



Uniting History SA September 2019

Guest Editor: Judith Raftery

What motivates missions?

‘Aboriginal missions: neglect, failure, atonement and legacy’ was the title of the lecture delivered by respected Uniting Church historian, Rev. Dr William Emilsen, at the Effective Living Centre, Wayville, on 8 August. The lecture was organised by the Seminary of the Third Age,¹ with the support of the Historical Society, and it was good to see a few of our members in attendance.

Many of you will be familiar with William, who is an Associate Professor in Church History and World Religions in the School of Theology at Charles Sturt University, and with his contributions to religious history, which includes histories of missions among Indigenous Australians. His latest book, a review of which you will find on page 7 of this newsletter, is *Charles Harris: a struggle for justice* (MediaCom, 2019). This is a “reticent biography”² of Charles Harris, a leading Indigenous Uniting Church minister, the founding President of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and a prophetic voice for justice within the Uniting Church and the wider Australian community.

The focus of William’s lecture on 8 August was broader than individuals or particular missions. It presented analysis about two linked questions:

- why did missionary activity among Indigenous Australians take a back seat to other missionary activity, especially that which occurred in the Pacific, in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries? and
- why, given that earlier neglect, did Aboriginal missions become more prominent from about the 1920s onwards?

His answer to the first question was that the earlier Aboriginal missions had been, on the whole, failures, “short and sad” affairs that seemed to many observers to give credence to the ‘doomed race’ theory that prevailed at the time. This failure was in stark contrast

to the success of the Pacific missions, whose hallmarks were mass conversions, revivals and the establishment of self-sustaining Christian communities among the mission populations. While William did not, on this occasion, explore in detail the reasons for these different outcomes, several explanations suggest themselves: for missionaries and mission societies the Pacific Islands were perhaps more congenial and ‘romantic’ sites than many of the Australian sites, which were isolated and highly challenging in terms of climate and material conditions; the social, economic and political patterns of Pacific Island societies may have been more recognisable and easier to negotiate than those of the Aboriginals; and the level of support from established British mission societies may have favoured the Pacific ventures over the Australian ones.

In answering his second question William presented a thesis that was largely new to me, and, I suspect, to others present. This was the notion of missions as atonement, reparation and penance for past wrongs. He traced the origins of this back to the eighteenth century, but linked it specifically to the missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. According to this thesis, this second wave of Aboriginal missions responded to new

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News from the History Centre

Volunteers continue to serve the church and the wider community by providing advice and assistance for those involved in researching church, local and family history.

The centre welcomes volunteers to help manage the large and growing collection of documents, memorabilia, books and records of churches and agencies.

The Centre at 44a East Avenue, Black Forest, is open on Wednesday afternoons from 1:00pm to 4:00pm.

(Other contact details can be found on page 2.)

The UCA History Centre

Open Wednesdays 1 - 4pm

44A East Ave

Black Forest

Website:

historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA

CORRESPONDENCE:

E: manager@ucsahistory.org.au

Post: UCA Historical Society

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Membership of the Society

Individual—1 year	\$20
Individual—5 years	\$80
Individual—Life	\$250
Congregational—Life	\$250

Contact the Centre for more information.

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anthropological insights that encouraged respect and protection for other cultures and religions, acknowledged culpability for the churches' past sins of commission and omission, and even foreshadowed more recent understandings of mission, such as 'standing alongside' and 'working for justice'.

William supported this reading of missions as 'atonement' by reference to the views of such luminaries as Schweitzer, claiming that it had been especially powerful in relation to Africa, and Gandhi, who commended some missions which he believed exemplified the atonement model. William argued that it also applied to the Methodist mission in Arnhem Land in the 1920s, which sought to protect the Indigenous population from the worst effects of colonialism and white intruders.

I found these ideas attractive and thought-provoking, but also discomfiting. Certainly the work I have done on twentieth century missions among Australian Aboriginals doesn't fit easily into this assessment. I have examined in detail how a denominational Aboriginal Mission Board that established missions in Western Australia in the 1940s understood what it was doing and how it presented this to the faithful in the congregations on whom it relied for support. And I discovered little of atonement and reparation thinking, let alone respect for Aboriginal religion and culture, in that history. This did not surprise me, given what I have learnt from other scholars and other research into Aboriginal missions.³ It is important to say that missions and missionaries do not deserve the cheap, easy and poorly-informed condemnation that they often get from those with an axe to grind, but sadly they are often not deserving of the atonement and respect claim either.

