

UAICC NSW/ACT REGIONAL COUNCIL REPORT

A number of significant developments have occurred over the last three years

Strategic Directions

Development of a Strategic Action Plan: The need for tighter governance was identified as a key issue and the Regional Council Executive now meets monthly by teleconference between the Regional Council's bi-annual meetings. Regional Council Executive developed a three years Strategic Plan in order to ensure fulfillment of identified objectives. These objectives are discussed in the report that follows.

Legal Recognition of UAICC NSW/ACT Regional Council by Synod of NSW.ACT A major issue developed in early 2017 when it was discovered the Synod had never formally recognized or delegated to the Regional Council some of the responsibilities entrusted to presbyteries. In the absence of any such formal agreement lines of responsibility and accountability had become blurred in terms of the calling of ministry candidates, the appointment of ministry placements and, most recently, the recognition of Indigenous Christian communities who seek to become members of UAICC. At its meeting in September 2017 Synod finally resolved in principle to "prescribe that Congress may have certain powers of a presbytery – specifically establishment of congregations and faith communities, and placement and oversight of Ministers" with the changes starting from 1 July 2018.

Church Engagement Leader (Uniting): in April 2017 Uniting appointed Nathan Tyson as Church Engagement Leader placed within the UAICC Coordination team but funded by Uniting. Nathan has already made a significant contribution in assisting Congress ministry centres to explore how they might engage with the wider community in providing services to First Peoples. Nathan is giving particular attention to assisting members develop leadership and management skills.

Rural & Remote Ministry: UAICC NSW/ACT is committed to the staged implementation of the NSW.ACT Synod 'Saltbush Project' providing ministry and mission in rural and remote areas. The project represents an important collaborative step forward in the Covenanting process where a team of ministry agents will be placed across three rural regional presbyteries with Congress involvement.

Congress ministry in Bundjalung Country: Congress currently has five ministry centres in Bundjalung country (Arising Aboriginal & Islander Ministries, Ballina/Cabbage Tree Island, House of Prayer, Marmung and Tabulam). Consideration is being given to creation of a UAICC NSW/ACT Bundjalung Ministry Reference Group. The group would liaise with FNC Presbytery, Lismore Regional Mission and Congress ministry centres to provide a more strategic and collaborative ministry across the region, and keep Regional Council and its Sydney based coordination team aware of recent initiatives and activities.

Congress presence in Sydney City: UAICC NSW/ACT is in discussions with an inner city Uniting Church congregation re possible establishment of a First Nations women's ministry operating among our vulnerable women living in the Redfern/Waterloo and other inner city suburbs, including the many first Nations women who are in jail.

New Ministry Centres: Initial conversations have been held with representatives from Nowra and the Bay & Basin UCA Congregations on the NSW South Coast regarding the possibility of establishing a Congress presence in the Wreck Bay community. We have also received an expression of interest in joining Congress from a non-denominational Aboriginal Christian community in Moree. We have had initial conversation with the group and will explore this possibility in consultation with Moree Uniting Church.

Masters in Indigenous Theology: Plans are well advanced for UTC to host an intensive in Indigenous Theology offered by North American Institute for Indigenous Studies (NAIITS)/ University of Divinity in Sydney from 5-16 March 2018. Congress is greatly encouraged by UTC's initiative. This follows on a very successful one-week intensive course in Indigenous Theology conducted by NAIITS at the University of Divinity in Melbourne in July 2017.

Ministry Centres

Broken Hill Ministry Placement: Earlier this year Rev Neville Naden concluded his placement with Congress but we are pleased to advise the ministry was filled by Jack Harradine in September 2017. The ministry in Broken Hill is 62.5% funded by UAICC, the remaining 37.5 % by Bush Church Aid, but is exercised under the oversight of UAICC.

Marmung (Coroki): The ministry continues under the leadership of Aunty Macky Welsh. Lismore Regional Mission currently provides local oversight for the ministry with Congress providing an annual grant of \$30,000 to cover its funding. The congregation has also planted an outreach ministry in nearby Cabbage Tree Island through Congress member, Carol Roberts. A number of members from Marmung have also undertaken studies at Wontulp-Bi-Buya over the last three years, with one currently studying for her Cert IV in Ministry & Theology.

