

Report of National Executive and Office

Introduction

This report seeks to highlight some of the activities, changes and work of the National Executive and Office over the last three years. National Conference is both a time of fellowship and study, and the governing body for Congress. National Executive acts on behalf of Congress between these gatherings, and has a particular responsibility for direction, staffing, budgets and finance, and encouragement of regions. The staff has responsibility to support the National Committee and to carry out the day-to-day work.

Meetings and work

This has been a hard working National Executive. Over the last three years it has met six (6) times face-to-face, and a further nine (9) times by phone/zoom to deal with urgent issues.

A major part of the November 2016 meeting was spent with the Assembly Standing Committee discussing sovereignty and treaty. This has been a slow and difficult conversation. Support has been given to the Uluru Statement.

National Congress has worked with the Assembly and regions on such issues as:

- * community closures in WA,
- * support for Indigenous Education (NT),
- * opposition to legal aid cuts,
- * growing new ministries in 'remote' areas
- * having an Indigenous voice in conversations about climate change
- * changing the date of Australia Day.

National Congress has co-operated with UnitingJustice around five projects over the last couple of years:

- * Destiny Together – the week of prayer and fasting for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- * A submission about human rights issues in regard to the ongoing Intervention in the Northern Territory.
- * A submission in response to a discussion paper about new ways of delivering social security support, and how the suggestions would impact on Aboriginal peoples.
- * A response to the Federal budget and its impact of programs that are important to Aboriginal peoples.
- * Continuing discussions about the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Australian Constitution.

Work has been done to clarify Congress' vision and mission – the total well-being of all things in God's creation, and how Jesus brings and enables that well-being. There have been discussions about ways to better support Elders and young people.

The Executive has overseen a number of regional consultations/ reviews and the restructuring of the Tasmanian Regional Committee and the Victorian Regional Committee. The reviews have highlighted concerns about budget and finance control, lack of a shared sense of direction, factional arguments, and lack of proper governance – each of which impacts on really good

local ministries. There have been two noticeable outcomes: (i) a tightening of budgets and available finance, and (ii) closer ties with synods for support.

See Working Paper 7 for the financial report.

An effort has been made to improve governance, and clarify the best roles to support work over the next three years. There has been a lot of work on the relationship between Congress and the Uniting Church. Part of this has been a suggested for MoUs between synods and Regional Committees to spell out those relationships and responsibilities.

Unfortunately the Executive never managed to convene a meeting of the First Peoples Justice Council that was established at last Conference (Minute 15.16.06).

The Elders have had one quite successful and helpful meeting since last National Conference. Unfortunately the National Elders Council has been impacted by death, retirement and ageing, and it only managed that one meeting. Rebuilding the Elders Council needs to be a priority for the next three years.

Congress has been very welcoming of people and churches into Congress. This has strengthened work amongst First Peoples. However it must also be said that those who seek the support of Congress are not always respectful of Congress' commitment to holistic ministry (including serious engagement in political issues that impact on First Peoples) and to the strengthening of Aboriginal identity, and nor do they always respect the fact that Congress is part of the Uniting Church.

Location of the office and national staffing

The last National Conference received a report on the shift to the role of National Coordinator, with office space in Newcastle. As the National Executive considered a replacement for Chris Budden (who will finish in the role of Interim National Coordinator at the end of January), it established a working group to consider the positions needed to take National Congress into the future. It was particularly concerned that Congress have good and well-supported Aboriginal leadership, including the ability to engage with the wider Aboriginal community and the church. For this reason it has recommended that the staff for the next three years be:

- * National President, full-time, located wherever the elected person wishes to live. This person would be a First Person, and would be elected by National Conference from a list of people the Executive believes could carry out the role.
- * Executive Administrator/ Resource Person. This is similar to the present position of National Coordinator, but carries fewer leadership responsibilities and is a resource for the President.
- * National Youth Coordinator (0.6).
- * Training Coordinator (0.4 for one year).

A short job description for all roles is attached to this report.

The Executive believes that the next three years can be be a period of rebuilding and encouragement.

