

# Frontier Services

“God of Justice and of Hope,  
We bring before you ...  
those who welcome us into their midst and those who  
turn us away,  
those who travel with us, and those we can't reach,  
those who share our struggle and those who ignore  
it.”<sup>1</sup>

In 2009, Frontier Services continues to be an expression of the commitment of the whole Church to find a way to be there with, and for, those who live beyond the possibility of a regular gathered congregation.

Almost one hundred years of continuous presence in, and commitment to, outback Australia have allowed the development of relationships of trust and confidence, creating for us a special role in supporting communities and individuals experiencing rapid and extreme change for a variety of reasons.

Frontier Services is tasked by the Assembly to facilitate ministry and mission in remote areas of Australia, particularly through the provision of a broad range of community services and to do that in partnership relationship.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, those partnerships have become more numerous and more complex as Presbyteries and Synods and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress identify opportunities for shared ministry but also as pressure on human and other resources make some of those developments necessary.

Frontier Services is in the enviable position of having almost all of its (growing number of) placements filled, while Presbyteries in many places struggle to identify incumbents for important ministries.

In this environment, it has been really important that we continue to remind the whole Church why ministry to the distant (relatively) few who do not fit the traditional model of congregation is critically important.

Following the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly, the new Frontier Services Board welcomed Jan Trengove to the Chair and committed itself again to serving the people of the heartland, revisiting the Frontier Services Vision Statement and developing a new Strategic Plan.

The Board was keen to add the commitment “as we journey together” to the Vision statement that:

In the remote areas of Australia –  
Reconciliation will become reality  
Hope will replace anxiety and despair  
Justice and equity will build community  
Everyone will have access to the services they need  
As we journey together ....<sup>3</sup>

New partnerships in both ministry and community services have been highlights of the past three years, addressing the Board's primary strategic focus on

best practise in patrol ministry and community services including working with aboriginal communities as invited; further progressing the cause of reconciliation; and building relationships with Congress and a range of other church, non-government and government organisations.<sup>4</sup>

In patrol ministry we have:

- Started the new Katherine Patrol in consultation with the Pilgrim Presbytery and the Northern Synod
- Restructured the West Coast (Tasmania) Patrol in partnership with the Smithton Congregation and the Presbytery of Tasmania
- Expanded the Sturt Patrol (SA) in consultation with the Synod and Presbytery of South Australia
- Reshaped the Cape York Patrol in consultation with the Presbytery of North Queensland and the Anglican Diocese of North Queensland
- Begun the West Arnhem / Jabiru Ministry, a partnership with the Pilgrim Presbytery and the Northern Regional Council of Congress to provide resource ministry to the communities of Maningrida, Minjilang, Waruwi and Jabiru.<sup>5</sup>
- Instituted the Snowy River Patrol and the High Country Patrol in partnership with the Presbytery of Gippsland (Victoria)
- Continued discussions with the NSW Board of Mission in relation to ministry in far western NSW<sup>6</sup>
- Commenced discussions in relation to possible partnerships in further NRCC resource ministries<sup>5</sup>
- Developed a new profile for ministry in the East Kimberley with the Pilgrim Presbytery and the Kununurra Congregation and continued to review the ministry needs of the West Kimberley, particularly through consultation with NRCC and the Pilgrim Presbytery<sup>5</sup>
- Rejoiced in the emergence of the “North West Forum” as a means of reviewing and visioning the ministry needs of the North West of WA with the Synod and Presbytery of Western Australia and Congress WA<sup>5</sup>
- Hosted the interdenominational Remote Ministry Consultation (June 2009) to address the possibilities for greater co-operation and to avoid overlap in ministry in remote areas.<sup>7</sup>

In community services, new partnerships have been developed with:

- UnitingCare West, with the possibility of shared office accommodation in the future
- The Port Hedland congregation where church space has been made available as a base for respite services
- The Mutitjulu community in the provision of their aged and respite services and the operation of their childcare centre<sup>8</sup>
- The Yuendumu community in the provision of support for their aged care operations<sup>8</sup>

