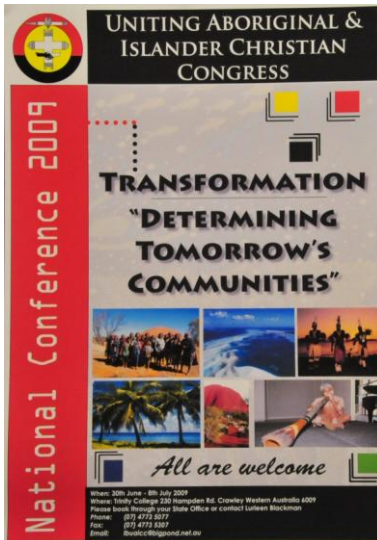




Dear Covenanters,



Momentous events have occurred since my last letter. Di and I spent an exciting week with the Congress at their National Conference in Perth where the final details were made and agreed to regarding the proposed preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution which then went to the Assembly last week. We enjoyed the studies on Nehemiah led by theologian Dr Daniel Smith-Christopher from Loyola Marymount University in the US and the discussion that followed was exciting in how that story spoke to Aboriginal people today. Each state presented their vision for the next three years. The fellowship and worship each night was led in turn by each state. Each was inspiring but I must say SA, joined by members of the About Face team, just rocked! On the last day elections were held and the Rev Ken Sumner from SA was elected as Chairperson of the National UAICC for the next three years.

The news from Assembly has just been sensational. The Preamble was passed after amendment and constitutional changes were made as a result which have momentous implications for the relationship between the Congress and the Uniting Church. At the end Congress Chairperson the Rev. Ken Sumner asked everyone who was able to kneel in prayer. "We get on our knees, we put our faith and trust in our Lord, because this is a new journey for us. "We don't know what is before us," he said. "But it's wonderful to start afresh." Now read on

2009 National Congress Conference in Perth

The welcome and opening service for the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) National Conference for 2009 began with joyous singing on Tuesday 30 June, 2009.

The theme for the triennial conference was "Determining Tomorrow's Communities" and as first peoples from across Australia had travelled so far to take part, there was plenty for people to take back to their communities to share. The theme was focused on the holistic measures required to improve the prosperity, health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities, many of which have made solid progress since the last national conference.

An official welcome to the land of the Nyungar people was made by Doolan Leisha Eates, and translated into English by her husband. She especially welcomed those who have travelled long distances and she spoke of how proud she is of her city and land.

A representative from each state then presented Rev Sealin Garlett, chair of the UAICC in Western Australia, with a gift to symbolise that they are entering someone else's land and to show their respect. Gifts included a candle, songs, stories, handmade cloth, decorations made from woven coconut leaves and a Bible translated in one of the many Aboriginal languages.

The conference was approached with God's vision for all people in mind. Vince Ross – pictured right, former national chair of Congress, said remembering this will help people to leave with their own vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. "If we want to see transformation:" Vince Ross said, "It's not about the programs. It's about the spirit."



During business sessions, Congress people made some key decisions about just how they are going to work towards transformation over the next three years. National UAICC Administrator



Rev Shayne Blackman said the fervent attendance and participation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the conference was testament to a real desire for lasting change in the spirit of the covenant.

Public rallies were held most evenings during the conference, and provide a time of relaxation and fellowship for those attending the conference, as well as a time for local people not attending the conference to join in worship, songs of praise, reflection and celebration. **Pictured left: members of About Face with some of the South Australian worship team.**

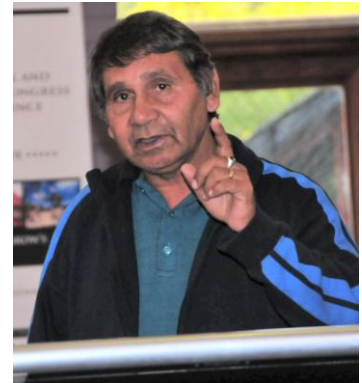
WA Synod general secretary Kay Dowling, chair of the WA Covenanting Commission Rev Alison Longworth, retired Reverends Betty and Alan Matthews and many other local people joined in at the opening public rally.