In 1942, in an effort to garner initial support for the Western Australian missions I investigated, the Churches of Christ Federal Aborigines Mission Board (FAMB) did acknowledge the damaging impact of colonisation on the Indigenous population, and the need for Christians to appreciate the worth and humanity, in God's eyes, of "the aborigine as a man" [sic]. But the FAMB, through regular articles in the Churches of Christ national and state journals, also insisted that the problematic and shameful conditions of the Aboriginals were connected to their own primitivity, their deficient, indeed benighted culture, and their existence "without God" or in thrall to an inadequate understanding of God. While there was some acknowledgement that "the aborigine was not without his religion" it was judged to be "a fearsome religion" and "through fear of death" Aboriginals "were all their lifetime subject to bondage". Conversion to Christianity was the only solution, and it was a solution that promised more than eternal salvation: it also held out the hope of assimilation into western civilisation and a chance for Aboriginals to "take their place" in wider Australian society. This latter goal, which was not clearly distinguished from Christian conversion, was assumed by the missions to be something that Aboriginals aspired to. But, even where this was the case, it was, for most, a vain hope, since from the start, the missions adhered to a contradictory strategy of promoting assimilation through segregated institutions that were characterised by unequal power relations, parsimonious

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material provision and a limited capacity to provide real opportunities for the Aboriginals to exercise agency or initiative.⁴ In addition, although it seems that the Churches of Christ missions may have been less culpable in this regard than some others, there is abundant evidence within the historical record that missions were promoters of loss and misery among Aboriginals through the tearing apart of families and the suppression of language and other aspects of cultural life.⁵ And there is no avoiding the reality that the complex legacy of much mission activity, and of racist and restrictive government policies and community attitudes that have prevailed in Australia since white settlement, continue to blight many Aboriginal lives and communities today.

However, nothing is ever simple, and William Emilsen has done us a service in pointing out that there have been various strands in what has motivated missionary ventures in the past, including the desire to seek atonement and make reparation. One valuable outcome of his argument is to encourage us to focus on what models of mission prevail today. At our best, we increasingly think and act not in terms of ‘missions’ with their inevitable connotations of cultural imposition and imbalances of power and resources, but of partnerships among churches and communities who are collaborating or supporting each other to pursue the ‘mission of God’ – that is, abundant life for all – in their own context. We are not always at our best of course, but reflecting critically on our history, allowing it to shine a light onto unexamined assumptions and to remind us that there are always new options to pursue, is a pretty good strategy for keeping us on track.

Judith Raftery

¹ The Seminary of the Third Age, run by the Uniting Church’s Effective Living Centre at Wayville, SA, and supported by the Progressive Christianity Network of SA, presents seminars, conducted by respected theological scholars and leaders, that offer persons of any faith or no faith the opportunity to explore and reflect on questions of faith and spirituality relevant in the twenty-first century.

² A ‘reticent biography’ – the term comes from American-Canadian Historian Natalie Davis – is a biography that, because of insufficient sources, is limited to looking at the subject “from a certain angle” only. William W Emilsen, *Charles Harris: a struggle for justice*, (MediaCom, 2019), p.5

³ For more on this, see Judith Raftery, *Evangelisation and Social Betterment: four decades of Churches of Christ Aborigines missions in Western Australia* (Australian Churches of Christ Historical Society, Victoria, 2013); and also Judith Raftery, *Not Part of the Public: non-indigenous policies and practices and the health of indigenous South Australians, 1836-1973* (Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2006)

⁴ Raftery, *Evangelisation and Social Betterment*, pp.16-25

⁵ Raftery, *Evangelisation and Social Betterment*, pp.31-33



In Memoriam

Brian Lewis Jones OAM

02 March 1927

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02 June 2019

Brian became a member of the Council of the Uniting Church Historical Society in

1978, soon after the formation of the Uniting Church which resulted in the change of name of the former Methodist Historical Society to include both Congregational and Presbyterian representatives. Brian retired from the Council in 2017. His knowledge of the world of finance has been greatly valued by the Council and the Historical Society continues to benefit from his stewardship and prudent advice in this area.