- The Warmun (Turkey Creek) community in the staffing and provision of support for their community care operations<sup>8</sup>
- Ngerreke, in the support of the delivery of care packages and community care to outstations<sup>8</sup>
- Croydon and Etheridge Shires and Gulf Savannah Development Inc in the development of the new Savannah Regional Health Service

“You stride before us  
 Into communities devastated by grief and dysfunction  
 Into towns and villages demoralised by decline  
 Into meetings called to discuss issues of challenge,  
 and  
 Into tense family situations and difficult work  
 environments.”<sup>1</sup>

Across the continent, patrol ministers and community services staff work with individuals and communities under extreme pressure. Indeed, in many places the term “community” no longer describes the key ingredients which once connected people and provided strength and sustainability to those gathered in one place.

In the Pilbara, and other parts of the continent affected by mining activity and the “resources boom”, so great has been the dislocation and dysfunction that long-term locals no longer recognise what they once thought of as their communities. In these places, the traditional owners and those who are disadvantaged in any way are pushed, in some cases quite literally, to the edge.

Shops and small businesses are closed as staff cannot be hired, tradespeople cannot be found and housing needs cannot be met. Huge camps are springing up around towns on both sides of the continent into and out of which workers, earning once unimaginable sums of money, are flown from capital cities.

At “home” the dislocation continues – families left behind, potential for expenditure vastly beyond that of neighbours and peers, lack of connection to community at either end and in many cases, disaffection from almost anything but work and the work pattern.

In 2009, the global financial crisis has eased the pressure on some regional centres, creating new challenges and further dislocating fragile community. It remains to be seen how this will impact over time.

On remote properties and small communities associated with pastoral industries, the effect of drought has been extreme. Almost every patrol area has experienced years – and in some cases many years – of drought. In those places where rain has fallen in the past year, it will take at least as many years to rebuild, where that can be achieved. In many places the critical task of recent years has been to stand alongside those who have had to take the hardest decisions about when –and where – to go.

Issues of viability, land management, succession planning and climate change are impacting on what people once saw as a certain future.

Counselling skills and the ability to simply be there with those whose hopes and dreams have dried up around them have been the key roles of patrol ministers from one side of the continent to the other, and in Tasmania where severe drought continues.

Aboriginal communities have experienced additional stress in the recent past as a result of the Northern Territory “intervention”, now extended to parts of Western Australia. Some measures were welcomed in some places, others opposed almost everywhere but while every community experienced the intervention differently, what was common was yet another experience of something imposed without consultation.

Trust slowly developed has been placed under extreme challenge and to date many of the promises of the intervention remain unfulfilled.

To all of these environments, Frontier Services patrol ministers and community service staff bring themselves and the values imbued by our purpose statement - “to offer service and ministry in the name of Christ to the people of remote Australia through compassionate care, justice and nurture of the spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

“You are there on the road with us –  
 At the dawn, as we head out to be with Your people  
 in their place  
 In the blaze of the midday sun as we meet with  
 traditional elders or work side by side with a farmer to  
 repair a windmill, and  
 In the evening, as we come home into the setting  
 sun.”<sup>1</sup>

Patrol ministers based in Esperance, Meekatharra, the Western Desert, Tom Price, Exmouth, Derby, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Jabiru, Alice Springs, Hawker, Orroroo, Port Augusta, Smithton and Queenstown, Oatlands, Swifts Creek, Orbost, Cunnamulla, Charleville, Hughenden and Weipa continue to provide community and individual support, facilitate community development activities, act as a catalyst and a resource for furthering community issues and provide sacramental ministry when possible and appropriate.

Together they support about 10,000 people in outback Australia.

“You are beside and beyond us as we settle our thoughts for the night,  
 As we bring before you the needs and cares of those we have met (and even of those we have not)  
 And as we gather our strength for tomorrow.  
 You are there to meet us, to inspire and refresh us,  
 when we step out to do it all again.”<sup>1</sup>

Frontier Services continues to be the largest provider of aged and community care in remote Australia. We have 5 high care residential aged care services (Old Timers in Alice Springs, Pulkapulka Kari in Tennant Creek, Rocky Ridge in Katherine, Terrace Gardens in

Darwin and Numbala Nunga in Derby) and 2 low care residential aged care services (Flynn Lodge in Alice Springs and Tracy Aged Care in Darwin) of our own and operate a number of others (The Juninga Centre in Darwin and Ngamang Bawoona in Derby) on behalf of their Aboriginal or community owners.