Tuesday's rally featured great music, which got many people up on their feet, as well as a number of guest speakers.

Robbie Jetta spoke to the gathered crowd of his experience ministering to and building relationships with both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Waroona community. He also spoke of a recent trip to Tonga, where he was amazed to find that he'd have to look very hard to find a non-Christian person, unlike in Australia where you have to look hard to find the Christians!

Murray Yarran shared the work of the Beananging Kwuurt Institute (BKI) which is housed in the old Sister Kate's Children's Home in Queens Park. Murray said that while BKI was only just starting out, it was already developing a good reputation, and had already been approached by local councils to talk through some of the issues in their areas. "This is going to be a really positive endeavour for Aboriginal people," he said.

Rev Sealin Garlett (pictured right) spoke from the story of 1 Samuel, 15–16, in which David is anointed as the future king of Israel, despite being a still a child. Sealin said the story was particularly appropriate for Aboriginal people, as 60% of the Indigenous population is 25 years or younger.



Sealin showed a picture drawn by Nelson Mandela when he was in prison. It shows prison bars with a lush landscape behind. Yet the view from Mandela's window was just another prison wall.

"That was a picture of hope," said Sealin. "Mandela was able to bring that, because he had hope." However, Sealin said, most of us are trapped behind some bars in our lives; often ones we have put there ourselves.

"Don't get caught behind the bars of life that are gonna stop you from becoming what you've got to become," he said.

He reminded everyone of David, who stepped forward when God called him and didn't let the fact that he was too young or inexperienced stop him. Although David had a checkered life, even after becoming king, "he knew who had the rein on his life," Sealin said.

He ended with a quote from Nelson Mandela's inauguration speech:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

(The speech was originally written by Marianne Williamson)

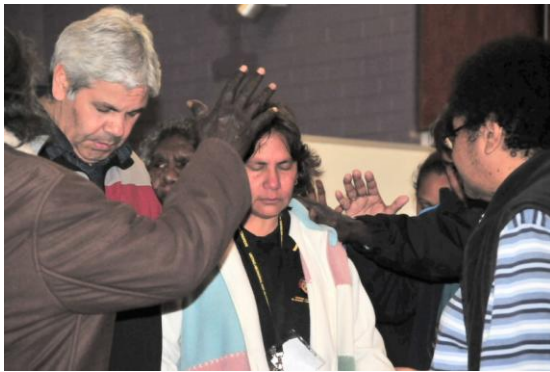
National UAICC Administrator Rev Shayne Blackman (pictured right) said the fervent attendance and participation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the conference was testament to a real desire for lasting change in the spirit of the covenant.

“Our nation’s history is tainted by Indigenous marginalization especially when it comes to decision making and empowerment; what we are doing is tackling this unjust state head on to equip our people with the confidence and spiritual sustenance to make the necessary changes in their lives and that of their communities.

“The outcomes of this forum will have been the result of many Indigenous people coming together and articulating their hopes and dreams for a better future expressed through a number of key resolutions.

“The time is upon us to embrace these aspirations and support them for the lasting benefit of the first people of this nation and ultimately the nation as a whole” said Rev Blackman.

Source: various



Ken Sumner elected as Chairperson of UAICC

Wednesday, 08 July 2009 On the last day of the Conference the Rev Ken Sumner from Congress in South Australia was elected as National chairperson of the UAICC for the next three years.

The national vice-chairperson elected was Roberta Stanley from Queensland. They were inducted at a moving ceremony during the closing communion service of the conference.

Watershed period in Indigenous affairs

Friday, 17 July 2009 01:16 “There comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time.

“The past three years are likely to be judged by history as a watershed time for the Aboriginal and Islander people of Australia.” These challenging words open the triennial report of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress to the 12th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The report highlighted several significant developments in the previous three years, including:

- Recognition of the harsh realities of life for many young Indigenous Australians through the release of the Little Children are Sacred report
- The 2007 “Intervention” in the Northern Territory by the Howard Government
- The 2008 formal apology in federal Parliament to Indigenous Australians by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and
- Acceptance of the urgency for governments to “close the gaps” between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous people.