Arising Aboriginal & Islander Ministries: AAIM was recognized as a member of UAICC NSW/ACT in 2015 but has been worshipping in the Lismore Presbyterian Church. In 2016 Lismore Regional Mission advised they had a hall available but that renovations were needed to enable it to be used as a worship and fellowship centre. Congress provided \$28,000 toward renovation, and LRM approx. \$20,000. A draft MOU was prepared on the basis of shared stewardship between UAICC & UCA but questions were raised by the Synod whether Congress had the power to recognize the centre (see comment above re legal recognition) as an activity covered legally by the UCA (Public Liability, Workers' Compensation). AAIM are worshipping in the property but sadly has been required to take our public liability cover until the matter of recognition is resolved.

Aboriginal Congress Church: Since the last national Conference this ministry centre was opened in the southern suburbs of Sydney (Sylvania) under the leadership of Rev Garry Dronfield, with the support of the local UCA Congregation where Garry is also ministering.

Our other five centres also continue their ministry to their local communities. Our Condobolin ministry, led by Beth Wolfe, is thriving through its particular focus on ministry to children and young

people, whilst our church in Wellington, under the leadership of Tom Sloane, is networking with local community organisations seeking to address drug issues rife in the town. Tom has been particularly effective in working with young boys and men.

Stewardship of Financial Resources

Special Purpose Trust Fund: Regional Council (RC) has resolved that various funds, held in trust for UAICC NSW/ACT under the oversight of the Synod's Uniting Mission & Education be consolidated into one separate 'special purpose trust fund' for the ministry and mission of UAICC NSW/ACT with First Peoples. To ensure the Fund is not depleted, disbursements will be limited to interest earned on capital less 10% to be reinvested. Congress has received two grants from presbyteries resulting from the Synod's sales proceeds policy which will be lodged in the newly created consolidated trust fund.

Sale of Tabulum Pre-school property: The property owned by Congress was sold in 2017. The property was resumed by Roads & Maritime Services for construction of a new bridge. The proceeds will be lodged in the above special trust fund for future mission projects.

Missional Use of Property (Belmore): Plans are well underway with Uniting Resources to redevelop the Congress church property in Belmore, not currently used by Congress, to provide low-cost crisis housing. The basic proposal is for 20 units at a cost of between \$3 and \$3.5 million targeting income in excess of \$30,000 per month. UR recently inspected the property and discovered hazardous material problems, adding weight to the proposal for redevelopment. UR indicated its willingness to underwrite and supervise the project.

Property maintenance continues to be a major issue due to the age of Congress properties and limited funds in the 2017/18 budget for any major property maintenance.

Special Projects & Information

Walking on Bundjalung Country: In March this year RC hosted an eight days coach tour to Bundjalung country (Northern Rivers). Congress had hoped to attract at least 20-30 people for a mini-bus tour but ended up booking a coach with over 50 participating. The tour group visited former mission sites and learnt what life was like there, as well as shared in fellowship with Congress ministry centres across the region, met with the local Land Council and visited the Kinchela Boys Home at Kempsey to learn about its traumatic past. A similar tour is planned for April 2018 on Wiradjuri country in far west and southern NSW.

Ministry students: We currently have three Congress ministry candidates studying for their B.Th. at United Theological College in Sydney.

Looking to the Future

As reported, the last three years have seen quite a deal of activity and progress in Congress' ministry and an increased awareness across the wider church of its goals and hopes. These include the emergence of new ministry centres in Sydney (Sylvania) and Lismore, the employment of an additional team member – Church Engagement Leader – through the assistance of Uniting, the

introduction of Indigenous Theology studies in Australia, and the recent 'Walking on Bundjalung Country' tour that raised the profile of Congress across the wider church.

These are all encouraging signs and a firm basis for the future.

Mrs Diane Torrens

Chairperson

UAICC NSW/ACT Regional Council