



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.~~

Since the last ASC meeting there have been lots of things happening including sorry business, Covid, the Assembly meeting, Synods, and other important meetings. In the midst of this we have had the blessings of a Congress ordination, the commissioning of pastors and the celebrations of Reconciliation week and NAIDOC. This report talks about some of these matters, which are important in the life of Congress.

SORRY BUSINESS

~~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.~~

I had spent most of my time in Perth at the start of the year from February 3rd with my mother in and out of hospital, until her passing in late March. Her funeral was a month later on April 29th. It was a special day of tributes to my mother. It was a blessing to have ex-President Deidre there along with WA Gen Sec Andrew & Katalina Williams and my Congress colleagues.

Naturally there are many others experiencing sorry business. Marrpalawuy, one of the President's chaplains is burying her husband the week after this ASC meeting, with a memorial service on July 15th.

ORDINATIONS & PASTOR'S COMMISSIONING

On May 1st I preached at the ordination of Mitchell Garlett in Perth, WA. This was a wonderful celebration, coming just over 2 years after the death of Mitchell's father, ex-Congress national Chair, Rev. Sealin Garlett.

In June, Qld Moderator Andrew Gunton, commissioned Perry Yunkaporta as a pastor to the Aurukun community on Cape York. NRCC also commissioned four pastors in the APY Lands on Pentecost weekend. They were Yanima (Darrien) Bryant of Kalka, Jill Doolan of Finke (Aputula), and support workers Ben & Emily Howland. Yanima & Jill had both studied for many years at Nungalinga College. Both before and after the commissioning the new pastors participated in a few days of pastors training. ~~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.~~

ASSEMBLY & SYNOD MEETINGS

~~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.~~

It was a privilege to be involved in the Assembly meetings and to sit at the top table with the President, General Secretary and chaplains.

The renewal of the Covenant was a special occasion. As we work towards the next Assembly in 2024, we are mindful that this will be the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Covenant, and also 15

years since the new Preamble to the constitution. We may also want to ask, what does the re-reading of the Covenant mean to us all as a church, and what actions as a church may we need to undertake.

It was good having Congress members involved in the Assembly, not only through the morning chapel, but also in Bible study and worship with NRCC members, and the presentation of proposals with Alison's involvement.

In the last two months there have been Synod meetings in three states being Queensland, SA and VicTas. Congress has been involved in all these meetings. In Melbourne I had the privilege of being the theological reflector at the end of each day and to preach at the final service.

OTHER IMPORTANT MEETINGS

~~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~~ At the end of May I had the opportunity to meet with the President and Moderators in Melbourne. It was good to be able to share with the Moderators and the President in this meeting. Unfortunately during the meeting the President tested positive to Covid, and the next week when I went home I did the same. As a result I unfortunately missed the commissioning of the pastors in Ernabella in the APY lands on the Pentecost weekend.

After Assembly, some Congress leaders met with the CEO of Frontier Services, Jannine Jackson to talk about how Frontier Services might work in partnership with Congress in our ministry. This included Tasmanian Congress, NRCC staff and the Northern Synod joining in by Zoom to talk about possibilities of working together in new ways. Congress has one bush chaplain in SA who works in the far north of the State from Oodnadatta. It was noted that the local state office of Congress has an important role in helping to support the ministry of the bush chaplain. We look forward to ongoing conversations about how new partnerships can emerge and develop ministry to First Nations people across the country.

In the week after NAIDOC week we have participated in Townsville with members of the Queensland Synod and Congress in a Covenanting Gathering and Yarning Circle. This included a day spent Walking on Country. This was an important meeting in the process of the restoration of the Queensland Regional Council following the closure of Calvary Presbytery some years ago. It also hearing about a variety of great programs supporting First Peoples in Queensland.

Next week we are sharing with Pacific Island church leaders in an important meeting in Canberra for the Pacific Church Partnership Advisory Network (PCPAN). Alison Overeem and myself will be sharing in a panel on self-determination with Pat Anderson, co-chair of the Uluru statement.org

RECONCILIATION & NAIDOC WEEKS

~~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".~~ Congress appreciates the support of the Assembly Communications team in promoting various stories through Reconciliation week and NAIDOC. We are blessed also through the contributions of our Tasmanian Congress members to both the Communications team, and to the First and Second Peoples Circles of Interest. During NAIDOC week Tasmania also hosted 23 people from Pilgrim College in Melbourne for a Walking on Country immersion, which was a special time.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of things happening in the next few months. I will travel to the WCC conference in Germany and attend the Indigenous Peoples pre-conference. There will be a Uniting First People's Gathering in Brisbane in late August, while the Congress National Executive are also meeting earlier in the month. We will be working on ideas for our National Conference, which is now planned for early in 2023. We value your ongoing prayers and support. ~~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

~~March~~July 2022