



Covenanting Commission

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The Covenanting Commission continues to work at creating and strengthening relationships between the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress (WA) and the broader WA Synod. The Covenant calls us to work together for the sake of greater understanding, justice and flourishing of First Peoples. To this end the Commission continues to walk with Congress in advocating for the rights of Aboriginal people and encouraging relationships between First and Second Peoples across the Synod.

CONGRESS UPDATE

The last 12 months have been particularly challenging for Congress in WA as they have had to deal with the passing of some close people and the ill-health of others. Despite this, the ministry of Congress continues across their local communities and broader networks locally and nationally. Cheryl is now a member of the Assembly's Sovereignty Working Group to progress the national implications of the Assembly's decision to recognise sovereignty. There is also hope for a Youth Committee of Congress to form locally to encourage the development of younger people.

There have been some communication issues between Congress and Synod operations that have led to some disappointments and frustrations. A particular point of concern is in regards to sharing information about Beanangning Kwuurt Institute (BKI). Congress in WA does not currently have any direct involvement with BKI and it is hoped that this can be remedied.

SHARING OF ASSETS

The discussion of how to best share assets between Synod and Congress has not progressed as other issues have been more pressing for Congress, but it remains on the agenda.

SYNOD/PRESBYTERY/ASSEMBLY

The Commission led a discussion on sovereignty and treaty at the November meeting of the Presbytery. This was a highly valued discussion facilitated by Stuart McMillan, Assembly Consultant Covenanting. This has led to this year's proposal to the Synod regarding the Statement From the Heart as a way of expressing our collective support for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and progressing the development of treaties.

A second proposal advocates for changes to Commonwealth Government unemployment programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a punitive and disproportionate manner.

The Commission was pleased to see the passing of its proposal to the previous Synod encouraging congregations to open the use of their facilities free of charge, if required, to Congress for funeral services and gatherings when available.



SORRY DAY

The Covenanting Commission is connected to both Bringing Them Home WA and the WA Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation whom we support to coordinate the annual Sorry Day events. Since Sorry Day occasion fell on a Sunday in 2019 the usual engagement with schools was not possible, so a collaboration with the Fremantle Dockers was negotiated. Stolen Generations survivors met for lunch on the day before walking over the Matagarup Bridge to the Dockers Indigenous Round match.

COLLABORATIONS

- A commemorative event to mark the 100th anniversary of the Moore River Native Settlement/Mogumber Methodist Mission took place in October. This was supported by a contribution from the Tabitha Trust and saw people from around the state come together to share stories and heal together.
- This year in September the Commission will be one of a number of groups supporting the first Surrender conference in WA. A non-denominational Christian conference led by First Nations people exploring issues of social justice, Surrender is set to be a great encouragement and opportunity to collaborate.
- The Commission continues to support Social Reinvestment WA who are continuing to campaign to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates through investment in holistic preventative measures. The key target campaigns are currently advocating for the establishment of justice reinvestment trial sites in WA and abolishing jail terms for unpaid fines.

It is encouraging to see new legislation to reduce the number of people in prison for unpaid fines coming to the WA Parliament this year. There is still much more collaboration and coordination that the State Government needs to provide in order to progress important reforms to youth justice and community-led crime prevention initiatives. People can add their name to [this petition](#) to strengthen this campaign.

OTHER ISSUES

The Covenanting Commission takes a keen interest in a range of other issues affecting First People's across WA. This included:

- The Commission wrote to the new Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians, Hon. Ken Wyatt, to congratulate him on being the first Aboriginal person to hold the position and to request a meeting.
- The Mowanjum Community continue to receive support from the Boab Network who are exploring the possibility of Derby/Mowanjum becoming a Justice Reinvestment trial site in potential partnership with Social Reinvestment WA.
- The Commission has been invited to participate in UnitingCare West's Reconciliation Action Plan working group and is engaging as capacity allows.

PROPOSALS

There are two proposals the Commission is bringing to the Synod:

- The Statement from the Heart proposal is a call to express support for a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution and the establishment of Federal Makarrata Commission for agreement making. It also calls on the WA Government to begin process to develop State-based treaties.
- The Reform of the Community Development Program & Cashless Debit Card Program proposal is about addressing the inherent discrimination experienced in the implementation of these unemployment programs that predominantly impact Aboriginal people.

Rev Robert Jetta & Rev Steve Francis

Co-Chairpersons