

# Synod '24



## Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress (SA)

### Introduction

The Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress-SA is responsible for ministry in its many forms with the First Peoples of South Australia within the UCA SA Synod.

This report reflects the current work of our ministry centres and state office.

- Oodnadatta
- Pt. Augusta
- Salisbury Adelaide Congress
- Murraylands Ministry
- UAICC-SA State Office

### 1. Oodnadatta

Oodnadatta is situated approximately, a 12-hour drive north of Adelaide. It is our remotest ministry centre.

Pastor Julia Lennon is our Bush Chaplain and is based in Oodnadatta and works throughout the northern region of our state, including parts of the APY Lands, and when needed crosses over into the Northern Territory to other Indigenous communities, offering love, care and support.

Julia continues to work with members of the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) to support ministries across the NT border. This continues to include much needed pastoral care and celebrations from funerals, baptisms, Easter and Pentecost weekends.

Locally, Julia has great support in Maxine Marks and the young adults, who do great work with the community, and especially the children and young people.

We are forever giving thanks to our Creator God for the wonderful support that is provided. The Bush Chaplain ministry is supported by Frontier Services, UAICC-SA and UCA SynodSA.



The Uniting Church in Australia  
Synod of South Australia

## Oodnadatta Building Project Update

We are very excited to report that the multi-purpose building is nearing completion. As we draw near to Synod we are pleased to report that the church building is at lock-up stage, with a few major works to be undertaken. These include electricity connection (a major cost) and sewerage connection, fit out of the interior of the church and some landscaping.

“What is the date for opening of the church?” has been the major recurring question of the year. We are pleased to say that 2025 is the year. We were hoping that it would be this year, 2024 being the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Colebrook Home at Oodnadatta. (the church is being built on “the Church Ground”, the site of the former UAM home known as Colebrook Children’s Home, which moved to other sites at Quorn and Eden Hills before closing in 1972).

At one stage in 2024 the church opening was planned for Easter, then Pentecost weekend in May, and then October. In fact, on the October long weekend former Colebrook residents visited Oodnadatta and the new church as part of a pilgrimage using five cars visiting the old Colebrook sites. There is a space on the site where the old home and church stood which can be developed in the future as a memorial for the Colebrook Stolen Generation Children.

So 2025 is the plan. In the meantime we are pleased to thank God and thank you (God’s people, the members and staff of the Uniting Church and Frontier Services) for the support Congress has received to bring this building into fruition.

This year UCFAMS raised a significant amount of money for new chairs for the building, while the men’s shed at Blackwood built a beautiful lectern from blackwood, and a Rosefield member made a communion plate and chalice.

In addition to this many individuals, fellowships and churches have continued to contribute generously to the Oodnadatta Building Fund, for which we are ever so grateful. Thank you to everyone who has donated so generously.

Frontier Services not only support the Oodnadatta Bush Chaplaincy financially, but through their grant writer (Paul Deverell), and with the support of their Director, Rob Floyd they have been successful in winning two or three grants for the Oodnadatta Church Building Project. This has included \$30,000 for the kitchen fit out and \$20,000 for computers and wifi with a Starlink connection.

As we write, a third application is being prepared for funding for trees and a community garden with rainwater tanks.

We are blessed that in 2025 we will be able to employ a part time men’s worker and a part time youth and children’s worker, thanks to the generosity of the Uniting Foundation. Part of the idea of having a men’s worker, is that they will engage with the men in the town to create and look after a community garden.

In addition to all her good work in the community and as a bush chaplain, we are pleased to report that Julia graduated with a Certificate 4 in Chaplaincy from Nungalinga College this year, along with her sister, Jill Doolan from Aputula, Finke. Pastor Melissa Thompson also graduated from her studies in the same celebration.

## 2. Pt. Augusta Congregation

The Pt. Augusta Congregation is under the pastoral care of Rev. John Saulo and his wife Ruth. They continue to be a blessing not only to the people that gather there on Sunday mornings, but to the wider community and the migrant workers in the area.

John & Ruth returned to Australia from New Ireland, Papua New Guinea in early 2020 due to Covid 19. They had previously ministered in Congress and Church of Christ placements in Queensland and NSW.

John & Ruth went to Port Augusta in late 2020 in a supply role and have been there ever since. At the end of this year John is planning to retire again.

