



Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Western Australia



THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SYNOD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

22 March 2025



Being with Jesus
in Ministry

CONSTITUTION OF THE MEETING OF SYNOD

BACKGROUND

On 7 March 2025, the General Secretary gave notice of a Special meeting of the Synod of WA following decisions of both the Moderator and the Synod Standing Committee under Regulation 3.5.7.(b) [Constitution and Regulations 2018, as amended].

The business to be considered was confined to matters related to Beanangirng Kwuurt Institute (BKI), an incorporated instrumentality of the Church, established under the Uniting Church in Australia Act (1976) [Western Australia], Part VI.

OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was led by Ian Tozer.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Rev Mitchell Garlett extended a welcome to country.

We share the journey of the First and Second Peoples and sisters and brothers in the Church of Christ. We pay respect to the elders past and present to Congress and to the Wadjuk Noongar people.

We give thanks to God that we meet here as his children and help to make his kingdom a better place to be for generations to come.

We pay our respect to our God our creator, asking us to look after this place for a long time and in return this place will look after us.

Our friends and family give us connection to how our journey began and our connection to our culture, to our language, to this land and to our God.

We gather here today to listen to one another, and may we continue as we live in this place to listen with our ears and our hearts for a better journey for tomorrow for us, for our community and for our Church.

This was followed by a video presentation of the interview with the late Rev Sealin Garlett by Jarrod McKenna discussing The Beatitudes, "Blessed are the Peacemakers".

BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

The Special Meeting of Synod was held at Trinity North Uniting Church, Greenwood, on Saturday 22 March 2025 at 3pm. The following was presented and discussed.

This meeting was held in the spirit of the Safe Church. Members were called to meet in a spirit of respect and care and bring the compassion of Christ to one another as we conducted the business to the Special Synod meeting.

PROPOSALS

PROPOSAL 1

Presented by Alison Xamon and Mervyn Anderson

Resolution 1/2025

The Synod of WA agreed to meet in private according to clause 5.16.4 of the Manual for Meetings with the following exceptions:

- a) the following people be permitted to speak but not vote – Lenny Yarran, Marilyn Garlett, Daphne Bennell, Jennifer Turner, Shonae Garlett, Lynette Garlett, Alison Overeem, Marion Kickett, Selina Knapp, Debbie Little, Howard Riley, Penny Yarran, Dr Jim Morrison, Rev Dennis Doust, Fiona Bentley, Geoff Bice and Alison Atkinson-Phillips.**
- b) Amanda Rigby and Ned Radov were authorised to be present to provide administration support to the meeting.**

Approved by Consensus

Susy Thomas, Ex-Moderator, prayed that God's continued presence and guidance would be with us during this meeting.

REPORTS

MODERATOR'S REPORT

The Moderator's report was received. The report outlined the processes and communication leading up to the meeting that required the action carried out under Regulation 3.6.3.2 (j) to dismiss the suspended Board of BKI with immediate effect and to appoint the following people as the Board of BKI until the Synod is able to act.

- Rev Robbie Jetta (Chair)
- Alison Overeem
- Cheryl Lawson
- Daphne Bennell
- Jennifer Turner
- Lenny Yarran
- Marilyn Garlett
- Rev Mitchell Garlett
- Shonae Garlett

The new Board will review the Constitution to ensure the vision in partnership going forward can be expressed.

SYNOD STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Synod Standing Committee report was received. The report included extracts from minutes and resolutions of the Synod Standing Committee.

The Synod Standing Committee resolved to affirm the Moderator's decision to dismiss the suspended Board of BKI and to appoint the new Board of BKI.

The Synod Standing Committee resolved to hold a special meeting of the Synod on 22 March 2025 as currently in attendance.

The Synod Standing Committee resolved to ask that an apology to Congress be presented at the meeting, to address, in particular, the time taken to act on the request of Congress regarding BKI made in 2023 and all that has happened since.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Nominating Committee report was presented by Heather Hamblin and was received.

The Nominating Committee was contacted by the Moderator in relation to the BKI situation. The Nominating Committee process to elect the Board was different to the Annual Synod and the Moderator used his regulatory authority to appoint the New Board which was endorsed by the Synod Standing Committee. A new nomination form was required which was formulated taking into account the requirements of the BKI Constitution.

The Nominating Committee examined the nominations provided and concluded that the requirements had been met.

BKI BOARD REPORT

The BKI Board report was presented by Alison Xamon in conjunction with Rev Mitchell Garlett and Rev Robbie Jetta and was received.

31 years ago, the Uniting Church in Australia entered into Covenant with First Nation's people and specifically with Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) [1994].

The matters today relate to the Bringing Them Home report that made a number of recommendations including that Churches look at their own land holdings, and those that have been a site for stolen generations survivors, to divest those land holdings into Aboriginal control.

