



Dear Covenanters,

Next week I will be driving to Perth with Di for the Triennial UAICC National Conference 2009, "Transformation, Determining Tomorrow's Communities". Three years ago, when I first started as Covenanting Coordinator, Di and I attended the previous UAICC Conference in 2006 on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. Perth promises to be as exciting as before. A number of folk taking part in the "About F.A.C.E. 09" cross cultural experience will also be in attendance.

When Congress people from all over Australia get together there is a very loud voice. Aboriginal people were pleased to hear the promises made by the Uniting Church in the Covenant speech at the Assembly in 1994. Since then many good things have happened but the Congress is feeling that not everyone holds those promises in their hearts and Congress longs for a renewal of the Covenant.

This conference comes prior to the Assembly and in the same way as three years ago proposals will come from this conference to the Assembly. For many in the Congress not all decisions made by the Assembly three years ago have travelled very well for the Congress and seem still far from being realised. These included the support for a Treaty and the idea of "Indigecare", a Congress partnership with UnitingCare. Much work still needs to be done.

Please pray for the Congress people at this time, that the Holy Spirit will empower and guide those at the Conference in Perth and be with those going on to the Assembly of the UCA in Sydney. Pray also for the young non-Aboriginal adults attending as part of "About F.A.C.E. 09".

Uncle Ken & Jordan Visit the Philippines



Pictured above: Jordan and Uncle Ken presenting a gift at the Conference.

03 Jun 2009 In early April, Jordan Sumner, was asked to represent the Uniting Church in attending a Youth Conference in the Philippines. Later that month, soon after returning home from New Zealand, he, along with his dad, the Reverend Ken Sumner, travelled to Singapore.

The next day they flew to Manila... that's when they got a shock at the amount of poverty all over the nation's capital. They spent their first night staying at an Ecumenical House in Metro-Manila... the weather was muggy and hot. They had no air-conditioners until their bus ride the next night. They travelled for 10 hours through the night until they reached Santiago City, where they changed buses from an air-conditioned state liner to a

"mini bus" where they fitted 50 people on, that's right, not just in but on...

They finally reached their destination in the small township of Mayoyao, Ifugao, where the 3rd National Youth Camp of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) was held. It was an experience that they will never forget because the majority of the bible study classes were told in Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines. The camp was based on how we can be a Greener Planet and reducing our carbon footprint. The theme was "Making the Earth Our Home".

It rained for most of the camp and they were caught in a typhoon. Everyone was crying and praying on

the last night, not just because the camp was almost over but because of the storm and lack of power. For the last three days of the camp they had no electricity.

On the day the camp ended it was still raining but everyone got on the buses and off they went. They got to the top of a hill and pulled over. The driver got out and others climbed off the roof but there were still over 40 people on the mini bus. They were stopped for a while and changed the 2 front tyres whilst everyone was on the bus, after that they took off again. It wasn't even 5 minutes and they pulled over again, the tyres were loose!! They tightened them and off they went.

Just when they thought they'd never get out of the mountains they pulled over again! This time they saw other buses pulled over too. There had been a landslide and they had to try to build a road over the landslide. Then they heard the horn of a bus. They quickly moved out of the way and the bus went flying over the dirt piled up over the road. They made it back safely and will always remember their first trip to the Philippines.

What did they learn spiritually on this trip? They learnt how to pray like they've never prayed before.

Source: <http://www.congress.org.au/news/index.php>

Tjinatjunanyi Students visit Parliament



The classroom at Parliament House

25 May 2009 During our stay in Adelaide Tjina went to Parliament House. It was an experience which some of our students will long remember. We went to the House of Representatives where all of our students sat in the seats where politicians talk and discuss different issues. The students looked around the room and in silence sat there and listened to the history and stories which our tour guide had. Many interesting facts included woven carpets of S.A symbols, the painting on the walls to the colour of the seats. The day was seen by the students as a learning experience and now knowing who their local Member of Parliament is and how the government runs.

Source: <http://www.congress.org.au/news/index.php>

Uniting Church Minister Wins Indigenous Art Award



15 June 2009 ABC News reported, "Yolgnu painter and rights campaigner Rev Dr Gawirrin Gumana AO was honoured with the most prestigious career achievement prize in Indigenous arts at the Australia Council for the Arts' 2009 National Indigenous Arts Awards." Gawirrin was ordained as a minister in the Uniting Church in 1992. You can read the full story here: <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/stories/s2599995.htm>

Gawarrin also has a message which he released in May. The full text is below. Please read prayerfully.....

Thursday 21 May 2009

My name is Dr Gawirrin Gumana AO of Gangan*, and I am one of the old people who fought for our Land Rights.

Government, I would like to pass this on to you, my words now.

