. Joy Sandefur and Ms. Tahnia Mossman also talked about their own experiences and perspectives from the field. Finally, the voices of each and every participant are woven throughout the publication through the inclusion of their thoughts arising out of the group work.

Many of the sessions were recorded and are included on an accompanying CD - in MP3 format.

**Order from [www.ncca.org.au/natsiec](http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec)**

## **KERKER**

**Kerker (it's time)**, the first publication of Munguddor Bi Buya is a collection of essays by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. These essays are one more step in the long journey which Indigenous Australians are making in rediscovering the light which shines through their traditional cultures, which gives strength and purpose in the face of continuing racism and oppression and which leads onto a brighter world for all.

Time is at the heart of these reflections: The Dreaming, the time before European 'contact' (BC-before Cook), the time since 'contact' (AD-after destruction), biblical time, prophetic time, the time of the birth of Jesus, the time of the fulfilment and beginning of Jesus' ministry, the time that is the present, the time of challenge, the time of hope.

**Kerker is available for purchase from NATSIEC**



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