



Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress

UAICC Report to the March 2023 Standing Committee

INTRODUCTION

At our last meeting in November 2023, it was reported that the UAICC (Congress) was in the process of finalizing the outcome of the ballot procedure for the appointment of the National Chair.

This has since been completed with Rev Mark Kickett being endorsed by the Congress membership to fulfill the role of National Chair for the next three years.

This is welcome news as Congress seeks to determine a new way forward as well as consolidating its place in, and its commitment to the life of the Uniting Church in Australia.

RAISING OUR TRIBAL VOICE Conference

This conference was held in Melbourne from February 5th – 8th at Box Hill. It was run by the School of Indigenous Studies, which is part of the University of Divinity, with the full grandiose title of “Raising our Tribal Voice for Justice: An Indigenous Theological Revolution.”

The conference papers were mostly presented by Australian First Nations leaders and theologians, with just a few Pacifica voices. Papers were presented on a wide variety of topics, with people coming from very different viewpoints and backgrounds.

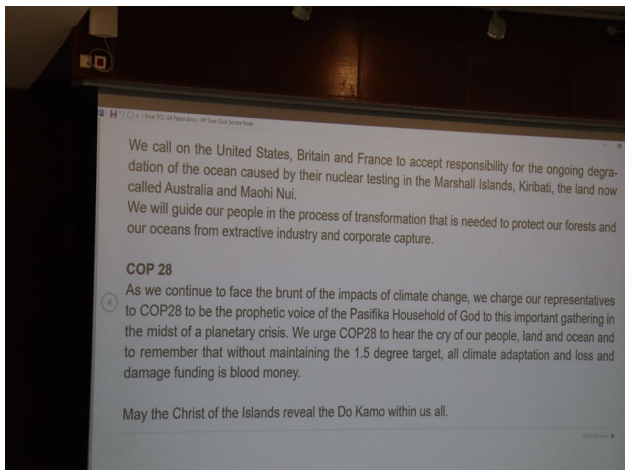
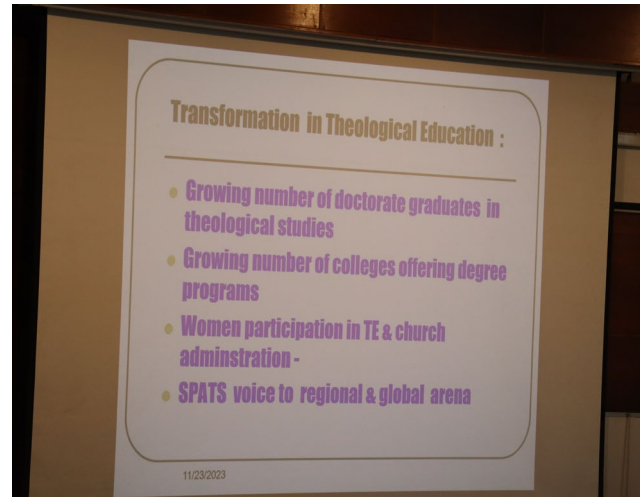
Well known names among the speakers included the conference organizer, Anne Pattel – Gray, Rev Dr Garry Deverell, Rev Dr Glen Loughrey, Naomi Wolfe, Professor Stan Grant and Brooke Prentis. Uniting Church leaders presenting papers included Nathan Tyson, Denise Champion (in a lunch time recorded video), Hohaia Matthews, Katalina Tahaafe – Williams, Lilliani Tahaafe – Williams and myself (as a last minute replacement speaker).

On the last afternoon students from Nungalinga College led a session of worship and prayer. Allen Edwards from Adelaide gave a moving tribute to the late “Aunty” Dr. Lowitja O’Donoghue. Allen’s mum had grown up at Colebrook Home with Lowitja and her sisters.

Also on the last day, leaders of the churches had the chance to respond to what they heard. We were blessed with our President’s response, which included an acknowledgement that we (the UCA) are not yet an honourable partner in our Covenant.

Following the Conference, I stayed on for another 4 days, with other invited guest to discern what an Indigenous Ecumenical Theological Network would look like.

PACIFIC CONFERENCE of CHURCHES



I had the pleasure along with Sean Weetra to travel to New Caledonia to attend The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) 12th General Assembly in Noumea from 16 to 23 November 2023. Unfortunately Sean became very unwell and as a result returned to Australia earlier than expected.

The theme of the Assembly spoke of - **Do Kamo: Christ Transform Us Into Your New Humanity**. The message of Transformation was the key presentation point as our Plenary sessions highlighted: Transformation as Ecumenical Fellowship; Transformation as Self-Determination; and Transformation as Stewardship.

