



Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress

Report to ASC

HEALTH MATTERS

As most of you know I ended up in hospital in Darwin after the National Conference. After a few days there I was medically evacuated back to Adelaide for bypass surgery on April 24th. They say the initial stage of recovery is 3 months, so I am nearly at that stage now, and have just returned to work. I have been able to attend a couple of family events during this time including seeing my grandchildren and attending my youngest son's wedding. I also spoke at a funeral of an old Aboriginal evangelist in Sydney in mid-July. I want to say thank you to everyone who supported and prayed for me during this tough time, and I appreciate your ongoing prayers in the months ahead.

CONGRESS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Congress National Conference was held in Darwin from April 13th – 19th at Nungalingya College, with the theme of “Weaving and Awakening: A Renewal of Faith, Community and the UAICC.”

Although the meeting was smaller in number than usual, all Regions were well represented. We also had a good number visitors with the Gen Sec, President, President Elect and some Moderators in attendance as well as other Assembly staff from Comms, FS & ACT2.

Highlights of the conference included:

- The opening worship, which was held at Darwin Memorial church on Larrakia land. We were welcomed on country by Lynette Fejo, daughter of our late Congress minister, Rev. Wali Fejo.
- Two more public events at Darwin Memorial, including a forum on the Uluru Statement with a presentation by Nathan Tyson, and a paper prepared by Anne Pattel – Gray about the “Legacy of Justice left by Don Brady and Charles Harris.”
- Bible studies led by Sean Winter on the theme, “Life in Christ on Stolen Land: reading Paul in Australia.”
- A presentation by Ken Sumner on why Congress matters to him, and what questions this raises today. (See Appendix One, “Questions to Keep Talking About”.)
- Presentations on what it means to be a First Nations Christian, and the relationship of culture with following Jesus in Australia today. Three presentations were made by Maratja

Dhamarrandji, Denise Champion and Tim Matton – Johnson, with the last two being made by video and Zoom. (These are available for viewing through the UC National Update in the Reconciliation Week edition).

- Worship on the Sunday morning, during which Congress honoured three past Chairpersons and an Elder who have died, recognised eight people as life members, and conducted a Closure of Ministry for Rev Garry Dronfield as a formal end to his time as President in March 2020. Members were also invited to light a candle to remember people close to them who had died.
 - The Chairpersons were: Pastor Bill Hollingsworth, Rev. Sealin Garlett, Rev. Rronang Garrawurra. The Elder was Rev Dorothy Harris-Gordon, wife of the late Rev. Charles Harris.
 - The Life Members were: Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra, Aunty Yanyi Baker, Rev. Bapa Ken Garrawurra, Aunty Mary Anne Coconut, Rev. Dennis Corowa, Rev. Dr. Denise Champion, Uncle Vince Ross and Aunty Marilyn Garlett.
- A presentation and small group discussion on the ACT2 project during which Congress members were invited to consider what new arrangements would best support (i) maximum self-determination, (ii) proper resourcing for Congress' work, and (iii) a place for Congress in the Church that would give Congress real authority over its own ministry.
- A report from the President, Rev. Sharon Hollis
- A presentation from Rev. James Bhagwan of the Pacific Council of Churches, who shared about the work of the Pacific Churches, and their desire to work in partnership with the UAICC.
- A session on the core values that should shapes the life of Congress, which was led by Alison Overeem. The core values suggested as a starting point were: self-determination, wholistic evangelism, affirmation of culture, the equality of women and men (and respect for the voice of both), the importance of Indigenous theology and worship, and the centrality of service to the wider community of First Peoples.
- The presentation of the Interim Chairperson's report. Please See Appendix Two for an outline of the presentation.
- The Assembly Communications team conducting video interviews with Congress members on "Why they love Jesus?", and "Why they love Congress?" The first three of these interviews were made available in NAIDOC week through the UC National Update.

Congress made the decision not to appoint a Chairperson at the conference, but instead engage in a process whereby interested people could apply for the position, and members who were at the

conference could vote for the incoming Chairperson by postal ballot, with the close of voting to be at the end of the NRCC meeting in mid-October. We value your prayers for this process, and for the selection committee and the whole election process.

News from NRCC

The NRCC through the Anangu Area Ministry Council, applied to Frontier Services for two bush chaplains. We are pleased to report that the Frontier Services board supported the applications for these two part time chaplains. One will be working from the border regions of the WA, SA & NT borders, while the other will be working from the eastern end of the Anangu ministry are from Aputula (Finke). We look forward to hearing about stories from this exciting new ministry.

NRCC have also advertised for a Resource Worker to work from the Regional Office in Darwin to coordinate UAICC ministry throughout the Northern Synod. If you know anyone who is suitable, please encourage them to apply by the end of July.