The report claims all those have ramifications for Congress’ life and ministry, both positive and negative.

During the past triennium, the Assembly Standing Committee established a task group to progress the renewal of the covenant relationship between the Congress and the Uniting Church Assembly. The group comprised three people from the mainstream Uniting Church and four from Congress.

This group sought to provide a context in which the covenant partners could “discuss experiences and issues that cause encouragement and concern over the operation of the covenant relationship across the church”. It also considered ways in which commitment to the covenant could be strengthened.

The Congress report emphasised the vital importance of the proposed Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, a matter for later business at the Assembly.

“This proposed Preamble is particularly important because it takes the Uniting Church Covenant — between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members — to another level; to beyond just having ‘truth’ in history and Indigenous claims for justice and a fair deal addressed ... It poses challenging questions such as:



- “What was God’s purpose in preparing and speaking to the ‘first people of our nation over such a long period of time’?”
 - “What cultural and spiritual insights can Indigenous Christians potentially bring to today’s Australian churches from their long history and a theology contained in their ‘Dreaming’?”
- “What would it mean for an Australian church to recognise these Australian spiritual roots as part of God’s revelation and gift for this nation today?”

Pictured above: Rev Ken Sumner at the 12th Assembly.

The full report is available at <http://assembly2009.uca.org.au/images/Reports/uaicc.pdf>.

View the photo gallery <http://assembly2009.uca.org.au/resources/photo-galleries/94-congressreport>

Church adopts historic new Constitution Preamble

Monday, 20 July 2009 01:44 The Uniting Church in Australia now sees itself in an entirely new light. And it will project itself to the world in a fresh way.

For the first time in Australia, and possibly in the world, a major Christian denomination in a Western nation defines itself in terms of its relationship with the people dispossessed by colonisation.

This is the significance of a controversial new preamble to its Constitution passed today by the Uniting Church at the 2009 national Assembly in Sydney.

Debate on the proposal was anticipated with both excitement and apprehension. Although strongly supported by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (Congress) and many others, solid opposition had been signalled in advance.

Many speakers sought to amend some of the proposal’s complex wording. Others expressed concern at the lack of adequate consultation.

Deliberations on Sunday evening became highly emotional, with profound distress expressed by many speakers. At one point Congress representatives told the meeting they felt “unsafe” and withdrew from the Assembly.

This was followed by many expressions of profound hurt, dismay, sorrow and apology. President Alistair Macrae then led the entire Assembly of 265 members outside the meeting hall where they joined with the Congress representatives before re-entering.

It was agreed late on Sunday evening that the proposal would again be put to the Assembly on Monday morning, but without any further discussion.

On Monday morning the President Alistair Macrae sought passage of the resolution by consensus, that is, without dissent. This failed, with about seven dissenters. The Assembly then moved to formal procedures where a 75 per cent majority is required.

An overwhelming majority then supported the proposal, approximately 256 to nine.

The preamble takes the Uniting Church Covenant between Indigenous and non- Indigenous members to another level.

It tells the truth about the history of Australia, including the truth of her Christian churches. And it places the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people at the centre of the denomination’s life and witness

The preamble states that:

1. When the churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.

2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians

(meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.

3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.

The preamble affirms, further, that many church members "shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples. They were complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land."

The preamble is not legally binding in terms of interpretation of the constitution, or for any understanding of regulations which flow from that constitution.

Although the overwhelming majority of Assembly members were strongly in favour of the new preamble, celebration was subdued following the acrimony and distress which preceded the final decision.



Pictured above: Assembly members fall on their knees in prayer.

Source: <http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/media-centre/latest-news/153-newpreamble>

Constitution changed to acknowledge Covenant with Congress

Monday, 20 July 2009 09:46 The Assembly of the Uniting Church, meeting in Sydney, made several amendments to its Constitution on July 20 to reflect the content of the new preamble adopted earlier in the day.

The purposes of the changes were explained as paving the way for more effective expression of the relationship between Congress and other branches of the Uniting Church.

