



## Covenanting Committee Report

### Executive Summary

The Covenanting Committee seeks to live out the words of the Covenanting Statement by resourcing covenanting activities across the life and ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of South Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in South Australia. Paramount to these actions is the desire to engage in meaningful Christ centred partnerships between First and Second Peoples. Endeavouring to raise awareness and advocate for equity for First Nations people. Whilst also celebrating First Nations cultures and spiritualities. The following report encompasses the activities of the Covenanting Committee between November 2020 and April 2022. Likewise, provides some recommendations for the Covenanting Committee going forward into 2022 and beyond.

### 1. Membership

The Committee presently consists of a small yet faithful group committed to covenanting. Rhanee Lester and Rev Lyn Leane remain the Co-Chairpersons of the Committee. Tarlee Leondaris as Covenanting Officer remains the Secretary of the Committee. A number of members resigned in August 2021 citing unavailability to continue. All who resigned have elected to continue as supporters of covenanting but do not wish to be formal members of the committee. Subsequently, new members representing both First and Second peoples across all three presbyteries are currently sought.

### 2. Meetings

The terms of reference of the Covenanting Committee state that the committee should meet at least four times per year, in locations that will enable it to build relationships with Congress congregations. Unfortunately, due to the risk of Covid-19 infection and restrictions, meeting in person has become difficult. In particular meeting in locations that could adversely impact First Nations communities due to risk of COVID-19 infection. The last meeting of the Covenanting Committee was held at Christ Church Uniting Church in August 2021. At that time Christ Church UC recently had their garden (Turlatina Wirra) named and commissioned by members of the Kurna Nation. The purpose of this location was for the committee to visit a church that had recently undertaken a covenanting activity. The meeting was a helpful time to review membership and also commence collaborative discussions about future directions for covenanting. During the meeting the committee formed groups representing both UCA and UAICC perspectives to collaboratively discuss a range of questions concerning covenanting within the Synod and the purpose of the Covenanting Committee. Responses to the questions did vary yet there was an overwhelming consensus that the Covenanting Committee seeks to have oversight of covenanting within the Synod of South Australia. In particular resourcing congregations are desirable in order to build respectful and honest relationships between First and Second peoples.

### 3. Covenanting Activities

Reconvening a meeting since August 2021 has been difficult due to the ensuing COVID-19 outbreak. Broadly this challenge has been embraced as a time to be reflective and intentional in covenanting. Members of the Covenanting Committee and its supporters have continued covenanting activities within their local congregations and communities. Examples of covenanting activities are as follows.

#### 3.1 Appointment of Rev Lyn Leane to Adelaide Congress

Rev Lyn Leane, Co-Chairperson of the Covenanting Committee was appointed a placement at Adelaide Congress to mentor Pastor Melissa Thompson. This partnership is an excellent example of supporting self-determination of First Nations people. Likewise, the enrichment of mutually respectful partnership as Lyn is learning a great deal about Anangu culture. Whilst Melissa becomes equipped with the skills and knowledge to further lead Adelaide Congress.

#### 3.2 Theologian in Residence Advisory Group

Upon the appointment of Rev Dr Aunty Denise Champion to Theologian in Residence an Advisory Group was formed. The Advisory Group comprises members of the Covenanting Committee that supports diary management and logistics for Aunty Denise to fulfil the position's key accountabilities. Aunty Denise continues to share knowledge of spirituality and a First Nations perspective to Theology.

#### 3.3 Uluru Statement from the Heart Symposium

In March 2022 members of the Covenanting Committee from Pilgrim Uniting Church facilitated a symposium and workshop over two days. Rev Dr Chris Budden and Rev Dr Aunty Denise Champion were both key note speakers who presented on the key concept of Voice, Treat and Truth from theological perspectives.

#### 3.4 Covenanting Officer

With support from Covenanting Committee members the Covenanting Officer has continued to resource congregations across the Synod of South Australia. This has included preaching engagements with congregations, supporting Congress initiatives, presenting at covenanting events and providing articles for Uniting Church publications.

### 4. Recommendations

Despite the difficulties of meeting as well as the resignation of key members, the Covenanting Committee remains important to the life of the Synod. This is evident through enrichment covenanting brings to congregations. It is apparent that within the church and broader society that the 'reconciliation' movement is evolving. This is observed on the one hand as more organisations than ever adopt Reconciliation Action Plans, Welcome to Country/Acknowledgement of Country becomes normalised at gatherings, likewise National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week become more present in the public sphere. Whilst on the other hand First Nations people continue to fight for a constitutionalised voice to parliament, effectively

reduce overrepresentation within the criminal justice system, improve closing the gap targets along with a range of other social justice issues. The Synod stands at a pivotal point in effectively partnering with UAICC and other First Nations people more broadly to be allies in First Nations struggles, while at the same time recognising and celebrating the richness of First Nations cultures. To achieve this the Synod requires ongoing training in cultural capabilities to ensure that actions are genuine and in line with best practices. The Covenanting Committee is vital to championing this resourcing. Through producing materials and facilitating workshops that promote education as well as culturally safe engagement between First and Second Peoples. It is hoped by providing these opportunities others within the Synod will feel inspired to also contribute their spiritual gifts to covenanting.

**Tarlee Leondaris**

*Covenanting & International Mission Officer*

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