Memorial Weekend for Aunty Dorothy Harris – Gordon

On Palm Sunday weekend, First Nations Christians in Lismore had a weekend of fellowship meetings in Lismore and Casino in memory of our former Elder, Rev. Aunty Dorothy Harris – Gordon. We heard many stories of her faith, example and encouragement to the First Nations people of the Northern Rivers. It was really a blessed time, and I was privileged to speak both on the Saturday night at Lismore and the Sunday night at Casino.

Queensland Congress Regional Council

Members from Queensland met at the National Conference and agreed to re-activate the Queensland Regional Committee. This proposal was met with much joy at the conference. Roberta Stanley was commissioned as chairperson of Queensland Congress at a special service in Cairns at the end of June. The National Executive was represented by Will Pickett, former National Chair Dennis Corowa and Ian Dempster. We look forward to their first meeting together as a new committee at the end of August.

Mark Kickett
Congress National Interim Chair
July 2023

APPENDIX One: Questions to Keep Talking About

The reason Congress exists is self-determination. It is about control of mission and ministry, worship, theology, and management of our own life. Only as First Peoples exercise control over our own lives can we walk with Second Peoples as equals.

However, at present Congress has no real authority in the church. It has no real ability to make decisions.

So, here are some questions to ponder:

- i. What is the best structure for Congress and the Church that will support self-determination and the absolute authority of Congress? [For example, should Congress be a non-geographical Synod?]
- ii. How does Congress establish an economic base for its work to support the present and future work? As part of this, what does genuine reparation or paying the rent look like for the Uniting Church?
- iii. Is there a need for a discussion about what it means to move “Beyond the Covenant”? Or a need for a serious discussion about what Covenant means in practical terms across all the councils of the Church?
- iv. How can the Church and Congress work together on the way that (i) the story of the Creator God in this country prior to invasion, (ii) the story of Jesus as First Peoples understand that story, and (iii) the story of Jesus as Second Peoples understand that story, be woven together? How can each story enrich our understanding of God’s work in the world?
- v. We say that the story of Jesus is good news, and offers salvation and life. What do people need saving from in your community? What harms and destroys their life? How is the story of Jesus good news for people in that situation?

APPENDIX Two: Report of Interim National Chair to the April 2023 National Conference

Keypoints

- From March 20th 2020, I moved into a part-time role as Interim National Chair and part-time SA State Development & Outreach worker.
- I was in the role for approximately 12 months, before being endorsed by National Executive to move into the Chairpersons role full-time in an interim capacity and up and until the convening of the next National Conference of UAICC.

Key Challenges:

- COVID 19:
- Family Tragedies
- Building and renewing relationships with Assembly and Synods.
- Renewing the UAICC story with Synods and also within the UAICC itself.
- Reminding the Church of it's commitment made to the UAICC within the context of the Covenant.
- Working with Regional Councils and Synods where Regional Councils have struggled with governance and capacity and as a result have come under the oversight of the National Office.
- As a result this has impacted on the National Executive and it's ability to maintain regular engagement from the Regions.
- Dealing with the challenges of decreased budgets.
- Responding to major issues impacting First Nations eg Black Deaths in Custody, Black Lives Matter, Alice Springs etc.
- Demands to constantly be a voice to all matters impacting First Nations in Australia and around the world. (Church & Media). Eg. Cashess Debit Card
- Closing Of Calvary Presbytery.

Other Commitments:

- Member of Assembly Standing Committee
- Board member with Frontier Services
- Member of Uniting First Nations Network
- Sit on funding panel for TEAR Australia
- Member of the Ministerial Education Board (MEB)

- Moderators' Meetings
- Member of PACPAN. Pacific Council of Churches.
- Bearnaning Kwert Insitute. (BKI)
- Walking Together (VicTas Synod)

Ongoing Engagements/Partnerships

- **Receiving official invites and participating in Synods meetings in NT, QLD, NSW, SA and being worship leader and Theological Reflector at the VIC/TAS Synod 2022.**
- Other visits include:
 - Northern Synod and NRCC (NT);
 - NSW Regional Task Group
 - First Nations Symposium (NSW);
 - Bush Chaplaincy Scoping (TAS);
 - ACT2 Meeting (VIC);
 - Moderators Meeting (VIC);
 - Calvary Zone Meetings and Carpentaria Presbytery Meeting (QLD);
 - Assembly Standing Committee (NSW);
 - Pacific Nations Leaders Conference (QLD);
 - Uniting Care Leaders

World Council of Churches Report: Karlsruhe Germany 30/8/22 – 08/09/22

Pre-Assembly First Nations Conference

Theme: Restoring Wholeness in Creation:

- Indigenous Rights and Climate Justice.
- Indigenous Cosmology and Spirituality.
- Land Rights Activism in Context of Indigenous Youth.
- Reconciliation and Unity.

WCC Assembly

- WCC Business
- Ecumenical Conversation
- Home Groups
- Plenaries: Europe Ukraine (Good Samaritan – Lk 10:25-37);
- Affirming Justice and Human Dignity;
- Christian Unity and The Churches Common Witness.