Brian’s interests were many and one which was to last his whole life was his passion for history – particularly the history of the Congregational churches in South Australia from the time of the founding of the colony. He prepared a booklet on the West Terrace Cemetery which our Society published.

For several years he was working on the history of the Parkin Congregational Mission (a Trust which was set up by the Honourable William Parkin in the late 19th century), the purpose of which was to provide funds to Congregational churches in the country who were unable to support their ministers. The other Trust which was also set up by Parkin was the Parkin Trust, which was to provide funds to educate ministers who would be sent to those country churches. The result of Brian’s research was published in 2007 titled *Parkin’s Passion* – a title which, he said, had been suggested by his late wife, Ruth.

Brian became a member of Henley Beach Congregational Church in 1941 and transferred to Stow Memorial Church (now Pilgrim Uniting Church) in 1944. He served as a deacon, member of Church Council and elder from 1946-2009. He also served as church treasurer, church secretary, secretary of Elders and treasurer of the United Parish (formed with Pirie Street Methodist in 1969).

Val Canty

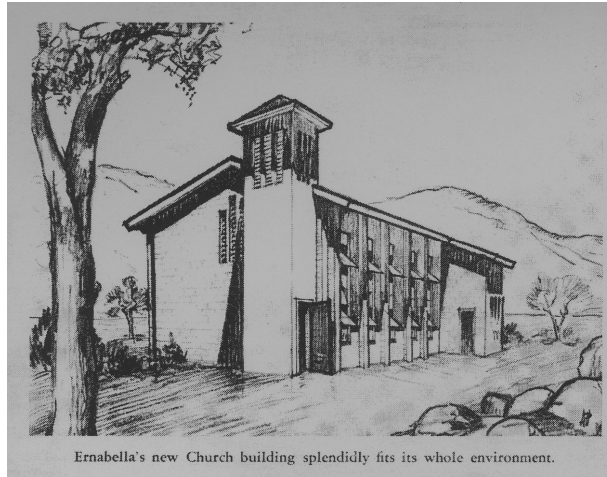
Ernabella: a remarkable vision

In 1935, Dr Charles Duguid, Moderator of the Presbyterian Assembly in South Australia, proposed the establishment of a mission to Aboriginal people in the Musgrave Ranges in the far north-west of the state. The following extract from Duguid's 1935 Moderatorial Address illustrates his vision for the mission and the way in which he tried to sell it to his fellow Presbyterians.

[He discussed in some detail] the condition of the native people, once in our midst but now on the fringe of our white civilisation. . . I am forced to admit that in the 150 years since the white man came to this continent no real and sustained attempt has been made by the governments of the ruling race to understand the native or to help these people to understand us. . .

The health of the natives in the northern parts of South Australia is serious and the only hope is to get them away from the townships and as far as possible from contact with white men. There never has been a medical missionary in Australia, and yet never did a people need one so much as our natives do today. . . . My plan is for the Presbyterian Church to lead the way by starting a mission out from the line, say 150 to 200 miles west in the vicinity of the Musgrave Ranges and east of the Great Aboriginal Reserve. To rid this so-called reserve of financially interested white men and to keep the natives in it would be outpost work of the scheme suggested by me. . . It is not only the soul of the native that needs attention, it is the whole man and whoever takes up the work will have to learn the language and understand the ways of the people among whom he is placed. We can learn much from the native and the native much from us. With good laws and proper enlightenment the two cultures will prove complementary. . .

Four and a half year's close study of the aboriginal problem has led me to doubt whether anything more alien to the spirit of Christ exists than the authorised and permitted treatment of the natives of Australia by us white people. It is



Ernabella's new Church building splendidly fits its whole environment.

Sketch of the Ernabella Church building—from the December 1952 Ernabella Newsletter (artist unknown)

the bounden duty of the Christian Church so to rouse the people and keep them roused that our Government will be forced to treat the aborigines as human beings.

