



NORTHERN SYNOD

Geographically the Northern Synod covers the Northern Territory, the Kimberley in Western Australia and the APY Lands (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands) in South Australia. The people of the Northern Synod pay their respects to all First Nations People and give thanks to God that we, in the Northern Synod, are blessed to walk side-by-side with people of many nations and many cultures, all of us children of God and one family in Christ.

There have been many changes over the last three years. In these changes God has been good, walking with the Northern Synod every step of the way. The words of Moses to Joshua are a constant reminder that God's love never fails us. "It is the Lord who goes before you. God will be with you; God will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." (Deuteronomy 31:8)

Amidst the many pressures on the Northern Synod, we are thankful for the support of the wider Uniting Church during this time. This includes support through loans and extending the interest only period on our loan (SA), a monetary gift in order to assist our immediate financial concerns (NSW/ACT), provision of a General Secretary and governance, finance and staffing support and advice (Qld) and complaints support (VicTas). The Vic/Tas Synod also offered to provide the Northern Synod with property development services, but this offer has not been taken up at this time as the focus has been on divestment of property in order to raise capital. The NSW/ACT Synod provides a paid payroll and insurance service and the SA Synod is delegated to manage our complaints and discipline process. Through this assistance we have seen the church at its best and seen God's provision for us. In Jesus' words we hear God's promise that, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b)

Northern Synod is very appreciative of the National Redress Recovery Scheme and the whole of the church reaffirming their commitment to ministry of the church in Northern Australia and its desire to support the Northern Synod. We are also thankful for support of the National Assembly in our redress claims. The claims that come to the Northern Synod are mainly from people who were children at the former Methodist Mission on Croker Island or were residents with Somerville Cottage Homes in Darwin. Some claims come from people who attended our schools or our children's groups.

We are thankful for leadership of our past Moderator Rev Thresi Mauboy, Moderator Rev Tony Goodluck and Moderator-Elect Rev Dr Michelle Cook who have steered us through difficult waters, alongside the work of our General Secretaries. We have had a variety of changes in our executive leadership, including a range of General Secretaries including Rev Andrew Williams, Mr Stuart McMillan, Rev Dr Michelle Cook, Rev Heather den Houting, Rev Dr Adam McIntosh and a General Secretary delegate Rev Linda Hanson. We are very grateful for their service and leadership. We are very pleased that Rev Janet Staines accepted the call to be our current General Secretary and the Synod was delighted to participate in her Induction on 14th June 2024.

We are also in a new season of leadership in our Presbyteries. We thank Rev Dr Michelle Cook for her service as chair of the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA) and welcome Lauren Merritt as the new chair. We give thanks to Jamie Nyangu for his service as chair of the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) and welcome incoming chair Rev Djawanydjawany Gondarra. And we welcome Rev Dr Peter Hobson as our new NRCC Resource Worker.

1. MISSION AND VISION

The mission (purpose) of the Northern Synod is "to make known and share God's abundant love, transforming people and communities in Jesus' way." The vision (What does church in Northern Synod look like?) is that "We follow Jesus, walking together in the reconciling love of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit." The Northern Synod has endorsed four guiding principles and at our recent Synod meeting, we teased out what these principles might mean for us as we navigate a new future.



Discipleship

- Follower of Jesus – People meeting regularly for bible study - Following Jesus in practical ways
- Passing the baton - Mentoring new leaders - Encourage and support next generation
- Local workshops on discipleship topics - recommending good resources to use locally

Serving our communities

- Engaged with our communities – visible – involved in local community– mission focused
- Being open and welcoming - being relevant – welcoming space - outward looking
- Walking alongside people to find out what they need – responding to local need - sharing facilities
- Caring for one another in and out of church circles - Young people to feel safe and loved

Fit for purpose

- Transparency - Reliable leaders
- Good stewardship – using time and resources wisely - utilise resources
- Develop appropriate strategies – excellent planning - prioritising
- Have knowledge and skill for the right work

