



# Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress

## Report to ASC

### **SORRY BUSINESS**

As most of you know the last few weeks have been a really tough time with the death of my nephew, Cassius Turvey in Perth. This followed the death of his father two months earlier in late August.

On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> I was in Sydney for the First People's Theology Symposium organized by Nathan Tyson with the NSW Synod. At that meeting Anne Pattel – Gray had the meeting pray for Cassius and the family as he was in a coma in ICU and not expected to live. The following day I flew to Tasmania to spend the week there, which included a visit to the Aboriginal community on Flinders Island and meetings in Launceston.

On the evening of Friday 28<sup>th</sup> instead of going to the ACT2 meeting I went back to Perth to join the family in their grief. The following day I participated in the first of three vigils in five days. The support from across the community and church was greatly appreciated, and I especially loved the words of grace from Cassius' mother Michelle.

### **MEETINGS**

Over the last four months Congress has participated in many meetings including:

The Pacific Church Partnership Advisory Network in Canberra in July

A Broken Hill meeting with NSW Congress, Macquarie Darling Presbytery & NSW Synod

Uniting First Peoples meeting in Brisbane

VicTas Walking Together meetings in Melbourne

NRCC & Northern Synod meetings in Darwin

First Peoples Theology Forum in Sydney

ACT2 meeting through Sean Weetra in Melbourne

Congress Calvary Zone Meeting in Cairns

### **CONGRESS NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

The Congress National Executive met together for the first time as a full group in over two years in Melbourne in August. The SPSG met for planning preceding this and also in September.

The major outcome of these meetings is the decision to hold the Congress National Conference in Darwin from April 13<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> next year.

## **WCC MEETINGS in GERMANY**

In late August I travelled with the President to Germany, where I met up also with the General Secretary where I presented at the Indigenous People's Pre-Gathering and was also an observer at the WCC meeting. One of the things that was obvious there was the number of Pacific Island leaders in attendance along with many of their young people.

In September I also participated in the Frontier Services Board meeting in Sydney.

## **ISSUES FACING CONGRESS**

The rereading of the Covenant at the May 2022 meeting of the Assembly raises questions about what the Covenant means to the Synod and Presbyteries. This is also highlighted in through the ACT2 process.

Congress was established with resources so that each state or region had its own State Office with staff including an Aboriginal person in a leadership position (mostly called the Development Officer), and support people (usually a Resource Officer). As Congress has struggled over the last ten years these positions have not always been maintained. The question needs to be asked is it because of the lack of new leadership coming through in Congress, or because of the need for continuing funding support from the Synods, or a combination of both? Or are there other reasons?

As you all know, Congress is a group of First Peoples who express their following of Jesus within the Uniting Church. We have joined together to claim responsibility and self-determination to oversee ministry to our own people - developing peoples' faith, affirming an Indigenous identity that does not have to be left at the door of the church, and pursuing justice and well-being for First Peoples.

While the Covenant means that we seek to build relationships between First and Second Peoples, the priority for Congress is building relationships and structures that support First Peoples.

We acknowledge that we have not always fulfilled this high vision, and at times have failed our own people and the wider church. We think, though, that it is an opportune time to reclaim our mission, and to challenge the various councils of the church to join us in this renewal.

At the moment we think that the renewal of our work and the covenant relationship needs to give weight to self-determination, support for justice, and reparation (i.e. a financial relationship that recognises that the church lives on and has made its wealth from Aboriginal land (rather than a relationship based on the alleged generosity of the church).

At the Congress National Conference we will be talking about these issues and the core values and vision of Congress. We seek an ongoing conversation with the Assembly, Synods and Presbyteries about these claims and their implications for our covenant relationship.

Mark Kickett  
Congress National Interim Chair  
November 2022