



# Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress

## Report to ASC

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the last ASC meeting I have taken leave over the Christmas holidays. At the moment, I am working from Perth due to family health issues. The WA Synod has been gracious in allowing me to set up an office space in their building, which I really appreciate.

### COVID CRISIS

Since the last meeting in November the Covid crisis has hit Congress communities hard. One community had over 50% of their numbers having Covid at the same time. In the NT members of communities at Elcho Island and other places were flown to quarantine at Howard Springs, with up to 100 people from the one community being in quarantine at the same time. At the current time people are still being flown from the APY lands to quarantine in Port Augusta and Adelaide. In late January another problem occurred for Anangu as when they were released from quarantine in Adelaide, some people found they were homeless, as they could not travel back to the APY lands as the Stuart Highway was cut off for two weeks due to the road being flooded between Port Augusta and Coober Pedy.

### FLOOD CRISIS

Congress members in Northern NSW & other places have been affected by the current flood crisis. Former NSW Congress Chair, Aunty Di Torrens and her husband Tim have had their house flooded in Casino. Other members of the family have lost everything in Lismore and on Cabbage Tree Island on the Richmond River, near Ballina. Di's sister, Queenie Speeding says they have been told all houses on the island will have to be demolished. Other Aboriginal communities like Coraki were flooded and totally cut off by the flood waters. Another community still has no electricity. The Koori Mail publishing house was totally flooded by the river at Lismore, and is now serving as an emergency distribution centre serving all the community.

In SA when the floods hit the Stuart Highway, media focus was on the opal mining town of Coober Pedy where people were stranded. Coober Pedy had the Air Force provide food deliveries, while little outback towns, stations and communities were totally cut off. Oodnadatta had supplies delivered by the little RFDS (Flyer Doctor) plane. Community members had to pay very high prices for food.

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

This week it was great to see two of our Congress women feature with picture and story in UC National News for International women's Day. Congratulations to ASC member and Leprena UAICC Tasmanian Manager, Alison Overeem and Julia Lennon of Oodnadatta, the first Congress woman working as a bush chaplain with the Frontier Services team. Other Congress women also rated a special mention including Rev. Dr. Denise Champion and Wanita Calyun, both of Port Augusta and Kirsty Burgu from Mowanjum, WA. Their stories are repeated across Australia with many other wonderful women faithfully involved in Congress ministry.

### **News from the REGIONS**

Members of the Strategic Planning & Support Group (SPSG) were able to travel with me to **Perth, WA** in late November to meet with members of the Congress Regional Council, as well as staff from the Synod office. As I am currently working from the WA Synod office, I have been able to have follow up meetings with the new General Secretary and the Moderator. In a fortnight's time the WA Congress and Presbytery will ordain Mitchell Garlett as a Minister of the Word. Everyone is very much looking forward to that celebration.

**Tasmania** have produced a one page flyer called, "Statistics & Outcomes: A snapshot of 2021" as a way of summarizes their ministry for the year. It highlights their great social media presence, their work with the National Congress and UCA (which includes the Walking Together as First & Second Peoples Circle of Interest), as well as their great local ministry through pastoral support and regular community events. They are also heavily involved with Uniting Care's First Peoples Network and Working Group. Please see the attached flyer for more information.

Next week they are looking forward to hosting the VicTas Moderator's visit, and in July they are planning to host the faculty from Pilgrim College. They are participants in the new VicTas Walking Together and Covenant Committee, and Ayla is participating in the Surrender Leadership Program.

**NRCC** are pleased to report that they have two new Support Workers for the Anangu ministry Area in Central Australia. Ben & Emily Howard have spent the last few years in Pukatja (Ernabella), and previous to that in Alice Springs. New pastors in the lands, Yanima, Darrien Bryant from Wingella and Jill Doolan from Apatula, as well as NRCC chair Jamie Nyangu from Pukatja will be glad of their support. There was a lovely story by the NT Moderator in UC National News about his visits to Yanima's country in mid February.

Despite the recent issues with Covid, Elcho Island at the moment is celebrating the anniversary of the beginning of the revival in the late 1970's with special meetings at Galiwin'ku.

In **NSW**, the Synod's First Peoples Strategy and Engagement Manager, Nathan Tyson has worked with the Synod leaders, the Presbytery of Macquarie Darling and the Congress ministry centres to produce an MOU which everyone is happy to sign in the near future.

Last week we were rapt to see the video production "Future Directions: Walking Together" on the Condoblin Congress church with its vibrant youth ministry, which was advertised on the UC National News. What a great local Congress story!

**South Australia** have also been working on a MOU, but this time the MOU is between the three SA Presbyteries and the Congress. This is timely as last year the SA Congress was granted some of the powers of a Presbytery. Both these Mou's may be useful to other Congress regions as we work with our Synods and Presbyteries to grow and strengthen Congress ministries across the regions.

In **Victoria** the Congress Oversight Committee is working with Synod leaders and Congress National office to develop plans for the growth of Congress ministry. We look forward to seeing future growth of Congress ministry in Victoria.

**Queensland's** Calvary Zone are planning to meet again at the end of March. We are hoping that some members of our SPSG will be able to share in this important meeting.

## **CONGRESS NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Due to the high rates of Covid across the country in Congress communities over the Christmas and New Year period no date has been set yet for the long planned National Conference.

In previous Congress reports we advised that we were planning to hold the next Congress National Conference in Darwin with the theme being, "AWAKENING: NEW SEEDS FOR FUTURE DREAMING: UAICC".

## **CONCLUSION**

As we pray for peace in our world, please continue to pray for and develop relationships with Congress ministries in your region, and continue to remember in prayers those affected by floods and Covid. Your ongoing support is greatly appreciated.

Mark Kickett

Congress National Interim Chair

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