The Constitution now allows specific rights, powers, duties and responsibilities of a synod or presbytery to be transferred to Congress, with an appeal mechanism if a synod does not respond to a request from Congress for such a transfer.

The title of Division 4 was amended to read: "Covenantal Relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress."

Secondly, a preliminary paragraph to Division 4 was added:

"49. Noting the Preamble and the Church's desire to build on its covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and in order to serve more effectively the purposes of God in the land of Australia, the Church shall remain open to the ways in which the covenantal relationship may find fuller expression in its life."

Both changes were accepted by consensus, that is, by unanimous show of cards.

The Assembly approved by agreement adding the following definitions to Clause 3:

"Covenantal relationship is the relationship which exists between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Assembly, which began in the invitation of 1988 and response of 1994, in which both groups commit themselves to developing more just, inclusive and equal relationships in the Church that recognise the place of First Peoples, the difficult history of this nation since invasion, and the particular responsibility of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress for ministry with and among Aboriginal and Islander peoples.

"First Peoples are the Aboriginal and Islander peoples of Australia who are the indigenous peoples of this land. These peoples are a diverse group with many languages and communal identities.

"Second Peoples are all those peoples who have come after the First Peoples and who are beneficiaries in some way of the invasion and dispossession of the lands of the First Peoples. Among Second Peoples within the Church are many whose racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, experiences and expression of

Christian faith are not those originating in Western forms of thought and theological expression.”

Clause 71 was amended by consensus to read: “All rulings as to the interpretation of this Constitution or any of the Regulations made by the Assembly shall be made by the President after taking appropriate advice, and noting the preamble, provided however that any such ruling may be confirmed, varied, modified, rescinded or over-ruled by the Assembly or by the Standing Committee on its behalf.”

A more controversial amendment was accepted by agreement after lengthy discussion.

That permits a synod, at the request of a regional committee of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, to prescribe that the regional committee or the National Executive of the Congress exercise the rights, powers, duties and responsibilities of a synod or presbytery.

Agreement could not be reached on the amendment relating to dispute resolution. So the Assembly shifted from consensus decision-making mode to the application of formal business procedures.

After extensive debate, those proposals were accepted by a majority of more than 90 per cent:

“(b) Any such prescription may be (i) made subject to such limitations as may arise from the nature of the Congress or the regional committee and such limitations or conditions as may be required by the Synod and

“(ii) withdrawn or varied from time to time by the Synod, after negotiation with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

“(c) if a synod declines a request from a regional committee made under (a) above, the Assembly shall at the request of the regional committee seek to negotiate a resolution of the dispute in the spirit of the Covenantal relationship and if the regional committee remains unsatisfied the Assembly may direct the synod to make the transfer of some or all of the specific rights, powers, duties and responsibilities of a synod or presbytery as requested by the regional committee.”

Finally the Assembly authorised, by consensus, “the Standing Committee on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee to produce Regulations that give effect to the amendment to Clause 49A of the Constitution.”

Discussion on these changes was the most time-consuming item of business of the Assembly so far, with many members exercising their right to speak, ask questions and suggest amendments.

The session closed with an emotional celebration, including songs, prayer and expressions of joy and relief, involving all representatives of Congress present.

Source: <http://assembly2009.uca.org.au/media-centre/latest-news/163-constitutionchanged>

Living as a guest

Sunday, 19 July 2009 03:48 (amended article from the assembly) Dr Budden’s book, *Following Jesus in Invaded Space*, explores what it means to “do theology” as the people who came second to Australian, recognising that we are living on Aboriginal land.

In many ways the ideas outlined in *Following Jesus in Invaded Space* provide a theological and historical context for the discussion about the preamble and what it means for the Uniting Church’s covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

Dr Budden said the ideas contained in the book had been “bubbling in his soul” over many years spent working alongside Aboriginal people as person who is fifth generation Australia.

This journey started in the late 1960s when, as a young man, he had already candidated and been accepted to start his training as a minister.

“By the grace of God I had this idea coming out of church one morning,” he recalled. “I’m sure it was God that said, ‘You’ve got three months before you start university, why don’t you offer it to the church for mission.’”