Working together

- Listening – communication – good understanding – transparency - sharing information
- Honesty – truthful to ourselves – trust – truth telling – open talking
- Common goal/ purpose – know what we are doing – clear goals
- Using our gifts together - helping one another – walking side by side – serving each other

2. PILGRIM PRESBYTERY OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

The Pilgrim Presbytery's role is to provide support to ministers and congregations and other ministries in the Pilgrim Presbytery, so that all may grow in faith and serve Christ. Since October 2022, the Pilgrim Presbytery has worked through its responsibilities of oversight of ministers and congregations and formation of people in specified ministries. This work includes what are usually Synod Responsibilities, including the oversight and education of candidates, providing and facilitating formational and educational opportunities to all people in the Synod.

PPNA have established a pattern for its meetings with one meeting a year being via zoom where they focus on elections and budgets, and the other being face to face, focussing on continuing faith formation and reflecting on how the Presbytery is meeting the priorities they have discerned together. Some congregational highlights include: Nightcliff UC celebrating 60 years in September and Darwin Memorial UC hosting the Uniting Church National History Conference and celebrating 150 years in August.

3. NORTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CONGRESS

This past year and a half has been marked with more deep sorrow. Though the list of departed loved ones is long we must acknowledge the passing of two previous NRCC Chairmen.

Kumanara Hoosan Chairperson 2012 - 2014

Mr M Wunungmurra Chairperson 2018 – 2021, Deputy Chair - 2021 - 2024

May God bless and hold their families.

The NRCC Presbytery manages ministry operations across five particular regions:

1. Anangu Ministry Region, in the APY Lands located across three states N.T. S.A. W.A
2. East Arnhem Ministry Region, encompassing congregations in Ramingining, Yurrwi, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala, and outreach to numerous homelands
3. West Arnhem Ministry Region, serving congregations in Maningrida, Waruwi, Minjilang, Jabiru, and surrounding homelands.
4. West Kimberley Region, focusing on ministry to the Mowanjum congregation, Derby and the West Kimberley Regional Prison.



5. Darwin Ministry Region, addressing ministry needs of NRCC members living in and visiting the broader Darwin area.

The NRCC acknowledge commitments made by the Queensland and NSW/ACT Synods to assist us toward resolution of complicated financial situations. Though the issues were complex, we are now in a much clearer position than we were 18 months ago.

The NRCC acknowledge and thank the Northern Synod for their commitment to ensuring debts to NRCC were paid in full and appreciate efforts made to ensure NRCC participation in the FAPS committee and Synod Standing Committee meetings. During the past 18 months we have seen multiple changes in Synod management with minimal disruption to our activities. The NRCC thanks those who have come and have made every effort to understand the particular relationship between NRCC and the Northern Synod and for ensuring that NRCC matters were not overlooked.

In terms of staffing NRCC are very pleased to announce that negotiations between NRCC / Northern Synod and Frontier Services in 2023 have led to the appointment of two Anangu 0.5 FTE Bush Chaplains being appointed to work across the APY Lands. Mr James Hughes has been appointed on Supply as Bush Chaplain / Support Worker in West Arnhem for the duration of 2024. NRCC has conducted Vitality of Call interviews for our Education Staff and for Support Workers. Terms have been set for the continued employment of our two Nungalinya College Teachers. (There is another Nungalinya placement that is funded by the Northern Synod.) Other highlights from the last 18 months include:

West Kimberley –

- Mowanjum, There has been a lot of activities happening at the church involving the children seeing that they will be the next generation to carry on. We pray that God will bring leaders out of these young ones.

