

Covenanting Commission

Co-Chairpersons

Des Lawson

Rev Steve Francis

Staff

Geoff Bice

Members elected by Synod

Cheryl Lawson

Uto Fotu

Cathie Kelly

Rev Dr Ian Tozer

Paul Walley

Rev Ivan Clark

Rev Dennis Doust

Richard Smith

Mitchell Garlett

The Covenanting Commission continues to work at creating and strengthening relationships between the Regional Committee of the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress and the WA Synod. Per By-Law 5.3.4.6.

1. CO-CONVENOR CHANGE

Due to the retirement of Rev Sealin Garlett and the subsequent appointment of Des Lawson to the position of Chair of the UAICC Regional Committee, there was an automatic change to the ex-officio co-chair appointment. We therefore welcomed Des Lawson as the new Congress co-chair of the Covenanting Commission.

2. COVENANTING ACTS

- Congress members regularly update the Commission on their work supporting the local community, developing young leaders, and outreach to regional communities.
- Commission members were pleased to support a gathering at Mogumber mission in October 2016 to discuss options for future use of the site. A number of previous residents, volunteers and workers of the mission gathered and a letter from the Commission's co-chairs was read out. The words were well-received, quoting from the Assembly's apology to the Stolen Generations and seemed to

provide a small moment of healing. The Commission continues to listen and support the local Aboriginal people connected to the site as they discuss options for its use.

- The Commission is currently investigating how the property at Maaman 'O' Miya may be best utilised to meet the needs of the growing congregation and its community outreach programs.
- Surplus chairs originally donated for use at the Mowanjum Community were gifted to the Maaman 'O' Miya congregation to replace broken chairs and increase their seating capacity.
- The Commission has welcomed Richard Smith to its membership who provides updates about the Boab Network's support for the Mowanjum Community, principally through Floreat UC.
- Discussions have begun about how to create a mechanism or acknowledgement system for congregations to better engage with the Covenanting commitment.
- The Commission took a strong public stance against the destruction of the Beeliam wetlands for the Roe 8 project after formal requests from the Commission's co-chairs to halt proceedings were dismissed. The

Commission was thankful to the group of Christian leaders from across the ecumenical spectrum who stood with Congress to protect the area sacred to Nyungah people.

- The Commission was pleased to see UnitingCare West develop a Reconciliation Action Plan and commends the commitments within it.

3. SHARING OF ASSETS

The Covenanting Commission had paused the progressing of discussions about the sharing of Synod assets and income with Congress while the Regional Committee of Congress was going through a review process with the national Congress. That process has now been completed and the Commission is keen to re-start discussions.

4. SORRY DAY

The Covenanting Commission is strongly connected to both the Bringing Them Home Committee and ReconciliationWA. Commission members were again prominent in running this year's Sorry Day events which marked the 20th anniversary of the handing down of the Bringing Them Home Report. Two highly successful events were run on the day, the first being the usual daytime activities for schools at Wellington Square, followed by an evening fundraising concert with Archie Roach.

5. COLLABORATIONS

- Through relationships with groups like the Bringing Them Home Committee and ReconciliationWA, the Commission supported the establishment of the Western Australian Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation.
- Funding from the Healing Foundation has allowed a number of healing camps to be run and the establishment of a Stolen Generations survivors' leadership group who are advising on the redevelopment of some of the old mission sites in the South West.
- The Bringing Them Home Committee has also been successful in obtaining funding from LotteriesWest to employ an Executive Officer and develop an

ongoing business plan, which is a great advancement for the group.

- Social Reinvestment WA continues to campaign to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates through investment in broad preventative measures. The co-chairs of the Commission wrote to the WA Corrective Services Minister, Hon. Fran Logan and recently met with his staff to discuss the need to shift to the preventative approach to justice outlined by Social Reinvestment WA.
- The Covenanting Commission, in collaboration with the Social Justice Commission, has also contributed to ongoing advocacy for the protection of Western Australia's remote communities. The new state Government has committed to continuing the Regional Services Reform Unit and its agenda. The co-chairs of the Commission wrote to the Hon. Ben Wyatt, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs querying the progress of the Unit and seeking clarification on implications for smaller remote communities, among other issues. A request for a meeting has been made, but in the meantime, Geoff Bice met with the staff of the Hon. Allannah MacTiernan, Minister for Regional Development to discuss these issues.

6. OTHER ISSUES

The Covenanting Commission takes a keen interest in a range of other issues including the deregistering of Aboriginal heritage sites, the Nyungar Native Title Settlement and housing rights for Aboriginal people. The Commission will continue to monitor all these issues and request advocacy from the relevant bodies where possible.

7. THANKS TO REV SEALIN GARLETT

The Commission would like to acknowledge with great appreciation the contribution of Rev Sealin Garlett. Pop Sealin has been our elder and guide for many years providing wisdom, grace and prophetic vision. He was hugely significant in the development of the Commission and the formation and

advancement of the Uniting Church's commitment and understanding of the covenant relationship with Congress. The Commission extends its heartfelt appreciation to Sealin for his many years of humble service and offers its blessings for a safe and joyous retirement.

Des Lawson
Co-Chairperson
desmond.lawson@bki.org.au

Rev Steve Francis
Co-Chairperson
Steve.francis@wa.uca.org.au