



23 December 2024

PASTORAL LETTER – CLOSURE OF BEANANGING KWUURT INSTITUTE (BKI)

To Church Councils, Ministers, Retired Ministers,

We are aware of media reports and social media circulating regarding the closure of our agency Beanangning Kwuurt Institute (BKI). The following information is intended to give some background to the steps that have led to the suspension of the BKI Board and subsequent closure of current operations at the Queens Park site.

Beanangning Kwuurt Institute (BKI) is an agency of the Uniting Church in WA, established in 2007 at the request of, and under the general oversight of, the WA Regional Committee of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

The establishment of BKI was a reflection of the Uniting Church in Australia's Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The Uniting Church in Australia has been in Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress since July 1994.

Since its establishment in 2007 the Board of BKI has been appointed at the recommendation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The members of the BKI Board were required to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons over 18 years of age. The BKI Board throughout the years has been accountable for the governance of the Beanangning Kwuurt Institute. Over time, the membership of the Board has changed, with the majority of the outgoing BKI Board put in place from 2021. Since its establishment, the Uniting Church WA gave the highest priority to allowing the Board to be self-determining, including control of financial management.

BKI was established as an agency assisting vulnerable people, and especially Aboriginal people, from its base on the old Sister Kate's site in Queens Park. The Uniting Church WA provided the Queens Park site for use by the agency. BKI has also had generous in-kind support and donations from a range of other sources and relied upon the goodwill of volunteers, including the volunteer Board.

Despite significant efforts over a long period of time to achieve the vision of BKI, in May 2024 the Uniting Church in WA made the difficult decision, at the request of Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, to close BKI in its current form. In order to resource the decision, detailed enquiries were made over more than six months.

The final decision to close followed an extensive, three-day independent mediation process involving all the parties in late March 2024. The process confirmed the inability of the groups

involved to move forward co-operatively and confirmed irreconcilable differences between the volunteer Board, and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, both its WA Regional Committee and the National Committee. After this, the decision was made to suspend the volunteer Board.

The volunteer Board were notified of the suspension in May 2024 with an initial closure date of 30 June 2024. In response to requests to allow the operation to make alternate arrangements for some of their programs, an extension was given until 31 August 2024. After another request, a final date of 13 December 2024 was given.

Programs in the name of BKI have continued to operate up to the closure date. As we worked toward the handover, we have been focused on ensuring there is an appropriate management of funds, so liabilities have been covered, legal obligations met, in preparation for what we had hoped was to be an orderly transition on 13 December.

Since announcement of the closure and handover, we have been deeply saddened to witness the abuse that has been levelled against Uniting Church and Congress leaders and members.


The Uniting Church believes that public disputation serves no-one's interest. We have been mindful of keeping this discussion out of the public discourse due to cultural sensitivities.

It is hoped that a number of alternate services might be in a position to open their arms to some of the people whom BKI has supported, and that new and positive relationships will be established.

We are thankful for those who have served BKI since its inception in 2007.

The land will be secured until the UAICC WA Regional Committee is able to progress their plans for the site.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Tozer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev Dr Ian Tozer
Moderator