Anangu Ministry –

- Easter is a special time in APY communities. In 2023 services held across the Lands, notably in Irrunytju, Amata, Mimili, Pukatja and Finke/Aputula.
- Biblical education courses were run in Alice Springs via the ITECA program.
- Workshops covering Bible Translation, children's ministry, and Bible overviews, this has led to paid translation work for some students.
- Children's Ministry workshop emphasized diverse storytelling methods for Anangu participants, showcasing their natural storytelling abilities.
- Old Testament workshop held over five days covered Genesis through Judges
- Clothes donated by Alice Springs Uniting Church were distributed to APY communities.
- Positive stories include fostering young church leaders and resilient faith among Anangu communities.
- The Frontier Services grant for two Bush Chaplains is yielding positive impacts in Finke/Aputula and Kalka communities.

West Arnhem –

- A new translation Centre has been constructed at Maningrida.
- Fellowship & worship in Jabiru including Jabiru Nativity Event, fostering a sense of community
- Collaboration with Uniting Church congregations to provide second-hand clothes and other essentials.
- Assisting communities to access education and ministry resources, including musical instruments.

East Arnhem –

- Baptisms Gawa,
- Thanksgiving Galiwin'ku,
- Youth Rally Ramingining,
- Formation of new Church Councils at various congregations.
- Good news stories from Yirrkala.





4. NUNGALINYA COLLEGE

Nungalinya is the Combined Churches Training College for Indigenous Australians. More details can be found on their website: <https://www.nungalinya.edu.au/>. The College is formally supported by the Anglican, Uniting and Catholic churches of the Northern Territory and is situated in Casuarina, a northern suburb of Darwin. In 2023, 336 students came to study - this is a new record for Nungalinya. Uniting Church still has the most students from any of the churches.

Since 1973, Nungalinya College has been equipping men and women for leadership roles in churches and communities. Nungalinya training programs explore the Christian faith contextually through courses in Foundation Studies, Bible Overview, Media, Music and Discipleship, Faith & Family Wellbeing, Art & Faith, Chaplaincy, Christian Ministry and Theology, and Bible Translation. The documentary: 'Freedom: The Nungalinya Jubilee Story' was created to celebrate their jubilee. <https://www.nungalinya.edu.au/News/freedom-the-nungalinya-jubilee-story>

In addition to funding three placements, Northern Synod has provided \$25 000 a year to Nungalinya College. This grant funds a quarter of the Translation training program and includes supporting the Certificate 2 in translation Yolŋu cohort which happened in 2023 and 2024. The Northern Synod does not have the funds for this to continue and would appreciate the support of the wider church in supporting translation. The Northern Synod and NRCC would also appreciate the support of the wider church in funding placements at Nungalinya, as the work of Nungalinya supports the whole church.

5. COORDINATE

Coordinate is a project of the Northern Synod. There are translation projects happening in most of the NRCC congregations. More details can be found on their website: <https://www.coordinate.org.au/>. Highlights from last 18 months include:

- The Pitjantjatjara Old Testament project continues with support from Bible Society Australia.
- In February 2023 Coordinate participated in a National translators gathering held at Nungalinya, with coordinate making up a third of the participants with 90 registrations in total.
- 'Jesus Calming the storm' to be printed as an illustrated children's book in Mayali.
- A Njebbena oral translation workshop early in 2023.

At our recent Synod meeting, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS) launched "A First Gupapuyŋu Dictionary: Celebrating 100 years of language work on Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island)." Copies of this dictionary can be found in the Northern Synod and Coordinate libraries, with copies also distributed to Synod libraries across Australia.

6. PLACEMENTS

The struggle we have in filling Placements in the Northern Synod is multifaceted.

First, Northern Synod requires all those in placement to be committed to the Covenant with UAICC and to have experience in working with First Peoples and in cross cultural situations. While many Second Peoples have the required gifts and skills for placements and may be committed to the Covenant with UAICC, they do not always have experience working with First Peoples. Second Peoples means all those who have come to live in this country since 1788, this includes people from many different lands, languages and cultures. The Pilgrim Presbytery requires all people candidating for ministry to undertake field placements in a First Peoples context. Rev Vicki Aitken, for example, did a placement in Mowanjum, Rev Deacon Amos Leana has enormous experience in this area of ministry. The national church requires all people training for ministry to have such experiences. Northern Synod would encourage other Synods working with us, to facilitate field education for ministry for Second Peoples in the Northern Synod context.