Presbyterian Banner, April 1935, pp. 6-10

At that time, South Australian Presbyterians were hardly in an expansive mood: they were preoccupied with debt, already struggling to maintain a missionary in the New

Hebrides and another in Korea, and to keep up their contribution to the Australian Inland Mission and Aboriginal missions in Western Australia and Queensland. Nevertheless, they accepted Duguid's challenge and the 1936 Assembly undertook to establish a new mission in the Musgraves, on a former station called Ernabella.

The mission which eventuated at Ernabella has since been widely acknowledged for its progressive thinking, its determination to respect Indigenous culture, and its capacity to act as a buffer between the local Pitjantjatjara people and the encroaching white settlement. However, it got off to a somewhat rocky start. In fact, the financial precariousness of the South Australian Presbyterian church, and especially tension between those who believed support for Ernabella could be maintained only at the cost of the work in Korea, meant that Ernabella, as a specifically South Australian venture, was short-lived. It was taken over by the Australian Board of Missions in 1937, thus becoming the responsibility of the Australian Presbyterian Church, with the South Australian Assembly promising regular support. A lively, if not entirely edifying correspondence on the competing claims of Ernabella and Korea was continued between Duguid and the Rev. NLD Webster, convenor of the Foreign Missions Committee, for some time after the national bail-out.¹ But despite these tensions, the new mission survived.

Not all the earliest reporting on progress at Ernabella reflected Duguid's ideas but focused instead on the nuts and bolts and practical difficulties of getting the mission established. But when Mrs Duguid wrote about a visit there in 1938 she demonstrated that she understood and shared her husband's views: "Ernabella aims at giving the native really Christian contact with white civilisation, and

so giving him the opportunity for the fine gradual development for which he is both eager and able". She wrote that freedom was the essence of the spirit of the mission – freedom in relation to dress, to language, to work, to leaving and ‘going bush’ – and should be observed even when this amounted to some practical difficulties for the staff. She did not underestimate the prodigious amount of work to be done or the difficulties presented by the language barrier, but insisted that “the spirit of the mission and the lives of the missionaries must be the sermons”.

One of the Historical Society’s long-term members, the late Rev. Dr Bill Edwards, AM, was for many years a missionary at Ernabella. He won the admiration and love of many for his outstanding commitment to the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara people and to the maintenance of their language, his translations of hymns and parts of the Bible into Pitjantjatjara, and his gracious and strategic support for the Ernabella people as they negotiated the transition from mission to self-determining community. For his assessment of how Ernabella fared over succeeding decades and how it implemented and developed Duguid’s initial vision, see William Edwards, *Mission in the Musgraves: Ernabella Mission 1937-1973, a place of relationships* (UCSAHS, Black Forest SA, 2012), available at the History Centre.

Judith Raftery

¹ *Presbyterian Banner*, November 1938, p.29; December 1938, p.3;

² *Presbyterian Banner*, September 1938, pp.22-23



Ernabella Mission

From the cover of *Mission in the Musgraves*



In Memoriam

Rev. Lindsay Faulkner OAM

16 March 1939

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27 July 2019

Rev. Lindsay Faulkner was a member of the Historical Society for a number of years, and was a current member of the Council at the time of his passing. He also served on the Board of the Trustees for the Payneham & Dudley Park Cemeteries Trust and was the President of South Australia’s Uniting Church Adult Fellowships in 2014-15.

Rev. Faulkner was ordained in 1965, and in the 54 years since that event served in a number of congregations, parishes, and missions in four synods. He was also Moderator of the Northern Synod for a term.

After his retirement in 2004, Rev. Faulkner continued to serve the church in supply ministry as well as being very supportive of his home congregations (Payneham Road and Argent).

As the Moderator, Rev. Sue Ellis, wrote in her recent pastoral note,

Lindsay was always active in his faith within local community life, bringing the Gospel to people, by being part of the good works happening in communities. He was a strong advocate for ecumenism and served in leadership with the South Australian Council of Churches for many years...

