

B25 NORTHERN SYNOD

1. INTRODUCTION

The Northern Synod's geographical area is all the Northern Territory, a 200km deep strip across the northern portion of South Australia and all the Kimberley region of Western Australia, around to and including Broome.

The Northern Synod has two Presbyteries; the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) and the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA). The NRCC Presbytery is responsible for ministry with Indigenous people and remote Indigenous communities with the PPNA responsible for ministry, non-Indigenous ministry and less remote non-Indigenous communities.

There are three ministry placements undertaken in the Synod with financial support from Frontier Services, which further reflect the diverse and dispersed nature of ministry in the Northern Synod.

1.1 CONTEXT

- Indigenous people comprise about 50% of the population of the Northern Synod.
- The land area of the Northern Synod is more than 1/6th of Australia, with less than 1% of the nation's population.
- Given the large land area and small, dispersed population, the support provided and inter-relationship of each Presbytery to the other Presbytery is crucial.

2. CHANGES WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE NORTHERN SYNOD

Over the last three years, major Synod issues are:

Coordinating Support for Indigenous Scriptures (CSIS)

God has been speaking and Aboriginal people are responding to a call to be directly involved in Bible translation activity. Through working with our partners AuSIL, the Bible Society and Nungalinga College, and the use of the *Our Word* software program, Bible translation activity in Aboriginal languages is continuing. From Djambarrpuyngu and Maung in the north to Pitjantjatjara in the south, translation activity is currently happening in more than a dozen Indigenous languages. This story is captured in the COORDN8 newsletter which is also available from the CSIS website: www.csis.org.au

NRCC/PPNA/Synod partnership

Our prime way of operating continues to be through partnerships. The Northern Synod continues to operate as a partnership organisation, with the relationship between the NRCC and PPNA Presbyteries at the centre of the Synod's operations.

Synod agencies

Our three community service agencies:

- Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS);
- Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS); and
- Somerville Community Services;

Each play different and major roles in providing aged care, disability support, financial counselling, cross-cultural training and education resources.

Note: ARRCS is auspiced and implemented by UnitingCare, Queensland Synod – and its work within the Northern Synod is greatly appreciated.

Our two Colleges

- Nungalinga College in Darwin (Indigenous adult literacy/numeracy and theological education); and
- St Philips College in Alice Springs (secondary education, day students and boarders);

provide access to a range of education services.

Communications

This year a communications team (of one) has been established. This addition has brought new life as we seek to tell our stories about what God is up to in the Synod.

3. RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The Northern Synod has participated on the UCA's Royal Commission National Task Group and through our Synod Task Group. Our Synod has a greatly appreciated relationship with the Queensland Synod such that any complaints or requests for Redress will be addressed by using the processes and procedures of that Synod.

Over the last few years our Synod has developed a *Safe Church* initiative, whereby the focus is on safety for all people of all ages. This has entailed a review and rewriting of many Synod policies, going significantly beyond child safety from sexual abuse. This comprehensive approach includes national child safety frameworks, codes of conduct, leaders and volunteer agreements, OH&S, activity risk assessment, food safety and chemical and hazardous materials safety.

Our Safe Church Coordinator has commenced rollout with congregations.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES - WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- Expanding the work of Coordinate so that more Indigenous people may be involved in Indigenous scripture and other resource translation projects. This is a key activity because it enables Indigenous people to engage directly with the portions of scripture being translated into their first or heart language.
- Further developing the partnership between the Synod's two Presbyteries in mutually beneficial and supporting ways.
- Supporting course materials development and implementation of a Certificate in Translation to be offered at Nungalinga College in 2019.

5. WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MAJOR UNDERTAKINGS / ACHIEVEMENTS / DISAPPOINTMENTS / CHANGES WITHIN THE LIFE OF YOUR SYNOD OVER THE LAST TRIENNIUM?

The most significant issue in our Synod has been the lack of follow through after the Consultation into the life of the NRCC Presbytery conducted by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in 2017.

The Consultation made important recommendations concerning:

- Support and capacity building of NRCC congregations;
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of Area Ministry Councils;
- Training and support for youth leaders and support workers;
- Code of Ethics training;
- Recruitment to fill the newly revised Presbytery Minister and Administrator positions.

Further intentional conversation involving NRCC, UAICC and the Synod is required.

6. WHAT ARE THE HOPES/PLANS/MAJOR MATTERS OF ATTENTION THAT FACE THE NORTHERN SYNOD OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

Over the next three years, it is our prayer that:

- The Constitution of Australia will be revised to give recognition to Indigenous people as the First Peoples of this land, (same as per the previous report to Assembly).
- the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) will be able to:
 - nationally: in conjunction with the rest of the Uniting Church, arrive at governance and administrative arrangements that best suit Congress across the UCA in each Synod;
 - in the Northern Synod: develop new means of governance and operation that work for First Peoples, because what we currently have is not working well.

- The wider Church will see the importance of and want to support Indigenous Bible translators as they undertake more work in translating God's Word to them into their own 'heart languages'
- The Australian Government will adopt a consultative approach (we wait in hopeful prayer) in redesigning the Commonwealth's Northern Territory Intervention and that Northern Territory Government will positively respond to calls concerning bilingual education and support for homeland centres.
- We will continue in partnership, being God's people together – Thanks Be to God.

Peter Jones
General Secretary
Northern Synod