In common with UnitingCare and other aged care providers everywhere, we struggle with issues of inadequate funding for aged care and a shortage of nursing and personal care staff everywhere, exacerbated of course by the need to employ them in remote locations.

Additionally we have a total of 69 community aged care packages and a wide variety of respite and transitional care services available. We have pioneered the flexible use of facilities to provide innovative services where they might otherwise be unavailable and established pilot programs where funding authorities required convincing.

The unused wing of our rebuilt high care facility in Katherine, for instance, became "Stepping Stone" – a transitional care unit where those discharged from Katherine Hospital can receive rehabilitation and support. Not only that, but family members can be trained in wound care or ongoing condition management, in order that those returning to remote communities have a much lower incidence of return to acute care.

As a result of the services available and the commitment of local staff, a Katherine resident, admitted some 2 years ago to our high care facility in a totally dependant state, unable to feed himself or undertake any personal care, has recently moved to supported accommodation in the community.

Some years ago, Frontier Services developed a program we called "Territory Older Persons' Support Service" to support those caring for people with challenging behaviours to modify those behaviours in order to improve their ability to care, and thus enhance the quality of life of the care recipient.

That program was evaluated by the Australian Government in 2007 and rolled out nationally as the Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Scheme in 2008. While we continue to make representations in relation to the nomenclature, we deliver the program throughout the Northern Territory and the Kimberley and employ the only consultant geriatrician in the NT to do it. Frontier Services also developed the training materials for DBMAS in indigenous communities and rolled out the training package.

In the Pilbara, new Mobile Respite and Mobile Mental Health Respite Services have provided support for those caring for loved ones without access to mainstream respite. 4WD vehicles and caravans make the services totally mobile and provide the opportunity for care to come to the carer – either in community or in remote locations, or to take the care recipient away for a break, allowing respite for the carer at home.

Extreme housing shortages in the Pilbara led to creative solutions involving home offices and a partnership with the Port Hedland congregation.

In 2009, mobile and other mental health respite services are being developed in partnership with communities and organisations across the Kimberley.

In addition to these innovative programs, we have continued to provide nursing services, migrant support, community support services and an extensive range of mobile and other children's services.

Collectively, we travel about 2 million kilometres a year ensuring that services and support are available to people where they need them.

In 2008, we decided to quarantine our own carbon tax and to invest it in the Tiwi Islands Forestry Project, ensuring that we are not only planting trees but helping to train indigenous foresters as well.<sup>8</sup>

"We give you thanks for the trust you place in us –  
To do your will  
To be your presence  
In this your land."<sup>1</sup>

The Frontier Services Board's second strategic focus has been on determining further critical areas of need and on speaking out from our knowledge base.

In response to identified need, in aged and community care we have:

- Committed to the construction of a new high care residential aged care building to replace the ageing facilities at Numbala Nunga in Derby
- Opened a new wing (the Nancy Lamb wing) and upgraded the Marion McGeogh Wing at Old Timers Nursing Home in Alice Springs
- Undertaken significant fire upgrade work at all of our residential aged care services
- Completed plans for a new Home and Community Care Centre in Kununurra
- Established the Pilbara Mobile Respite Service and the Pilbara Mobile Mental Health Respite Service
- Begun the establishment of the Kimberley Mental Health Respite Service
- Took over the Home and Community Care services in Tennant Creek
- Obtained funding for day respite services for aged care clients in the communities of Katherine and Tennant Creek
- Expanded our Respite Options programs throughout the NT

And in community support services we have:

- Established a National In-home Care scheme to provide child care at home for families who need care on a long term basis
- Expanded the Gulf Savannah Regional Health Service and opened a new regional office in Georgetown
- Developed a proposal for a new Community Centre for Andamooka

- Obtained funding for Home and Community Care services for the far north of South Australia
- Re-established counselling and other community support activities in Meekatharra
- Restructured our Remote Family Care Service and begun work on new models of service delivery through our Remote Area Families Services to provide for the Australian Government's commitment to universal access to early childhood education for every child under 5
- Taken over the management of the multi-functional Children's Service in Charleville

Our continuing and growing role as a provider of services in remote areas has resulted in an increased number of approaches from communities and government authorities in relation to areas of special need.

