

Another formation possibility made itself available in recent times through the auspices of our CSSV member organisations under the banner of Edmund Rice ministries. The Yingadi Immersion is a week-long cultural immersion experience to Lake Mungo National Park in southern New South Wales. It is the site of the ancestral land of the Paakantji, Ngyiampaa and Muthi Muthi tribes.

In the week prior to Easter 2017 Peter Hudson joined the Yingadi Immersion group of eighteen people, mainly teachers from Catholic schools around Melbourne. . This group was invited by Vicki Clark a Muthi Muthi woman to journey with her on her country. Vicki is a Life Member of Catholic Social Services Victoria and was coordinator of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in the Archdiocese of Melbourne for 25 years. She is now retired and living back in her country at Nyah just out of Swan Hill and it was here that the group was given the Message Stick by way of entrée and recognition to pass safely through this sacred land.

The whole experience from the banks of the Murray River to the Walls of China sand dunes in the National Park was gentle, reverent and welcoming of people, places and stories. On the first day we were welcomed to country by a Wamba Wamba woman, Marilyn Nicholls, in a smoking healing ceremony on the banks of the Murray River. It was a gentle summoning to walk on land through the traditional healing circle. It was here that the peaceful connection was made to the land and its spirit and its “old people”. This mood was then sustained throughout the following days as we journeyed , reflected and shared the walking on the land.

We experienced sunrises, sunsets, stories, star-gazing and hospitality from an indigenous perspective with its power to teach and heal. So much of Aboriginal culture and tradition is expressed through stories of ancient beginnings and rituals. As a quote in our Yingadi journal says:

*All stories are true: some actually happened.*

*All stories are about truth.*

*All stories have the power to transform and to convert.* (Megan McKenna, storyteller & theologian)

As I journeyed there was this feeling both physically and metaphorically of ‘standing on the edge of something’ as we wandered and wondered on the red dirt and shards of this primal land. I had a feeling of being regularly invited to look beyond my own horizons and to be freshly challenged. As I tapped the origins of our First People I felt the reassuring embrace of my own ancestors and our unifying stories of life and connection.

The whole experience was surprisingly non-confrontational as Vicki and her people lovingly and respectfully invited us into the intimacy of family and culture. We were introduced to Mungo Man and Mungo Lady who go back forty thousand years and whose remains will be respectfully returned to the earth of this land later in 2017.