Second, Northern Synod relies heavily on other UCA Synods to recommend and contact ministers in other locations. Moving interstate requires people to be ready to answer God's call despite the costs to established relationships and work and education spaces for the whole family.

7. VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING

Background: When Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was discussed in 1996 PPNA members in recognition of the position of their NRCC brothers and sisters in Christ, agreed for the NRCC position to be the Synod position. This aligns with the Northern Synod protocol that because of the significant covenant relationship they have, the Northern Synod stands with NRCC in matters of justice and advocacy. The Northern Synod position from 1996 is: "That the Synod state its opposition to the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act " The Synod also took a position against the RTI Act and supported and advocated for the passing of the Kevin Andrew's Bill in the Federal Parliament to overturn it.

In relation to Voluntary Assisted Dying the Northern Synod has now endorsed the following:

- The Northern Synod has not changed its opposition to the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act.
- The Northern Synod states its opposition to the introduction of Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation into the Northern Territory.
- That the Northern Synod will not provide voluntary assisted dying as a service.
- That the Northern Synod will continue to provide high quality care to anyone in Uniting Church facilities.
- That the Northern Synod will offer compassionate support to people, and their families, if they choose to use Voluntary Assisted Dying
- That the Moderator write a pastoral letter communicating this decision to the Uniting Church and the wider church.

8. FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

The Finance and Property Services Committee makes recommendations to the Synod Standing Committee for the effective financial, property, and risk management of the Northern Synod. At the 46th Synod meeting FAPS noted that considerable work still needs to be done to return the Northern Synod to a sustainable position. Whilst acknowledging that this will be challenging and require difficult decisions, it will remain a focus of FAPS in 2024.

9. GOING FORWARD

The Queensland arrangement with the Northern Synod began mid 2023 and concluded May 2024. In May 2023 Queensland General Secretary, Rev Heather den Houting, produced a document outlining what would be involved if Queensland Synod provided services to the Northern Synod. In that document she observed the following in relation to strategy and risk management:

"There was no evidence of an agreed strategy or approach to the ministry and mission of the Northern Synod. The operational settings of the business were based on business decisions that had been operating for some time. The purpose of the Northern Synod was to facilitate the mission and ministry of the church, however, how the Synod office was to do this was unclear. Instead, the resourcing of the Synod office appeared to be in response to issues as they arise, which while commendable was not sustainable."

In response Rev den Houting proposed that the Queensland Synod could offer the Northern Synod assistance in the development of strategies designed to address and mitigate the current risks being faced by the Northern Synod, including a strategy to "trade their way out" of the current financial situation.



Since the agreement there has been an update to the mission direction of the Synod and there has been progress in rebuilding trust. Over the last few year, Synod office has continued to respond to issues as they arise, alongside carrying out remediation work to bring their financial reporting up to an acceptable standard. The Synod has made progress with a plan to “trade their way out” of the current financial situation, but there will need to be a continued review of the operational settings of the organisation.

Northern Synod is in a very different place than it was 12 months ago, but there is still work to be done. The Finance and Property Services Committee (FAPS) noted at their recent meeting that, “ongoing viability and sustainability is still a major issue for this Synod.” However, thanks to the goodness of God and the support of the wider church there is hope. As Rev Tony Goodluck shared at our 46th Synod meeting, “Our hope for New Life, here and now and in the great mystery beyond, is found in the goodness of God.”

Please pray for the Northern Synod as they continue to take the next steps to move forward towards a sustainable future, as they make known and share God’s abundant love, transforming people and communities in Jesus’ way.

Rev Dr Adam McIntosh
General Secretary (November 2023 – May 2024)





threads of love
WEAVING CHRIST'S LOVE ACROSS
CULTURES & BOUNDARIES

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA 17TH TRIENNIAL ASSEMBLY
11 - 16 JULY 2024