We have extended our systems and resources to meet that increasing need and continue to keep our structure under review.

In the past three years, we have developed a significant training division with a focus on training our own staff but also training as many people as possible in communities with a view to the development of a skill base which will allow communities to manage their own service delivery into the future.<sup>8</sup>

In 2007 Frontier Services was the winner of the Federal Minister for Training's Award for Excellence in Training.

The past three years have also seen the significant development of the Outback Links program, connecting volunteers to the needs of families and communities across the land.

Outback Links volunteers can make a very real difference -

"The Grahams left yesterday, and we all felt we had made very special friends. They were just so lovely and worked so hard. It was so very easy having them at school. I loved arriving in the morning and seeing them... My students even played the marimbas for them. Thank you so much for providing our school with this volunteer service. No one at present has a moment to spare. Our gardener is in full swing building the new undercover shed for our school, another family is away at sport in Darwin and another family has just had a baby, so our very small P&C is grateful for your help."

And even more so when working in partnership with other Frontier Services' services -

"Sorry that it has taken me so long to get around to writing this, but I have been quite busy trying to finish the year off with school and going to Charleville for speech and awards and swim muster. Saw Flick, gave her a cheque for RAFS visit and a little donation for all the good things that you guys do. I am doing so much better now and it has been reflected in the whole family. We are trying to make some positive changes all round and talking with Max has just been

a real godsend. We have applied for our dream job, and are positive but I am sure there will be plenty of competition for the position. John is very excited but very scared about it too.

Thank you so much for everything that you have done for us all and me in particular, you literally saved this family. Well I had best go as on air is finished. Thank you once again."

"We give you thanks for the courage you give us – To say and to do the right thing at the right time and To know what matters most For these your people."<sup>1</sup>

Frontier Services has a key role to play also in speaking out on issues affecting remote Australia.

As a member of key representative bodies, we add our voice to those of other organisations with a critical interest in regional and remote Australia and contribute to the development of policy when and where we can.

Frontier Services is a member of the Aged and Community Services Association and is represented there by Sharon Davis, our NT Regional Manager, who is also on the Minister's Advisory Committee for Dementia and is a consultant to the Department of Health and Ageing on Indigenous Aged Care.

Our Community Care Manager, Pauline Wardle, represents Frontier Services on the National Rural Health Alliance, serving also as a member of the executive and as its Treasurer.

Marina Izatt, Manager Queensland and SA, chairs the Australian Rural Education Association.

Frontier Services plays a key role in the Isolated Children's Parents Association with representation at national, state and local councils and is one of the inaugural members of the Australian Healthcare Reform Alliance.

We continue our lifelong association with the Royal Flying Doctor Service through membership of the Australian Council and, since the restructure of UnitingCare Australia and consequent demise of Advisory Committees, we participate in the networks which seek to maintain an overview of issues affecting particular service delivery areas.

In recent years we have contributed significantly to the Minister's review of the efficacy of NextG as Telstra sought to replace the CDMA network; we made a detailed and comprehensive submission to the Review of the Social Impact of Drought; we have provided input to the National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care; and made numerous representations on subjects as diverse as services to support 457 visa holders to the appropriateness of criminal history checks for aged care employees in aboriginal communities.

The Frontier Services Board has also been committed to capacity building. It made a strategic commitment to enhancing our resources, ensuring good governance and being an effective employer.

Additional resources were committed in 2007 to our development and public relations functions. The modernisation of our logo and signage, updating of stationery, centralised production of service brochures and material, and updating of the website have assisted in the professional presentation of our work.