Training and Formation

At the time of the last Conference it was reported that National Congress would establish its own training body for candidates. Having completed most of the preparatory work the

Executive decided that this was not the best way forward. Relationships have been strengthened with Nungalinga, and students are encouraged to study in local theological colleges. As Training Officer, Murray Muirhead has offered extra learning opportunities around issues like understanding the Uniting Church, Code of Ethics, and gospel and culture.

Major work was done on requirements for those who are ready for ordination. Congress candidates no longer require a Diploma as evidence of theological learning. The main thing is that people show evidence of their learning, skills and ability to act well as a Minister. There has been increased interest in Indigenous theology and spirituality. Each candidate will work with a formation panel to develop their personal learning program.

Murray has decided to pursue a career in nursing, and has completed his training while working with Congress. He has finished his position with Congress, and will start at Townsville Hospital in February. He has made a great contribution to Congress over a number of years, and will be missed. The MEB held a Close of Ministry service for Murray in December at UTC in Sydney.

Chris Budden
Interim National Coordinator

APPENDIX: New national roles

National President

The role of National President is a new role in Congress. It follows a period when the senior staff position was an administrative and resourcing role, and the National Chairperson's role was done part-time and unpaid.

The aim is to create a role where an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person can offer leadership to Congress, hold and share the Congress vision, advocate for Congress, encourage and resource the regions and Ministers (including regular consultations), support Indigenous theologies, and build strong connections between Congress and other Aboriginal groups and the Uniting Church Assembly.

National Congress is seeking a person with a deep Christian faith and a commitment to UAICC, who is able to inspire people with Congress' vision, who is committed to justice for First Peoples, and who can encourage and support other leaders around Australia.

The prime accountabilities of the National President are:

1. Provide leadership to National Congress.
2. Support the work of regional councils and Ministers.
3. Building relationship with the Uniting Church Assembly
4. Building relationships with the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

Executive Administrator/Resource Worker

The primary focus of this role is to provide administrative support to the National Executive, and support to the National Chairperson. They would be responsible to establish a National Office, preferably in relationship to a synod office.

The prime accountabilities of the National Resource Worker are:

1. Provide support to National Congress.
2. Provide support for the National President.
3. Provide oversight of Committees and Staff.

National Training Coordinator

The primary focus of this role is arranging additional education for Candidates, ensuring the establishment of formation panels, providing leadership and administrative support for the MEB, and supporting the development of Indigenous theology and spirituality through events such as annual Indigenous Theology Forums.

The prime accountabilities of the National Resource Worker are:

1. Provide support to Candidates for Ministry.
2. Provide support for the MEB.
3. Provide support for continuing education.
4. Provide support for the development of Indigenous Theologies and Spirituality.

National Youth Coordinator (Part Time, 0.6 FTE)

The National Youth Coordinator will provide key leadership for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders members of the UAICC National Youth Committee and will have major responsibility for the growth of the ministry and resources. This position will work closely with the UAICC National Youth Committee and its Chairperson, the National Resource Officer, the Resource Officers of each state, UAICC Regional Committees, ministers of UAICC congregations and Presbytery's and Synods to develop the life, mission and ministry of the UAICC across Australia. This person will be a spokesperson for the National Youth Committee in Australia. This position will liaise with the National Executive of the UAICC and staff.

The National Youth Coordinator will serve the UAICC by providing culturally appropriate strategic and pastoral leadership for the ministry and mission of UAICC National Youth Committee members and other Congress youth leaders through the following focus areas:

1. Support for structures and the organisation.
2. Coordinating youth programs and events.
3. Media and communications.
4. Resourcing.
5. Relationships

Please Note

1. The National Executive will bring names of people who have applied for the role of National President, and who the Executive are most suited to the needs of Congress at this time. Conference will appoint the President from among those people.
2. The National Executive will appoint the Executive Administrator/ Resource Person. Applicants have been called for, and a short-list of people has been prepared. Interviews will occur in January.
3. The position of National Training Coordinator is a part-time (0.4) position for one year while the need for this position and its relationship to the Executive Administrator/ Resource person is assessed. Chris Budden has been asked to carry the role for the year.
4. The National Executive will appoint the Youth Coordinator. It has applications, and hopes to interview mid-January.