Having already done some accountancy training, the church sent him to Aurukun Mission as an accountant.



"I went there for three months and basically it was life changing," he said. "I was 18 years of age living in this Aboriginal community and being confronted by all these issues."

It was there Dr Budden became aware of the damaging effects of paternalistic attitudes and policies. "I was watching the government taking money out of people's bank accounts even though they didn't spend it, because all Aboriginal people were the same," he recalled.

This experience sowed the seeds for a passionate involvement in social justice issues. After being ordained, Dr Budden's second placement took him to the Northern Synod, where he became involved with the land rights debate and developed relationships with Aboriginal Christians.

However, it was only relatively recently, during the 2003 Assembly meeting in Melbourne, that a conversation with his friends and colleagues from Congress led to a turning point in the way he thought about what it meant to be an Australian Christian.

"I made a comment in the debate that the primary covenant for the church was baptism and we had to figure out what the covenant with Congress meant in terms of baptism," he recalled.

What he realised was that to take seriously the relationship with Congress meant he had to re-think his own received traditions and stories in the context of that relationship.

"I came to the conclusion that I couldn't answer the question of what does baptism imply in just a traditional sense. I had to figure it out in relationship with them," he said

"I had to take seriously what they said about covenant and how that impacted on my understanding of the rights and responsibilities that come with baptism."

Dr Budden said once he started to seriously consider that he realised there were implications for how he thought about his own faith.

"The important thing is that it actually moves the conversation from being just about justice and ethics to being about central theological truths," he said.

However, Dr Budden stressed that his aim was not to talk about Aboriginal theology which would be perpetuating a tradition of the dominant culture "speaking for" others. Rather, his aim was to find a way to speak about his own faith living with the history of Australia as one of "invasion and suffering" for Aboriginal people.

"It's about the connection between tradition and context. How do you engage with your tradition in the light of your questions that are raised in the context in which you live," he said.

"You always approach the tradition from a particular place. And I want us to approach it from the place of say we are people who occupy aboriginal land and find out what that does to the questions we ask of the tradition."

He is influenced by the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who said that who is Jesus is inseparable from where is Jesus.

"So part of my question was always, 'How do I talk about God in Australia?'" he said.

"Jesus was always located on the edges of community and with the poorest of people. How do I find Jesus in Australia if that's where Jesus always is?"

The question of space and place is a crucial one for Australian Christians as they learn to relate with Aboriginal people, whose culture has a spiritual connection to the land.

"What Aboriginal people do is integrate the fact that land for them is economically and socially crucial and is tied to their understanding of where God is," explained Dr Budden.

"We as Christians have got to think again about the locational nature of our faith," he said.

"There's a challenge in there about where we should be as a church — more on the edges and less in the centre."

Dr Budden said as he thought more about this issue he realised that place was important within the Old and New Testament traditions of the Bible.

"It struck me that Jacob's well is actually a sacred spot," he said, referring to the place where Jesus met the Samaritan woman, a story which has been explored in a number of different ways during Assembly.

Asked whether he thought the ideas contained in his book would change the way the church operated, Dr Budden said, "I hope we would relate to Aboriginal people differently and would begin to wrestle with the question, **'What does it mean if you treat yourself as a guest, rather than thinking of ourselves as the host all the time?'**"

Source: <http://assembly2009.uca.org.au/media-centre/indepth/131-1807chrisbudden>

Chris Budden, **Following Jesus in Invaded Space, Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land**, Princeton Theological Monograph series, Pickwick Publications, 2009, ISBN: 13:978-1-60608-608-7 will be available from the bookstall in the Synod Office or from Mediacom.

Intervention condemned

Tuesday, 21 July 2009 02:14 Decisions made on the final day of the Uniting Church's triennial Assembly meeting will strengthen the voice of the church in opposition to the controversial Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

The Intervention was initiated by the Howard Government in the run-up to the 2007 federal election but was continued, with some modification, by the Rudd Government.

Congress representatives strongly opposed the Intervention, claiming it had negatively impacted all Indigenous Territorians.



