

FROM THOUGHT TO ACTION

“My thinking about people and things was laid down in my early years,” says Terry Widders. “The great influence was my grandfather who although an initiated man never passed on the culture.

“Personally it never occurred to me while growing up that there was a difference between black and white. I was quite naturally aware of being Aboriginal but not in the sense of being distinctive.

“I could never comprehend why white people used to speak at us. I always assumed I could do anything anyone else could do,” he said.

These comments reflect several aspects of Terry Widders character. One is the careful thought behind whatever he says. Another is his natural curiosity, closely allied with which is a modest confidence. A confidence recently endorsed by the Australian Council of Churches in its decision to appoint him secretary to their Aboriginal Development Commission.

Terry took up the 3-year appointment in April. His own description of the job reflects his deliberative posture:

“The job is basically to liaise between Aborigines and the A.C.C., especially in regard to the community development programme already in train.

“As I see it the mode of my operation will be to make contact with Aboriginal communities, to set up a network of communication. The other thing is to gauge the ideas and attitudes of the people, to understand the thinking in specific localities and try to knit together an understanding of what’s going on generally.”

As part of this endeavour Terry is at present nearing completion of a 2-month study tour of the Territory, Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria.



“Specifically,” he says, “I would like to make church bodies aware of the real attitude and thinking of people in their regions. The churches and especially their parishioners must become more involved.

“We must re-establish trust between the churches and the people—trust in the church structure and ideology. This can be achieved through dialogue. It’s not the churches’ ideology that needs to be changed but the attitude of church people. This applies to any agency involved with Aboriginal people.”

On the question of community development Terry believes the approach should be to “get the people to think about their own situation and as a result build a working community to attack internal problems and to deal effectively with other government and non-government agencies.”