John has been deeply committed to the work of the whole church, regularly (at least once per month) preaching in other churches, and being part of the Port Augusta Combined Ministers Association. Congress now also has a combined service & luncheon once a month with the Port Augusta Uniting Church, which is a great blessing to both congregations.

John received accreditation to be a prison chaplain this year, and also began a ministry to the Lakeview temporary accommodation facility.

John & Ruth's lasting legacy may be the recommencement of the Op Shop at Congress. They have installed two wonderful ladies to run the shop, and already the place has become a haven for people to not only come and shop, but also to have a cuppa and chat. So people feel welcome to come, and so like worship on Sunday, the space at Willsden has become a welcoming place again not only for First Nations people, but people from other cultures as well, including members of the Pacifica fruit picking community.

Congress is conducting a review of ministry in Port Augusta, which may include improvements and repairs to the property so that the fellowship there can be set up to be a place of welcome and holistic ministry into the future.

Port Augusta is also thankful that the Uniting Foundation is sponsoring the Adnyamathanha Bible Translation Project. This has long been a dream of Rev. Dr. Denise Champion, so we rejoice with Denise and her people that at last there is support for this to happen.

Please pray for John & Ruth & the Port Augusta community in this time of transition.

### **3. Salisbury Adelaide**

The Salisbury Congress church is the only Aboriginal Church in Adelaide that worships in the Pitjantjatjara language. As such it is a place of sanctuary for the people of the APY Lands in Adelaide. The Anangu – this word means “people” – are often in the city because of challenging health needs. Treatment for dialysis is a huge issue.

Pastor Melissa Thompson is “pulled” and called to go everywhere, which includes hospital chaplaincy, caring & praying for people in prison, and the homeless and hungry in the parklands and elsewhere. Those that do live in homes reside anywhere from the southern suburbs such as Marion to the western, inner northern & north eastern & northern suburbs of the city. So Melissa is constantly dealing with challenging and difficult situations.

Many Anangu do not have the financial resources for a car, so transporting people to church and other meetings is a constant challenge. At the moment, the ministry uses two buses to pick people up for Sunday worship. This year the church has been hiring a second bus on a weekly basis to help people to get to church. Congress is planning to buy a second bus in the near future, to help reduce costs in this area.

Melissa receives wonderful support in this ministry from Pastor David Wright & Sally McPherson, for which Congress is grateful. In particular, this support has enabled Melissa to undertake ministry training at Nungalinya College in Darwin over the last three years. Melissa has attended Nungalinya for 4 weeks over each of the last 3 years, so having a ministry team in place is vitally important.

Please pray for this important ministry for the Anangu people. Resources in language are critical as well. On Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November at 2pm a Pitjantjatjara Children's Art Bible is being launched at Emmaus College at South Plympton. RSVP to [events@biblesociety.org.au](mailto:events@biblesociety.org.au) phone 0415441334.

Melissa would also love to hear from people who would love to assist with bus driving on a Sunday.

## 4. Murraylands Ministry

Murraylands Ministry currently incorporates Murray Bridge, Kalparrin Community and the Raukkan Community. There is hope in the future to outreach to folks in Meningie, Goolwa and Victor Harbor.

There are two ministry areas that are operating in the Murraylands region which are both funded through the Uniting Foundation:

### 1. Murraylands Minister

Murraylands Minister, the Revd. Hohaia Matthews and his wife Mrs. Dawn Matthews through the UAICC-SA and the Māori Evangelical Fellowship of South Australia, provide regular worship and fellowship services, pastoral care. From the worship and fellowship services comes other ministry opportunities, like, community care, social and emotional well-being, that is offered by the Revd. Hohaia and Dawn Matthews to not only Ngarrindjeri people but other First Nation Peoples and non- Indigenous people that live in and around the Murraylands area. Hohaia and Dawn have established a Food Bank service to people within their ministry and within the wider community. This has particularly been an important service to people “doing it tough”, in these economic times and is a much-needed program, and we always give thanks to God, for the provision to care for the people entrusted to us.

### 2. Murraylands Children Worker

Melissa Sumner is currently the Children’s Worker for the UAICC-SA in the Murraylands region. Her main focus is a small gathering of children in Murray Bridge with a particular age group between, 7 – 14 years old and a couple of 17- and 18-year-olds. Activities normally involve board games, outdoor activities, trips to the cinema, beach and ten-pin bowling etc....