Rev. Rronang Garruwurra (pictured left) from Elcho Island said that when the Northern Territory Intervention was first announced, "We didn't have a clue what it was about. It has taken us a long time to understand the Government's intentions.

"We are now asking that you walk with us in this ongoing dialogue, with our communities," he said. "The bottom line for us in the Northern Territory communities, your system of politics and law, we do not understand very well. But the parallel is also true. You do not understand well our system of law."

Assembly resolved by consensus to call on the Federal Government to rectify the lack of negotiation on the Intervention.

It agreed to call on the Government to negotiate with Indigenous people and communicate in their local languages.

Further, it resolved, in collaboration with UAICC and the Northern Synod, to identify funding and appropriate resources and make that funding and resources available to the National Aboriginal and Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA) to bring about a church-based forum on negotiation within the churches to be held in the Northern Territory.

The Assembly noted, with strong endorsement, the action of the Australian Government in recognising the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In a parallel move, the Assembly resolved to support the World Council of Churches sending a Living Letters delegation to the Northern Territory.

It is expected this will greatly assist the Aboriginal people to achieve their aspirations in relation to the Intervention and related matters.

The General Secretary of the National Council of Churches Tara Curlewis was present at the Assembly and expressed her support.

Source: <http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/media-centre/latest-news/181-2107intervention>

A number of other matters relating to the UAICC were covered by the assembly including a decision to increase the number of Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress representatives at Assembly from six to 16. Go to the Assembly website to explore further

<http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/> and click on [Media Centre](#) for media releases and news items.

Ongoing Issues

Current ongoing issues for Aboriginal people follow the concerns voiced in our last newsletter. Now Bob Randall from Mutijulu community and famous as the narrator of the film, *Kanyini*, adds his voice to the call to maintain the Aboriginal homelands communities. As reported in The Age "Homelands essential for Indigenous Australians." Bob is reported saying, "It is much better to strengthen these little communities where they are, give them the resources, the services. Moving people to bigger townships will only create social problems. "Moving them out of country brings the beginning of loss, and then the sorry feeling comes in, and you are looking to lift you out of the sorry state. And maybe like the marketing says, you drink some beer, it will lift you up.

"In the end, it will only cost the government much more money to look after you when you are sick, or because you are picked up drunk in the street, or you start a fight ... Go to the hospitals and the jails, talk to the people, and you will hear the same story. 'I wasn't on my land.' People are sick and jailed because they are not in the protection and energy of their land, of their family."

An understanding of kanyini allows insight into the blight of distance from land and family, Randall says. "It's the interconnectedness of my belief system, my spirituality, my land, my family ... I've got to connect with each of these four to be whole."

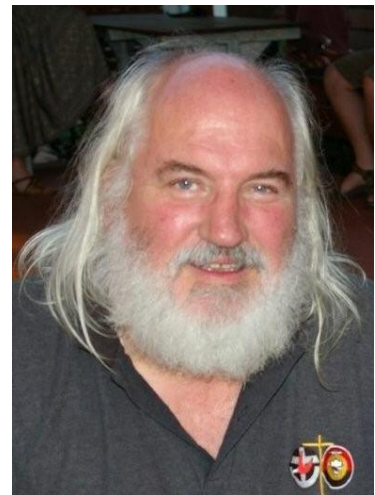
His concerns echo policy experts including the Australian National University's Jon Altman, director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, who argues that research over 30 years indicates that life on the outstations is, for many people, better, in terms of health, livelihood options, social cohesion, and even housing.

Source: The Age

Pastor David Wright finishes his Patrol

22 July 2009 David Wright has retired as Patrol padre to the Aboriginal people of the Flinders Ranges. Although written some time ago at the beginning of his ministry the following extracts from Frontier News give a good picture of the man and his passion for justice. As he ponders his next step with the Uniting Church please keep David in your prayers.