There were many other sessions conducted, with the usual business and finance reports. Congress was also able to do a short presentation with a panel of other Pacific Nations on Self Determination.

What impressed me most (along with everything that was impressive), was the structure and organization of the PCC, the incredible Pacifica Youth, the PCC's commitment to excellence in education and Theology and the cry for justice with Climate Change and Sovereignty for the ongoing colonization within the region.



In addition, Rev James Bhagwan's tenure as the General Secretary was overwhelmingly extended By Conference members



NEWS from the REGIONS:

NORTHERN REGION COUNCIL OF CONGRESS (NRCC)

We have more sad news from Arnhem Land. Our brothers and sisters in the Top End are all shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden passing of our brother, Mr. M. Wunungmurra. At the time of his death he was deputy chair of NRCC, having previously served two terms as NRCC Chair. He was also chair of ALPA (Arnhem Land Progress Association) and had also served on the board of the Traditional Credit Union.

The NRCC are meeting in early April in Darwin after the Northern Synod meeting. At the same time they are hoping to have conversations with applicants for the Resource Officer position. They are also looking for a Support Worker for the East Arnhem area.

We value your prayers for the Wunungmurra family and all those who are part of NRCC at this time.

QUEENSLAND

There has also been more sorry business in Queensland. Our former chair of the Napranum church, Aunty Florence Charger passed away on Boxing Day. Her funeral was held in late January.

Also Lurleen Blackman, the wife of former National Administrator, Shayne Blackman passed away this month in Bundaberg. Dennis Corowa will be present at her funeral on behalf of Congress.

Queensland also recently had a launch of a book on one of our former leaders, Pastor Don Brady. It is called "Yalanya: That's the Way It Is". Pastor Don was a minister in the Methodist church in the 1960's & 1970's. The book may be available through Wesley Mission, Queensland.

Queensland are working positively on developing their new Regional Council.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

OODNADATTA CHURCH: The builders are hoping to have the new Oodnadatta Church completed around Anzac Day. This will be a monumental event when this occurs as planning for this has occurred over more than 10 years. The Church is being built on the site of the original Colebrook home, which began in 1924, exactly 100 years ago.

If everything proceeds as planned, Pastor Julia Lennon would like the church to be opened on Pentecost weekend, on Sunday May 19th.

We have also been blessed by a grant from the Uniting Foundation, which has enabled the development of ministry in the Murraylands region, which is centred on Murray Bridge. This has enabled Congress to employ Hohaia Matthews as a minister (0.5FTE), and Melissa Sumner as a part time youth & children's worker.

Some of our Congress and Uniting Church members were able to attend and participate in the State funeral for Dr. Lowitja O'Donoghue, including singing with the Iwiri Choir.

VICTORIA/TASMANIA

VIC: Victoria now have four First Nations people on their oversight committee which is a good development. This includes Will Pickett, the minister at Bendigo who is now their new chair. We are looking forward to the VicTas Walking Together group visiting Bendigo in May.

In February I was able to speak at a Q & A with the President at Pilgrim Theological College in Melbourne, to welcome new students on the topic, "What does it mean to do theology and ministry on stolen land?"

TAS: Tasmania continues to move forward positively with its focus being on: Ongoing Mission and Ministry; Governance and Self Determination; Whole of Church Sustainability and Future Directions

A major issue of concern is a significant reduction in funding which impacts on how well the Region can manage its current objectives.

NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW continues to be without a Regional Council, with ongoing challenges for the NSW UAICC Task Group as it seeks to find a productive way forward for the re-establishment of the NSW Regional Council.

The Ministry Centers continue to impact their communities in Wellington and Condobolin. Broken Hill is still a necessary Ministry Centre and requires a new proposal for funding for this for this ministry center to re-start.

There are still great ministry needs for the greater Sydney area, the Norther Rivers and many other parts of NSW that continue to contain the largest population of Indigenous people in the country.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

WA is maintaining a commitment to two ministry centers, with Mitchell Garlett at Marmin Omiah (Coolbellup) and Uncle Robbie Jetta at Waroona.

WA is hampered by limited funds, however is receiving solid support and encouragement from the WA Synod. It is evident that National Congress will need to continue to work alongside Mitchell, Uncle Robbie and the WA Congress members to achieve appropriate governance training and strategic planning,

The Bernaning Kwert Institute (BKI) continues to provide major challenges for Congress, Synod and the BKI members.

Rev Mark Kickett
UAICC National Chair
March 2024

