

History of McKay Patrol

The McKay Patrol (based in Cloncurry) stems from the original North West Patrol of the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) first set up in Cloncurry in 1915 and the Federal Methodist Inland Mission Patrol (FMIM), which commenced in 1928 at its Gulf Mission Base in Camooweal. The AIM served in Cloncurry from 1915 until 1931 and then in Mt Isa from 1947 until 1960. FMIM was based at Camooweal from 1928 until 1947 then in Camooweal/Boulia until 1956. During the similar period FMIM had a Patrol Padre based in Cloncurry from 1927 - 1960. FMIM also had a Patrol Padre based in Mt Isa during the period 1929 until 1955, which also served the Camooweal/Mt Isa areas from 1956.



At the Union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in 1977, the various Inland Mission agencies of those three churches became Frontier Services. The Queensland Synod, however, elected to keep the North West Patrol as a ministry of the Synod rather than a Frontier Services Patrol. This decision was made due to

nature of the Patrol having a proportionally large geographical area, an unusually large number of communities within its bounds and an established support network through the North Queensland Presbytery.

Rev Dennis Robinson, who was the Methodist Inland Mission minister from 1974 to 1980, came when the areas of Julia Creek, Cloncurry and Camooweal were joined as one patrol. It was obvious to him and to the congregation of Cloncurry that the large geographical area made a road Patrol not only impossible, but exceedingly dangerous. Through many fundraising efforts, the Cloncurry congregation purchased an aircraft and in 1976, the North West Patrol changed from a road patrol to an aerial patrol. In 1986, realising that the aircraft was inadequate for the job, the Cloncurry congregation undertook further fund-raising and purchased the current aircraft. By this time, the North West Patrol was well established as an aerial Patrol. And while it has continued that way ever since some 30,000kms is still travelled by road to properties that do not have serviceable airstrips.



Early in the 90's the name of the Patrol was changed from the North West Patrol to the McKay Patrol in honour of Revd. Fred McKay who was appointed by the Revd. John Flynn as the first Patrol Padre after the establishment of the Aerial Medical Service (eventually the RFDS) in this area. In 1993, the last minister assigned to purely look

after Cloncurry left and the McKay Patrol and Cloncurry UCA effectively became one service.

About McKay Patrol

The McKay Patrol serves the Uniting Church in the North West of Queensland and the eastern Tablelands of the Northern Territory. It covers an area of some 625,000 sqkm with a population of less than 10,000 people. This is almost 3 times the size of the state of Victoria!

In partnership with other church denominations, the McKay Patrol brings both services of religion and pastoral care to some of the remotest communities and cattle stations in Australia. As a church that is seen to cover the 'messy middle' between the traditional churches and the charismatic/pentecostal traditions, the Uniting Church, as an uniquely Australian church, is well placed in being able to serve the needs of a broad spectrum of both Christians and Non-Christians in the Queensland Outback

The padre performs regular services in Cloncurry, Julia Creek, McKinlay, Karumba and Adels Grove. Many of these congregations are small in number, but are, nonetheless, enthusiastic in having the opportunity to worship and serve God in their communities. Serving outback communities is part of the DNA of the Uniting Church and the churches that came together to form it in 1977. The Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church see the importance of providing services to all people, irrespective of their geographic location.

The current padre continues on the tradition of providing both spiritual and physical help to the people he serves. And it's the unlikely things that become 'core' services that the McKay Patrol offers. In years past, the padres were responsible in maintaining the pedal wireless systems used by the Royal Flying Doctor Services in its work in providing medical services to the outback. From stringing up antennas and replacing radio valves, the padre was often the most welcome person to show up at a gate. With the change of technology, the padre provides much needed assistance in setting up and maintaining computer and network systems on cattle stations. A simple repair to a computer for someone who is 800kms or more from a technician means that a simple job for a person living in the city, can be a three day ordeal. Providing modern computer services allow students of the School of the Air to receive first class education via the National Broadband Network is already transforming outback Australia.

Religious services taken for granted on the coast are often a rarity in the outback. As the only ordained clergy in Cloncurry, the padre is called up for most of the baptisms, funerals and weddings (even for those who would prefer an non-religious service)