The UCSA Historical Society extends its sympathy to Lindsay’s wife Nessie, their children, grand-children and great-grandchildren.



Presbyterianism past, present, continuing: no more haggis and bagpipes?

The Historical Society's most recent public meeting, held at Scots Church on 25 August, focused on the contribution of Presbyterianism to the Uniting Church and on the nature of the Presbyterian Church that continues as a separate denomination outside the Uniting Church. Of the 26 people present at the meeting, 12 were members of the Historical Society and the rest were former or continuing Presbyterians interested and involved in this ongoing history.

It was a very good meeting in which differing perspectives were given space.

- **Rev. Norah Norris**, former Presbyterian Deaconess, and member of the Uniting Church, argued that the Presbyterians' gift to the Uniting Church was its ecclesiastical polity, that is, Presbyterianism itself, with its distinctive commitment to the shared responsibility and authority of clergy and laity for the spiritual oversight of the various courts of the church, from the local congregation to the national assembly. The Eldership was a key Presbyterian Structure. Elders were endorsed by their congregations and ordained for life. Norah noted that being ordained to the Eldership was "nothing like being put on a committee", and through it the church heard "the voice of God". This high notion of Eldership has clearly been weakened very considerably in the Uniting Church.
- **A small group of former Presbyterians**, now members of the Uniting Church, whose views were relayed through their responses to interview questions, reiterated some of Norah's observations about Presbyterianism's contribution to the Uniting Church. They mentioned regular, ordered worship, the centrality of the Bible, the importance of the Eldership to the life of the congregation and to pastoral care, and a strong focus on missions and youth work.
- **Rev. Murray Earl**, Uniting Church minister from Mount Gambier, spoke about Presbyterianism in the southeast of SA, where many congregations opted to remain outside the Uniting Church at the time of Union, and continue as part of the Presbyterian Church. He argued that this reflected local historical and geographical factors, and especially their close links with the dissenting culture of the numerically strong 'free church' Presbyterians of southwest Victoria.

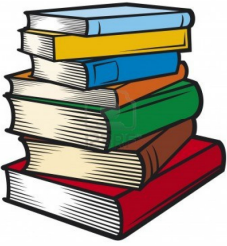
- **Continuing Presbyterians in Adelaide**, where six churches have formed themselves into one congregation, see themselves as evangelical Christians who, "for the most part", have found the *Basis of Union* "too flexible" to allow them to be part of the Uniting Church. Very few of the members were Presbyterians before Union, but the congregation still operates through an Elders Council in a traditional Presbyterian manner. Despite this, and despite the presence of some "staunch Scots continuers", they seem much like any other evangelical church community.

Lively discussion followed the presentations. Topics included difficulties over property arrangements, current relationships between those who joined the Uniting Church and those who didn't ("cordial but strained"), differing views about the role of women in ministry, the weakening of links between Presbyterianism and traditional expressions of Scottish culture, and the influence of the Queensland Assembly on South Australian Presbyterianism.

Judith Raftery



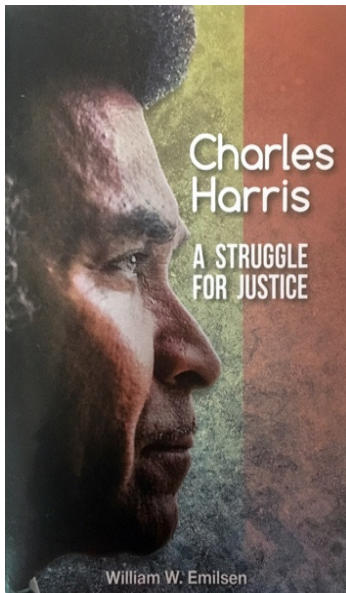
**Scots Church (then Chalmers Church)
Drawing by Alexander Schramm, 1856**



Book Review

Charles Harris—A Struggle for Justice

by William W Emilsen



William W Emilsen, *Charles Harris: A Struggle for Justice* (Unley, SA: MediaCom, 2019), 243 pp., ISBN 9781925722208. RRP: \$27.