A joint UAICC-Frontier services ministry, the Aboriginal Patrol is somewhat unique in Australia. Based in Port Augusta, the Mobile Aboriginal Patrol aims to develop supportive and empowering relationships with Aboriginal people across the region. Community development, pastoral and sacramental ministry, community education and advocacy all play a significant part in David's role, but it's primarily freedom that indigenous people are seeking. Freedom to express their culture and let it nurture their families and communities; freedom from the oppressive and sometimes destructive expectations of non-indigenous observers; freedom to celebrate the land.



It's a freedom they're not often offered. "I was the Minister at the Salvation Army church in Port Augusta prior to taking on this role, so I had a lot of contact with local Aboriginal people." David explains. "Those existing relationships made it a lot easier to make contact with people, in the outlying areas – I was welcomed because I knew uncles, cousins, brothers. It's still not an easy thing to do – fronting up to communities where sometimes people are doing well, other times really struggling – to offer support and assistance. It's constantly a challenge not to feel you're imposing your own agenda."

The Mobile Aboriginal Patrol takes in the Flinders Ranges, Gammon Ranges and Lake Eyre Basin, including the communities of Hawker, Leigh Creek, Oodnadatta and Marla, as well as Aboriginal owned pastoral stations in the region. While for most of us, these names are just obscure dots on the sparse canvas of outback South Australia, for David and the people he visits, they're sites of emotional and historical significance. They're home.

"The situation in which Aboriginal people find themselves today has everything to do with their history and the way we've thought about them," David says. A policeman for sixteen years before becoming an Ordained Minister with the Salvos in Adelaide, David's sense of justice for the marginalised is almost tangible, even down the phone from distant South Australia. ...

David said, “when we first came to Port Augusta, Kim and I were involved in a consultative committee at the Baxter Detention Centre as well as running services there. We were also working extensively with Aboriginal people in town, providing a bus and Sunday School for families where the grandparents had a strong Christian background and a knowledge of the stories and songs of faith, but where a real vacuum existed in the next generation. We found that our involvement in both areas – the detention centre and with the Aboriginal congress in town – left us open to criticism on racist grounds from the wider community. People think about both asylum seekers and indigenous people in narrow ways that have influenced the ability of both groups to achieve their potential. It was a difficult time for us, but also an opportunity to discover grace and the freedom to walk where we believed God was taking us.” Freedom. That word again.

When David resigned from his role with the Salvation Army, he had been involved as a Chaplain in the Port Augusta Prison and he was keen to see the role continue in his new work with Frontier Services. He viewed the experiences of Aboriginal people in prisons as being central to their sense of identity and future in the region, as well as shaping the way they were viewed by the broader community. “70% of the population of the Port Augusta Prison are Aboriginal people, and 70% of those will eventually be found not guilty of the charges laid against them,” David explains. “By that time, though, they’ll already have served a remand sentence longer than they would have received had they been guilty of the crime.

The system is totally different to that of traditional indigenous culture, in which justice is swift and restorative. Aboriginal culture sees grievances settled pretty well immediately instead of being long drawn out affairs. The over-representation of Aboriginal people in the prison has a major impact on the broader Aboriginal community – there’s almost a sense that to be incarcerated is a rite of passage. You hear young men saying, “My father, my uncles and cousins – they’ve all been here. It’s how the system works.”

The attitude is proof positive of the fact that our thinking inevitably shapes our practise. As David reflects theologically on his role working with the Mobile Aboriginal Patrol, one senses the frustration that comes from the realisation that the Christian message has often been used to oppress rather than bring authentic freedom into the lives of indigenous people. “Why was it necessary, I wonder, for Christian ‘missionaries’ from a European context to place Aboriginals in the position of being the Old Testament ‘oppressed’ people in order to preach freedom to them?”



David muses aloud. “These were people who knew they were not spiritually bankrupt – knew they were not slaves – yet we cast them in those roles and that’s had a major impact ever since. Our sense of our own white superiority meant we couldn’t accept that truth was here before 1770. In fact, Aboriginal people had a keen sense of the Creator long before we arrived. There’s a harmony, a wholeness about Aboriginal and Christian spirituality, if only we had the ability to cope with it and allow Jesus Christ to facilitate the relationship.”