If you are looking for people to move out, if you want to move us around like cattle, like others who have already gone to the cities and towns, I tell you, I don't want to play these games.

Government, if you don't help our Homelands, and try to starve me from my land, I tell you, you can kill me first. You will have to shoot me.

Listen to me.

I don't want to move again like my father moved from Gangan to other places like Yirrkala or Groote. I don't want my children to move. I don't want my family to move.

I will not lose my culture and my tribe to your games like a bird moving from place to place, looking for its camp or to sleep in other places, on other people's land that is not our land.

I do not want my people will move from here and die in other places. I don't want this. We don't want this. I am an Aboriginal from mud, red mud.

I am black, I am red, I am yellow, and I will not take my people from here to be in these other places.

We want to stay on our own land. We have our culture, we have our law, we have our land rights, we have our painting and carving, we have our stories from our old people, not only my people, but everyone, all Dhuwa and Yirritja, we are not making this up.

I want you to listen to me Government.

I know you have got the money to help our Homelands. But you also know there is money to be made from Aboriginal land.

You should trust me, and you should help us to live here, on our land, for my people.

I am talking for all Yolngu now.

So if you can't trust me Government, if you can't help me Government, come and shoot me, because I will die here before I let this happen.

Gawirrin Gumana

Labor recently announced it would not support any expansion of services to remote homelands communities, despite a wealth of Australian and international evidence showing Aboriginal people living on outstations and homelands were healthier than people who lived in larger communities. [reported by ABC Lateline, June 4, 2009]



* Born in the 1930's, Gawirrin Gumana is a leader of the Dhalwangu clan. He is one of the most senior Yolngu alive today and is renowned for his artwork and knowledge of traditional culture and law. Gawirrin was a contributor to the Yirrkala church panels that are a statement by clan groups regarding their equal authority with the church and in 1992 he was ordained as a Minister of the Uniting Church. He was a major litigant in the 2005 Federal Court Blue Mud Bay decision that granted inter-tidal rights to traditional owners. Following the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, Gawirrin led his clan back to its traditional country at Gangan, about 150 kilometers southwest of Nhulunbuy. Gangan, with a population of around 80 people, has been acknowledged as one of the notable success stories of the homelands movement.

Fifty years of working alongside Indigenous people

15 April 2009 It was the inaugural meeting of the South Australian Mission Studies Network (a state chapter of AAMS), held from 12.30 to 2 pm on Wednesday, 15 April at Tabor College.



Rev Dr Bill Edwards, Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of South Australia reflected on fifty years of working alongside Indigenous people.

Bill's reflections ranged across a substantial part of the history of the Ernabella Mission. "In 1937, in an effort to help these people cope with the unwanted intrusions of European pastoralism into their country and lives, the Presbyterian Board of Missions, chivvied by the redoubtable ex-patriate Scottish surgeon Charles Duguid, acquired the recently granted Ernabella pastoral

lease. The people themselves still lived a completely nomadic, traditional hunter-gatherer life. The mission offered medical attention and education; it was very unusual as a mission, in that traditional Indigenous culture was respected and valued. Gradually people chose to stay permanently at Ernabella, or leave their children there for schooling while they went back to the bush"¹.

Bill's reflections covered the later years of the Ernabella Mission, the development of thinking with regard to missions and illustrated how far sighted the policies that were implemented were. Aboriginal people were not forced to give up their culture or language. Indeed education started with developing literacy skills in reading and writing Pitjantjatjara and the mother tongue was a key feature of reaching out to local people. All the missionaries had to learn the Pitjantjatjara language. Bill gave an insight into how important this was.... It was not just a simple matter of translating. He said,

"Of the 51 parables in the gospels, 5 had some relevance to Aboriginal life but not very close relevance; although unrelated to everyday happenings, 30 referred to aspects of life introduced through culture contact, including shepherding and gardening of the mission's program; 16 had little or no relevance. So the parables as presented didn't have much relevance to Pitjantjatjara life. I sought to find analogies from familiar features such as hunting, tracking, dingoes, ant lions and eagles.... In addition to the selection of culturally relevant elements of the scriptures, one must find cultural parallels which will make possible apprehension of biblical truths within the context of contemporary life. The Pitjantjatjara preachers were able to take these suggestions to a deeper level and use them really effectively."

After spending some years on the APY Lands myself I can reflect on how well the older generation valued their Pitjantjatjara Hymn Books and scriptures and how fervently they sang. A secondary age student in my school reflected with some concern and sadness her inability to read and write in her own language. How quickly the lessons were forgotten by the government agents who replaced the mission. At first all the teachers had to learn the language. By the time I arrived in 1996 Pitjantjatjara was no longer either a requirement nor taught in all but one school, Fregon. However, I believe it is now taught in most of the schools on the Lands.