William Emilsen has done a great service in reminding us of the key role Charles Harris played in the founding of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UIACC). Charles is not nearly as well remembered as he deserves but this scholarly yet readable biography hopefully will inform and inspire not only Uniting Church members, but all who seek to understand why it is so important to hear the voices of Australia's first peoples. Charles Harris stands out in four ways.

First, his life is a story of struggle – a struggle to survive. On the one hand a struggle against the odds, given the appalling assimilationist and dubious protection policies for Aboriginal and Islanders in Queensland; and having to struggle to maintain his aboriginality in a white-dominated church. On the other hand, it was a struggle for rather than against: he awakened the church to listen to the voice of Indigenous peoples; he responded to the presenting historical issues such as land rights; he reminded all Australians of the cruel dispossession of his peoples when white settlers justified their claims to a land that was supposedly empty; and he transcended the disparate voices of his own Indigenous community when it was divided within itself. On a grand scale, Charles struggled for the recognition of the longest living culture in the world.

Second, Charles is an exemplar of true servant leadership, one who humbly advanced the purposes of God and created history. Anne Patel-Gray said in her Foreword, “Charles was before his time, a pioneer with vision and extraordinary leadership”. All who think that leadership is the essence of ministry should read this book. True leaders never forget their origins no matter how humble. Charles finished school at sixth grade but went on to fulfil all the requirements for ordination. He knew that a leader respects difference, is patient enough to convince others to embrace a larger vision, and knows when to say no despite the pain of having to stand aside from colleagues who choose alternative paths. Above all, Charles led the way forward after listening to others and then empowered them to journey with him along new paths. His was the driving force behind the extraordinary “March for Truth Freedom and Justice” of over 30,000 people on 26 January 1988 as part of the bicentenary celebrations.

Third, Charles' leadership style enabled him to be a consummate networker as he shared his dream of a “fellowship of Aboriginal congregations,” first across Queensland and then across the nation. This larger vision coalesced when he spent time at Nungalinya College in Darwin and witnessed the vibrant Christian presence of communities in Arnhem Land. He then inspired the emerging Indigenous leadership around Australia to speak with a clear voice. Thus was born the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

Fourth, Charles always knew when to move on. He readily transitioned from ministering in a rural environment to the complexities of an urban society. He heeded the need to be more thoroughly equipped as a Minister of the Gospel but never abandoned his evangelical roots. He flowered as an advocate for justice, especially after being tested in the fire of the Noonkanbah confrontation and was perhaps the first to talk of ‘holistic evangelism’. Charles Harris was indeed a man of abiding faith, infectious hope and all-embracing sacrificial love.

I strongly commend this book to all. It is available from Mediacom.

Jonathan Barker

Final public meeting for 2019

Sunday 27 October—Theological exploration in Adelaide: recalling the contribution of Methodist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian scholars



Join us as Dr David Hilliard OAM, Research Fellow in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University presents a paper on the history of the Adelaide Theological Circle. Over its eighty-year history (1924–2005), scholars from each of our antecedent denominations were members. Other papers on individual theologians will be presented by members of our Historical Society.

The presentations will be followed by afternoon tea with our hosts, Dr David Hilliard and Dr Don Hopgood.

When: 2:30pm–4:30pm

Where: Uniting College for Leadership and Theology
312 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Brooklyn Park



Methodist Hymn books wanted

When Wesley Methodist Church, Lautoka hosted the delegates of the Uniting Church in Australia President's Conference in Fiji in July 2019, the Pastor asked that we from Australia find them Methodist hymn books.

The Indian Fijian congregation is an active, singing congregation with over 500 members.

Does your church have any 1933 edition Methodist hymn books stored in cupboards, boxes, and other places?

Is your church willing to donate these books to a Fijian congregation?

Can you get these hymn books to the Uniting Church History Centre (44A East Ave, Black Forest)?

If you answered 'yes' to these questions, we'd love to hear from you. Feel free to get in touch with us at the History Centre (contact details are on page 2).

Thank you.

Welcome Darryl

At our AGM in June, Darryl Dyson was elected to the position of Secretary for the Society.

Darryl is an active member of the Cherry Gardens congregation of the UCA.

Welcome to the Society, and to the Council, Darryl.