One of the main objectives of the Children’s Ministry is to inform children of the way of Christ and that there is a better way of life. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” Matt 19:14.

The other main objective is to enable the children to be proud of their heritage and to learn important parts of their culture and identity. This is done a number of ways. We work closely with and have been involved in our cultural heritage through a couple of First Nation organisations and government departments, the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation, which is our Prescribed Body Corporate for Ngarrindjeri Native Title and the Department for Water and Environment. The children are involved in day trips to the River, Lakes and the Coorong and a number of the estuaries where sometimes, turtle monitoring and fish counting are the order of the day and of course frogs.

Melissa says that “the young people are at their happiest when they are out on country, and this is what makes me happy, to see their faces light up when involved in activities that’s hands on, on country”.

Please continue to keep us in your prayers.

### 5. State Office

**Staffing** – State office is staffed by Ken Sumner who in June was confirmed as Congress State Development Officer, after three years of being in this position as Supply Minister. This was because Mark Kickett was Interim National Congress Chair during this period. Once Mark was confirmed as National Chair, then Congress was able to affirm Ken’s call to the State Development Officer position.

Ken is supported by Ian Dempster, who works two days per week as SA Congress Resource Worker. Ian also works in a similar position with Mark Kickett as National Resource Officer three days week.

### **Training - Nungalinga & Period Of Discernment**

Training for our Congress ministry workers is vital, as it is for all of our members. We have also mentioned that two of our pastors have graduated this year from courses at Nungalinga College.

We are also pleased to advise that two of our young leaders – Jordan Sumner & Sean Weetra – have commenced a Period of Discernment and have enrolled in subjects at Uniting College.

### **Training – Conference: Raising our Tribal Voice Conference**

This conference was held in Melbourne in early February this year. It was run by the School of Indigenous Studies. The conference papers were mostly presented by Australian First Nations leaders and theologians, with just a few Pacifica voices. Papers were presented on a wide variety of topics, with people coming from very different viewpoints and backgrounds.

Congress had 6 participants there from SA, with another 6 or more coming from the rest of SA including the Uniting College. Allen Edwards from Pilgrim gave a moving tribute to the late “Aunty” Dr. Lowitja O’Donoghue, who passed away at the start of that week.

Also on the last day, leaders of the churches had the chance to respond to what they had heard. We were blessed with our president’s response, which included an acknowledgement that we (the UCA) are not yet an honourable partner in our Covenant.

### **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Covenant & 15 years of the Preamble**

In early July a special event was held at Adelaide West, remembering the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historic agreement. Some of us were also able to celebrate this at the Assembly less than a week later.

In between these events a conference on the theology of the Preamble was held in Sydney. As well as having some Congress members in Sydney, others were able to join by video link at the Uniting College.

### **Uniting Foundation**

Without the support of the Uniting Foundation, Congress would be unable to support new and innovative ministries. Hence as previously described, we are exceedingly grateful for the 2024 Uniting Foundation grants which support Congress ministry being:

- Murraylands Congress Ministry
- Murraylands Youth & Children’s Worker
- Oodnadatta Youth & Children’s Worker & Men’s Worker
- Decolonising Scripture: An Adnyamathanha Bible Translation Project

### **Sorry Business**

As in any other year there are too many deaths of too many wonderful people.

As we come to Synod we remember Uncle Victor Wilson of Kalparrin, near Murray Bridge. Uncle Victor loved coming to Synod, and challenging the church about the need for Treaty, and encouraging us to think about the Letters Patent, which are part of the foundation documents of South Australia. He was a valued member of our Regional Council, who was not only a strong speaker, but a gifted songwriter who loved people.

This year our Anangu brothers and sisters lost too many members, including the wonderful old Pastor Graham Kulyuru from Pukatja / Ernabella. Graham was predeceased by three of his daughters and grandchildren as well.

And lastly on the national scene we want to especially remember Rev. Dr. Gondarra from Elcho Island, who was the first Aboriginal Moderator of a Synod (being the Northern Synod.

We give thanks for their faithful service.

Sean Weetra (Chairperson), Ken Sumner (Development Officer), Ian Dempster (Resource Officer)

October 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia  
**Synod of South Australia**

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