

Since our last gathering, much has happened in the life of Congress:

Referendum:

Naturally we are very disappointed with the result of the referendum.

I want to say thanks for the great support across the Uniting Church for the YES campaign.

The SA Covenanting Committee had a low – key Friday afternoon gathering a fortnight ago when they gathered around the campfire and shared afternoon together as well as communion. This was a good chance to reflect together and provide some care for those who attended.

Tasmania also had a time of coming together, reflecting and finding healing for community members also in the aftermath of the referendum.

Queensland Regional Council:

Congress Queensland held a meeting in August in Cairns to restart the Queensland Regional Council. It was a very good meeting. A new Regional Council Executive has been formed with Roberta Stanley as chair, along with great support from Kym Korbe and the Synod leadership team.

The Moderator of QLD has been instrumental with support, encouragement and consistent and ongoing availability to achieve this result.

NEWS from NRCC:

I made three visits to Darwin in August and November. These were for Nungalinya College's 50th anniversary celebrations, the UCA History Conference with the theme, "Truth Telling: From Colonising to Covenanting" and for the annual full NRCC meeting in October.

It was a joy to be at Nungalinya's 50th celebrations, and to see so many Congress members at the NRCC meeting. Our NRCC Congress members love Nungalinya. The current chair of the Nungalinya board is one of our National Executive members, Djawut Gondarra of Elcho Island.

NRCC are also in the process of appointing a Resource Worker for East Arnhem. This appointment will be made in due course.

News From Other Regions:

NSW/ACT: Plans are underway to visit Sydney later this month to talk with the Synod about growing Congress ministry in NSW/ACT and to discern the appropriate way to go forward.

Ministry centres in Condobolin and Wellington continue to provide strong ministry support to the communities and there is still a strong commitment to re-establishing the Broken Hill ministry.

VIC/TAS: Members of the VicTas Walking Together group are being encouraged to attend the University of Divinity Conference, “Raising our Tribal Voice: an Indigenous Theological Revolution” to be held at Box Hill from February 5 – 8th 2024.

Victoria Synod continue to be committed to the re-establishment of the Victorian Regional Council and have been consistently working with Congress National. It is looking positive for this to occur in the New Year. Uncle Wil Pickett along with Greg Crowe and Rachael Kronberger (amongst others) have been key personnel in this journey.

SA: SA members from Oodnadatta are excited about the work which started in October on their new church building in Oodnadatta, being built after years of praying and planning.

WA: Our brothers and sisters in WA continue to struggle with youth justice issues, the most recent being the death in the juvenile justice centre. October was also the one year anniversary of the death of young Cassius Turvey.

There are still challenges confronting the WA Congress and Synod with ministry direction and focus, particularly in finding a way forward for the Bernaning Kwert Intitute (BKI) and the property in Queenspark.

Health Matters:

Our Admin Officer, Ian Dempster is recovering well from his heart attack. He had an angiogram, during which a stent was placed in an artery. He has started his cardiac rehab program. Personally, I am doing reasonably well. I am now walking good distances most days. Many thanks for your ongoing prayers for both of us.

Congress National Ballot:

As you know the Congress National Conference did not appoint a chairperson at the conference, but decided to advertise the position, and to engage delegates in a postal ballot to appoint the new chairperson.

There has been great confusion and angst around this process, but the good news is we will know the result of this ballot by the end of this month.

Frontier Services Bush Chaplains Conference:

Frontier Services held their Bush Chaplains conference in SA in October. I was pleased to be able to go and speak to the chaplains about the work of Congress.

It was also great to see our two new bush chaplains from central Australia in Jill Doolan from Apatula (Finke) and Yanima Bryant from Kalka & Wingellina.

Seminars in SA & QLD on Healing from Inter-generational Trauma:

After the referendum when we were told by people from the NO campaign that there were no lasting effects for First Nations people from colonisation, it was great to go to a seminar in Adelaide on **BLACK RAIN** : “Healing from Intergenerational Trauma & Domestic Violence” conducted by a Maori counsellor, Faye Pouesi.

Fay also spoke to Congress leaders in Brisbane.

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE of ASIA

I attended the Christian Conference of Asia meeting in Kerala, South India along with Alison Overeem and other UCA guests. It was an interesting meeting and a wonderful cultural experience.

It was also an amazing experience to present on behalf of the UAICC and Uniting Church to that ACC the YES campaign. It was encouraging that the ACC strongly endorsed their support and encouraged the diaspora in Australia to get behind the YES campaign.

PACIFIC CONFERENCE of CHURCHES

Next week I am going to Noumea, New Caledonia with Sean Weetra from Congress and other UCA guests for the PCC conference. This should be a great time as we engage again with James Bagwhan and our Pacific sisters and brothers.

I look forward to the New Year and for all that God has in store for us.

Mark Kickett
Congress National Interim Chair
November 2023