



Covenanting Commission

Committee Members

Co-Chairpersons	Rev Robert Jetta, Rev Steve Francis
Staff	Geoff Bice
Member	Cheryl Lawson
Member	Uto Fotu
Member	Rev Dennis Doust
Member	Dr Richard Smith
Member	Rev Mervyn Anderson
Member	Mitchell Garlett
Member	Rev Dr Alison Longworth

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.

During 2020 the Commission has included Stuart McMillan, National Covenanting Consultant and Susy Thomas, Moderator-elect as guests to assist the work of the Commission.

Remembering Rev Garlett AM

The Commission is still grieving the loss of our long-time Congress leader and deeply respected Nyungar Elder, Rev Garlett AM. There are few words to adequately describe the impact of Rev Garlett AM over the course of his life and ministry. While small in stature, he was a towering spiritual and cultural presence of humility, grace and wisdom. He will continue to be a source of inspiration to many and as a Commission, we pray that his legacy may yield great fruit for First Nation's Peoples, for Congress and for the Uniting Church as we continue our Covenanting journey.



Moderator with Minister Tinley and Mayors of Fremantle and Cockburn, speaking at the community memorial for Rev Garlett AM.

Congress update

The loss of Rev Garlett AM has had a significant impact on Congress and the wider Nyungar community. Congress is still coming to terms with this and we are adjusting to carry on our ministry.

Congress was grateful to receive assistance from the Synod for the funeral service. We were so pleased to see the large numbers of people who turned out to both the memorial community event in Perth and the funeral service in Kellerberrin to honour our Elder.

Following the funeral for Rev Garlett it was pleasing to see a number of people in the Tammin area be baptised, inspired by the life and ministry of their Elder.



The impact of COVID-19 has also been significant for Congress. While pleased to have kept the illness out of our communities, it has been difficult to maintain cultural practices that are often communal. In particular, restrictions on funerals and travel between regions was a challenge. The Waroona and Coolbellup congregations are pleased to be able to meet in person again since the lifting of restrictions and there is a group who have started meeting in the Tammin Uniting Church building.

In 2019, the Waroona congregation were very grateful to host Christian musician Steve Grace for a special performance. Many families from the community came along and were greatly blessed by his ministry.

A continuing point of concern is in regards to Beanangng Kwuurt Institute (BKI). Congress in WA does not currently have any direct involvement with BKI and it is hoped that this can be remedied soon.

Financial Covenanting

The discussion of how to best share financial resources between Synod and Congress in a way that reflects the covenant relationship is still an important agenda item for the Commission. It is disappointing that this has not progressed, but the Commission is aware of the challenges facing the Synod's income at this time. Synod Standing Committee have been made aware of the Commission's desire to progress this matter and it is understood that options are being explored.



State-wide Stolen Generations Forum 2019.

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 and other collective healing events and activities for Stolen Generations survivors and their families. Due to COVID-19 restrictions Sorry Day was held online in a collaboration between Bringing Them Home WA, Yokai and Curtin University.

Collaborations

- In September 2019 the Commission supported the first Surrender conference in WA. A non-denominational Christian conference led by First Nations people exploring issues of social justice, Surrender proved to be a great encouragement and opportunity to share and learn.
- 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 current key target campaigns are advocating for the establishment of justice reinvestment trial sites in WA (following the first example at Halls Creek) and reforms to the youth justice system.

It was a relief to see new legislation passed this year to end the imprisonment of people for unpaid fines in WA. Well done to all involved, especially Social Reinvestment WA, and many thanks to our State's legislators for passing this life-saving reform.



Social Reinvestment WA (SRWA) celebrates at Parliament House with MP Supporters of the Bill ending imprisonment for unpaid fines.

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 Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians, Hon. Ken Wyatt, to raise the matters passed by the previous meeting of the Synod. This included concerns for the discriminatory nature of the Community Development Program, the Cashless Debit Card, as well encouragement to support a First People's Voice to Parliament and the establishment of a Makaratta truth-telling Commission.
- The Commission also wrote to the State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon. Ben Wyatt, to call for the development of State-based treaties.
- The Mowanjum Community continue to receive support from the Boab Network although recently contact has been limited due to the COVID-19 restrictions. They have been pleased to receive a LotteryWest grant to refurbish and expand the Loch St Hall in Derby to provide a useful community centre and accommodation for volunteers. The Mowanjum Community are going through a challenging transition period but are using the opportunity for some strategic planning. Promising developments have been employment of World Vision staff in Derby and employment of Indigenous Rangers through carbon credits.
- The Mogumber Mission site remains a point of connection with Stolen Generations survivors but has seen little activity this year. Some survivors from Mogumber have claimed redress through UCA Redress Ltd and have been assisted by the Synod's Culture of Safety unit.

Appreciation

The Commission wishes to acknowledge the dedicated and faithful contribution of Rev Dennis Doust over an extended period. Dennis has decided to finish his appointment on the Commission but will remain a committed servant of the covenanting cause through his ongoing connections with Congress and other Aboriginal communities. We are deeply grateful to Dennis for his valued contribution and ministry over many years of service.

Rev Robert Jetta & Rev Steve Francis
Co-Chairpersons