

The Heart of Australia

St Elizabeth's, Tarragindi teacher Timothy Lynch recently travelled to the heart of Australia to assist with a camp that develops sport and musical skills for boys in the Northern Territory.

This is his account of a trip that provided Timothy with educational and spiritual nourishment, and challenged him to realise that the gospel can enter our lives in unexpected ways.

Nyangatjatjara College is located in Yulara, the village of Uluru, Central Australia. The school was established to develop the educational needs of three closely related Aboriginal communities: Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara (Docker River). The Anangu people are the traditional landowners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

On arrival I marvelled at the tremendous beauty and unique mystery of Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kata Tjuta (Olgars) and the surrounding red soil, all of which can be clearly seen from the College. However, it was to be my interaction with the Aboriginal adolescents aged between 12 and 19 that left the greatest and lasting impression of my visit.

Our opening duty for the camp involved picking up the students

from Docker River, a four hour trip down a dirt road in a 4WD troop carrier. The scenic drive was one of many 'slowing of time' experiences that I had for some time forgotten. Stopping to ponder is a luxury that many of us sacrifice or reject from our busy lifestyles, but one necessary for reflection, growth and prayer. We arrived safely to the Kaltukatjara Aboriginal community, 10 kilometres from the WA border.

Visiting Aboriginal communities and working closely with the boys during the camp enabled me to appreciate first hand the spiritual strengths of their culture. Salient features of my time with the adolescents were the brotherhood and closeness between one another within a community and the non-reliance on material goods. This is very different to the consumer

'Consumerism is different from Christianity in one very important way. Christianity teaches us to love people and use things. Consumerism teaches us to love things and to use people' Di Giacomo (1994)

society we are often immersed in and yet also models the actions of what we preach as Christians.

When the boys discovered that I was the brother of their teacher they greeted me with warm approval and their respect instantly grew. Family was of great significance to them and their religious values.

The other salient feature of the Aboriginal culture was their understanding and respect for the land. Their knowledge of the surrounding plants, animals and weather patterns, as well as their many uses was mystifying. Tjukurpa is the religious heritage of the Anangu people, "it is the law for caring for one another and for the land that supports our existence; it tells of the relationships between people, plants, animals and the physical features of the land".



Brotherhood was a salient feature of the trip.

This teaching experience enabled me to further identify the Kingdom of God within both the culture I live and the culture of the Anangu people, thus linking my faith with the students' culture. As Catholic educators



AFL is a passion for many Territorians.

attempting to understand the lives and experiences of our students "we undergo conversion to a deeper sense of what the Gospel challenges us to become" (Tinsey, 2002).

Dr Timothy Lynch
St Elizabeth's, Tarragindi.



Kata Tjuta (Olgas) in Australia's remote outback