“Everything about the role continually challenges my understanding of the gospel and the way in which it’s traditionally been read – and then imposed – upon the people with whom the church does ‘mission.’ I’ve always resonated with the social justice aspects of the Scriptures – the message of the prophets about power and how it’s used. In my role as Patrol Minister, there are countless opportunities to reflect on those issues.” Freedom, oppression. a vast and open landscape, institutions of incarceration. dogma and spirituality, power and empowerment. To the casual observer, there’s not much growing out Port Augusta way. Frontier Services’ Patrol Minister David Wright knows differently. It’s all fertile ground. CT

Source: Frontier News February 2005

Covenanting Forums Are Coming

Preliminary planning is continuing for 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 take place in the Port Augusta area with invitations going out to regional churches to attend. Pastor Denise Champion will be the contact person. Later forums will be in the city, with some focussing on specialist areas such as agencies and schools.

Tjinatjunanyi – where now?

At the end of Term 2, Walter Reyes, the teacher, has reported as follows:

Twenty students were enrolled in the TJINATJUNANYI program. They participated in an off campus program in a range of integrated sub-programs linked to wellbeing and SACSA, SACE outcomes. All students were involved in multi-ways and multi-levels of engagement, and learning and were engaged in a positive and responsible manner during their attendance at the 'TJINATJUNANYI community based program'. Their interaction with staff, volunteers and peers was excellent.



Most of my students are transient and live in the Davenport community (former Umeewarra Mission), Port Augusta and also come from small outback communities (Maree, Leigh Creek, Ceduna, and Kooniba). Some of them live in third world conditions. My students are disadvantaged in health, wealth, land, status and diminished by a set of systemic circumstances.

Their advancement in their schooling was average for some students and high for others. There were students enrolled at year 7, 8, 9, 10 and years 11 and 12. The students in senior years were

encouraged to attempt SACE units relevant to their lives. These SACE students, despite family, societal constraints and economic pressure achieved success in their studies. Nine students obtained their first ever (SA) SACE Stage 1 Integrated studies; two achieved (RA) and one withdrew for the first semester of 2009. For most students this added to their SACE successes last year.

The level of these students' achievement cannot be measured by mainstream standards. It was a triumph that has come from the spirit of their people.

Aunty Dawn reported that each day they start with devotions and this has become a really important time for the students. It enables them to deal with the complex issues in their lives, deaths in the family, or relations or friends in hospital or in trouble. It also helps to settle them down for the day of learning in the classroom. **Pictured left: a candle lit during devotions in memory of departed friends.**

In working to support these students Congress members also regularly visit the families and provide support and encouragement which is vital for the continuing attendance of these students. This is something the local schools can't do.



Unfortunately, at the end of the last school term the program was temporarily halted due to some government funding issues. As noted before, 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. We are still waiting to see what responses government will make regarding a vital program that really works. Your prayers to support this program are essential at this time.

Covenanting Website Downloads

Some folk have reported problems with downloading resources from the Covenanting website, particularly the Reconciliation Sunday resources. Please email me if you have continued difficulties as we are having some teething problems with the new site. Else go back and try again later. My apologies.

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

- Give thanks for the continuing work of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress across Australia and in particular the work in SA and the ministry centres at Salisbury, Murray Bridge-Kalparrin and Port Augusta.
- Pray for Rev Ken Sumner and his family as he takes up the challenge of the position of National Chairperson of the UAICC.
- Give thanks for the historic decisions made by the 12th Assembly regarding the new preamble and constitutional changes that were made.
- Pray that all members of the Uniting Church may prayerfully consider where the Spirit is leading the church in its journey with Aboriginal people and especially the Congress and how they individually and as congregations might become a supportive part of that journey.
- Give thanks for the ministry of David Wright to the Aboriginal people of the Flinders Ranges and pray for David as he seeks direction for his continuing work in the Uniting Church.
- Pray for the Rev Wally Fejo the new Frontier Services patrol minister taking David's place.
- Continue to pray for Tjinatjunanyi, the students, teacher and leaders. Pray that new government funding sources will be found.

Palya, Go with God,

Peter

22 July 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 still problems with the new site. They will be rectified as soon as possible. Please be patient.*

<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.