A challenging public relations plan has resulted in significantly increased regional media exposure assisted by high profile events such as the Red Centre to Gold Coast Car Trial in 2008, for which Frontier Services was the charity partner, and the Adelaide Show.

Our fundraising area has also received attention and a new database has allowed us to maximise our response to our donors. New fundraising acquisition programs have been successful and ambitious targets exceeded. A major gifts officer was appointed in 2007.

The Board has continued to work on policy issues and on the provision of a theological and philosophical framework for our ongoing growth and development.

Members of the Board and of the Frontier Services Finance and Audit Committee have given generously of their time, as have thousands of supporters across the continent and hundreds of people who have put their practical skills at our disposal on work parties or participating in events like the Birdsville Races.

We continue to be blessed by our staff – well over 500 of them. In 2008 we celebrated 30 years of service by 2 staff in Alice Springs and marked year's end by noting that more than half the staff had served for over 5 years. While there is considerable turnover, particularly in residential aged care staffing, the core of our staff is defined by its length of service and by the commitment and dedication shown by everyone, particularly when times are tough.

Many of our patrol ministers are now committed to at least 10 year terms in their patrols and the ministry is greatly strengthened by the continuity and commitment of those in placement.

Frontier Services is renowned for its employment practise, cited time and again as an Employer of Choice for Women and gained again in 2008 a three year waiver from reporting under the EOWA legislation.

We are committed to supporting our staff and do that through personal support, opportunities for training and the provision of additional resources where that is appropriate. A network of clinical psychologists is now available to our patrol ministers on a voluntary basis for critical incident debriefing or advice; Bush Crisis Line (a service operated by the Council of Remote Area Nurses) is available to our nursing staff, counsellors and patrol ministers; and we run regular conferences for Patrol Ministers and for aged and community care and children's services staff as well as regional gatherings where possible.

And we give you thanks for being with us –  
At the day's beginning

As we go about Your business  
And at journey's end."<sup>1</sup>

The Frontier Services Board is acutely aware of the challenges inherent in our commitment to remote Australia.

- Increasing ministry needs as circumstances continue to change rapidly will stretch human and financial resources
- Staffing will continue to be a challenge while workforce shortages continue, particularly in aged care and childcare
- Housing will continue to be a significant factor in recruiting staff particularly to communities where mining or other development has artificially inflated prices
- Inadequate aged care funding will continue to challenge viable operation particularly where the need to provide culturally appropriate care increases costs
- Increased and duplicated accountability requirements and onerous reporting regimes will continue to stretch an organisation committed to minimising its administration in favour of maximising its support for vulnerable Australians
- Training will continue to be a priority
- Working with communities whose history and experience of dysfunction continues to affect their ability to provide services will continue to stretch our own human and emotional resources
- Working nationally in a federated structure under pressure will test our relationships and call for a real focus on our mandate and challenge our ability to keep it before the whole Church

Nevertheless, the Board is confident that the energy and commitment evident throughout Frontier Services will allow the Assembly's agency to maintain, indeed to enhance, this vital expression of our identity as the Uniting Church in Australia.

"God of Justice and of Hope, Pilgrim God,  
Let your love live within us as we journey with you on the road".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the Heartland 2008

<sup>2</sup> Frontier Services Mandate Assembly Standing Committee 2004

<sup>3</sup> Frontier Services Board 2006

<sup>4</sup> Frontier Services Board Strategic Plan 2006

<sup>5</sup> Relates to Assembly Key Direction (a) working in relationship with Congress

<sup>6</sup> Relates to Frontier Services SMART Goal No.3 – Assembly Key Direction (d) articulate and celebrate our identity as the UCA

<sup>7</sup> Relates to Assembly Key Direction (b) seeking closer unity with other churches and Frontier Services SMART Goal No.1

<sup>8</sup> Relates to Frontier Services SMART Goal No.2 and Assembly Key Direction (a) continuing reconciliation

<sup>9</sup> Frontier Services Board 2006

**Mrs Rosemary Young**  
**National Director**