



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia
11-13 February 2021

Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress SA Report

1. Introduction

SA Congress continues to be blessed by the ministry and leadership of our members at the local level, which is supported by our State Office and the Synod.

Despite the unique year that 2020 has been because of Covid, there have been many challenges and highlights, as seen in this, our 2020 report to the February 2021 Synod meeting.

2. Governance & State Office

Mark Kickett, our State Development Officer became the National Congress Interim Chair in March 2020. This had a drastic impact on our working arrangements (occurring as the same time as Covid restrictions started), as it meant that Mark has had to divide his time between national work and SA work.

Mark now works 0.6 FTE for National & 0.4 FTE for SA. This is the same as the SA Resource Officer, Ian Dempster who works 0.6 for National Congress as Administration Assistant and 0.4 for SA as RO. This arrangement has presented plenty of challenges for our State Office staff, as they respond to needs and issues both locally and nationally and work out where to spend their time. The State Office is looking forward to the employment of a part time Finance and Admin officer to assist with all the SA work, along with the continuing work of our Training and Formation officer.

The Congress Regional Council met only once during the year (in September) as a full Regional Council. However the Executive of the Regional Council met a number of times to assist with decision making.

3. Finances

SA Congress has been blessed with the support of the Rev. Ross Honey from the Resources Board in assisting Congress to get its financial affairs in order. After years of deficits Congress is pleased to report that in 2019, Congress achieved a small surplus. We are expecting a slightly larger surplus for 2020.

Congress is also glad to report that we have successfully recruited a First Nations person, Candice Hazeldine to become our first Finance and Admin Officer from January 2021. This will greatly assist the work of Congress in SA and relieve the burden on Rev. Ross Honey.

4. Uniting Foundation & Frontier Services

Uniting Foundations continues its great work in supporting Congress ministries. In 2020 UF has supported a part time youth worker at Raukkan, the Training & Formation Coordinator, and pastoral ministry at Oodnadatta. In 2021 the UF will continue their support of the first two positions, but will no longer support the half time position at Oodnadatta.

Congress is exceedingly grateful for the support of Oodnadatta ministry by the Uniting Foundation over the last 4 years.

The Oodnadatta position only became full time in October 2018, when Frontier Services came on board, enabling our part time pastor to become a fulltime minister as the Oodnadatta bush chaplain.

We are very pleased that Frontier Services have picked up the shortfall in funding from January 2021, to enable the pastor to maintain full time ministry to Oodnadatta and the other communities of the northern regions of our state.

Some of you may have sent or received Frontier Services Christmas cards this year. The artwork was all painted by our bush chaplain, Julia Lennon, with appropriate scripture verses included.

For Congress it makes real the Scripture verse on the calendar for 2021: Isaiah 43:19, which says, **“Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert”**

One again Congress wants to thank all FS & UF supporters who help make this and other vital ministries happen.

5. Training & Formation Coordinator

Chelsea Size commenced work in this part time position in June 2019, and has continued to support students in 2020, with four students undertaking intensives at the start of the year. Two students have continued studies on-line.

Chelsea has also been pro-active in obtaining funding from two sources to initiate a new Congress Child and Family Ministry position in Adelaide. It is hoped that in 2021, with the help of other funding sources that we will be able to run a Congress History & Theology course. This will enable our current and emerging leaders to understand the place that Congress has in our church and community. We hope that the 2021 reconciliation week appeal, ‘A Pilgrimage of Healing’ will also assist with fundraising for the development of programs to assist our young leaders.

6. Congress Properties

Congress has been working on plans for a church building at Oodnadatta for a number of years. During the last two years the Reconciliation week appeal has raised over \$40,000 for the Oodnadatta Building Fund. In addition, Congress now has an additional \$440,000 available through the sale of the Salisbury Heights manse, which was home to the State Development and Outreach minister. Congress now has over \$800,000 in the Congress Capital Fund which are held as investments and for contingencies such as property improvements. Congress approved an initial budget of \$300,000 for the Oodnadatta Building project.

Congress also received the Synod Property Review report on the Taillem Bend church property. The review advised that over \$90,000 needed to be spent on property repairs, with \$6,800 of category 1 urgent expenses.

7. Congress Ministry Centres

In SA we have four Congress ministry centres. We have already mentioned the two faith communities that are supported by the UF: Oodnadatta and Raukkan. In addition we have two churches at Port Augusta and Salisbury with full time ministry placements.

In 2020 we have been blessed to have supply ministries for part of the year, when our ministers have been off sick, or on leave. In Port Augusta, Rev. Jesse and Chelsea Size as well as Robert Crilly provided supply ministry for most of the year. John Saulo and Wanita Calyun replaced them at the end of the year. In Adelaide, Melissa Thompson and David Wright provided supply ministry. Now that Dean Whittaker is back at work, Melissa Thompson is continuing to work part time with Congress.

The Congress Regional Council have also been working with Generate Presbytery on a review of Adelaide Congress ministry at Salisbury in the last months of the year. We are grateful for the work of the review team, which was made even more difficult in the pandemic with events such as the unexpected lockdown in SA in November. The Regional Council looks forward to working with the congregation on the recommendations of the review.

8. A Congress Presbytery?

In 2019 we reported that Congress was investigating what it would mean if we were a Presbytery on our own, rather than being a Regional Council of 4 communities split up into 3 different presbyteries. This is still a “live” issue for Congress, even though the situation of the last 12 months has not allowed us to have further discussions on this topic.

“Is there a Doctor in the House?”

So asked the Reverend when she phoned excitedly to the Congress State Office staff in early November. The following Monday night there was a good size contingent of family and other Congress members at Adelaide West UC at the Adelaide College of Divinity graduation, when Aunty Denise received the honorary doctorate (Doctor of Divinity: Honoris Causa).

One scholar wrote, “Through her writing and education, Aunty Denise has made a significant contribution to theological education, initially in Australia and now in Aotearoa.” Another said, “Aunty Denise is a scholar looking to the horizon by reclaiming the ancient past of her peoples – a stance that makes her a thought-leader among First and Second Peoples in an Australian church profoundly influenced by colonial missionary theology, and an important indigenous contributor internationally.”

On the following Saturday during NAIDOC week, a special celebration was held by Congress in Port Augusta. We are grateful that the President, Moderator and General Secretary all spoke and shared in this event for the Rev. Dr. Aunty Denise Champion.

We are looking forward to the publication of Denise’s second book, “Anaditj”.

Robert Crilly, SA Congress Chair

Mark Kickett, SA Congress Development Officer

Ian Dempster, SA Congress Resource Officer