Bill's reflections acknowledged the knowledge and skills of the Aboriginal people and he encouraged and worked with them in culturally sensitive ways. He talked about the models of ministry that were appropriate in the Aboriginal context.

Pastor Paul Albrecht of the Lutheran Church in Alice Springs commented:

In retrospect it is fairly clear what we have done, was superimpose on the Aboriginal Christians our forms of ministry.... we assumed a fulltime ministry of preaching, teaching, counselling, etc., financially supported by the congregations the pastor served, with a small vehicle subsidy from the Finke River Mission. Of course we received from them what appeared to be their agreement. What we understand more clearly now, is that if you put to Aboriginal people a plan which to them indicates you do not understand how things are done in their society, it means you do not agree with how they do things. The idea is then seen as your idea, and in their terms, you are quite welcome to your idea. However, because it is your idea, it is also your responsibility to make it work."²

Bill's challenge was that in any form of ministry, whether to Aboriginal people, or even our own youth, it is imperative that we understand and work within that culture, understanding its structures and speaking its language.

- report by Peter Russell

1. http://www.australiadreamingart.com.au/itjanu_ernabella_art.htm

2. Paul Albrecht quoted in Helen Yubu, Ministry in Aboriginal Churches, 40 Spring 1989, page 8

Covenanting Forums Coming

Preliminary planning has started for conducting a series of forums on Covenanting in the latter half of this year. The aim of the forums is for non-Aboriginal members of the church to explore what covenanting means and find out about the work of the Congress. The first forum will most likely take place in Port Augusta with invitations going out to regional churches to attend. Later forums will be in the city, with some focussing on specialist areas such as agencies and schools.

Have you completed the Covenanting Survey?

Some Covenanters have yet to complete the Survey. **You know who you are!** To get a better picture of where our covenanting support comes from we need to know a few other things about you and your congregation. For many there is only an email address and in some cases not even a name! Please go to the web survey form by pasting this URL into your browser if clicking on it doesn't work.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=S4f7vMX8rGIKNcSULQ7SrA_3d_3d

Don't forget to scroll down and press the **DONE** button when you finish the form. Not all questions need be answered.

Prayer Points

- Please pray for the Congress people at this time, that the Holy Spirit will empower and guide those at the UAICC Conference in Perth and be with those going on to the Assembly of the UCA in Sydney.
- Pray also for the young adults attending the UAICC Conference as part of "About F.A.C.E. 09", that they will grow in their understanding of justice, peace, reconciliation and faith as part of God's mission.
- Give thanks for the ministry of Dr Gawirrin Gumana of Gangan. Pray for his homeland community and all other Homelands in the NT as they face the impact of the "NT Intervention" and the NT Government decision to only fund large Aboriginal Centres.
- Pray for the continuing ministries of the Congress, the work of the Congress in Adelaide and Kalparrin / Murray Bridge.
- Pray for the Aboriginal students that take part in Tjinatjunanyi Educational Program in Port Augusta³. The program is suffering a crisis in funding at the moment but hopes to continue next term. Pray for all those involved in this program, the teacher, Congress people and those in government who are making the big decisions, so that the 20 plus young Aboriginal people will be able to continue their education.
- Pray for the working party going north to Oodnadatta in July and that the Lenten Appeal Project outcomes to support Congress youth ministry needs in Oodnadatta will be achieved.

3. More news on what is happening with the Tjinatjunanyi Educational Program will appear in our next newsletter. Uniting Foundation and other seeding funding from the church finishes at the end of this year. If the program is to continue other sources of non-church funding must be forthcoming.

Palya, Go with God,

Peter

25 June 2009

'Til we meet again,
Hold the warmth of the camp fire in your heart
And may the Creator Spirit, the God of peace,
Always walk with you.

Peter Russell

Covenanting Coordinator
Mission Resourcing Network
Uniting Church in Australia –
Presbytery and Synod of SA

Level 2, 212 Pirie Street ADELAIDE
GPO Box 2145, Adelaide SA 5001
P: 8227 0822 M: 0427 667 607
E: prussell@sa.uca.org.au

Note: The Covenanting Coordinator position is only half time. Office hours are usually in the first half of the week, Monday to Wednesday when not out and about. The Covenanting Coordinator is able to preach at Services, and talk to Church Councils, Bible Study and Fellowship Groups. For further details

contact the Covenanting Coordinator. Past copies of this newsletter may be downloaded from the website: *Apologies if there are problems with the new site. They will be rectified as soon as possible.*

<http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/covenanting-whats-new.html>

The resources, events and conferences listed in this newsletter are not necessarily officially supported by the Uniting Church. Information is provided as presented by the relevant organisations. The views expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily reflect the policy of the Uniting Church.