At that time discussions were held with the Federal Government, Congress and Aboriginal groups. The negotiated consensus was that half of the land would be divested to the Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and the other half would be divested to WA Regional Congress. The agreement was finalised in 2007 and in 2012 half of the former Sister Kate's site was legally transferred from the UCA Property Trust to Beanang Kuuurt Institute (BKI).

The vision for the site was to establish services and a healing centre on the site. The Uniting Church expressed sorrow that the Church has failed to appropriately walk alongside Congress to assist them with their vision.

There has not been a constitutional BKI Board for some years, failing to fulfil the requirement that at least one third of the Board are required to be members of Congress.

The Church was recently made aware of plans for the site dating back to 2012 for a Healing Centre at the Treasure Road site and that discussions had been occurring with the WA Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation (trading as Yokai).

A WA Regional Congress meeting was held, and a new Board was proposed and subsequently appointed.

The Board of Beanang Kwuurt Institute (BKI) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress of WA (UAICC) and the West Australian Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation (WASGAC), trading as Yokai.

Yokai has been granted a 12 month peppercorn lease whilst discussions occur to begin delivering services to the site in conjunction with BKI. Yokai is well known to Uniting Church agencies and is already working with both UnitingWA and Juniper.

There are current discussions in progress to establish a 30 year ground lease (still in the ownership of BKI) of part of the site to develop an income stream. It is proposed the income will be put into Trust for specified purposes and whilst Yokai would engage in service delivery, BKI would focus on Ministry and spiritual healing.

It was noted that just as the Stolen Generations came from right around Australia, that the Healing site would be a place for all Aboriginal people, not just those that are Wadjuk Noongar, the Traditional Owners.

Uncle Howard Riley and Auntie Marilyn Garlett spoke on behalf of the Elders and Congress and spoke of the importance of the Healing Centre and the vision that Rev Sealin Garlett had had for the site. They called for us to progress in love, understanding and unity.

Dr Jim Morrison, Chair of Yokai, spoke.

The former Sister Kate's site will be a truth telling place, and a learning and development site to help all generations, as over half the Aboriginal population continue to be affected by removal.

The number of First Nation's people that are now aged 50 or above is more than 8,000 people who are eligible for aged care services. Only 9% are receiving services.

As part of Redress, 55,000 victims were identified in data recently received, 38% are Aboriginal.

The opportunity presented will give the ability to provide an advocacy service to close the gap.

The recent work that has been done and the meeting today was acknowledged and thanked.

Rev Mervyn Anderson expressed his support for this work.

PROPOSAL 2

Resolution 2/2025

The Synod noted that, in determining to appoint a new board for BKL, this lifts previous suspensions in place in relation to the BKL Constitution and its Board.

Approved by Consensus

The Synod resolved to confirm the decision of the Moderator and the Synod Standing Committee to dismiss the suspended Board of BKL and appoint the new Board consisting of Rev Robbie Jetta (Chair), Rev Mitchell Garlett, Lenny Yarran, Marilyn Garlett, Cheryl Lawson, Daphne Bennell, Jennifer Turner, Shonae Garlett and Alison Overeem.

Approved by Consensus

APOLOGY TO CONGRESS

Ian Tozer gave the apology to Congress.

We meet in Lent, a time for reflection, self-examination and repentance as, in the Spirit, we follow Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross and the resurrection. It is a season when we turn or return to the true way when we acknowledge something needing change.

Lenten reflection is a call to face reality – even what is uncomfortable – to own up about what has happened and to make changes. Followers of Jesus are called to a life of repentance.

In 1994, the President of the Uniting Church acknowledged, as part of our covenant commitment to Congress, that the impact of church and “western culture” often caused harm to First Peoples. Dr Jill Tabart specifically apologized for wrongs done “knowingly or unknowingly”.

I come today with an apology about recent events related to WA Congress and BKL in the spirit of the Covenant.

As a church, we have committed ourselves to the Covenant call to work together practically.

However, there are always cultural elements. Habits and practices of “western culture” which are built-into our processes sometimes mean that our ways of functioning as a church cause harm. Sometimes people are harmed by the time things take. Leaving decisions with meetings often means that we delay decisions.

Today, we lament that it took so long to deal with Congress WA’s request in 2023 to conclude the term of the BKL board then in place and the programs under its oversight.

We regret that this time meant continuing hurt for Congress and other church members and leaders.

We lament we took so long to find a solution when it became clear that those on the BKI Board that was in place at that time and those operating its programs were not just working outside Uniting Church values but were also using the BKI Facebook page to undermine Congress priorities and abuse the UCA and its leaders.

We regret that, when it became clear that those linked with the suspended board of BKI and its operations would not fulfill their undertakings, we were not able to find a solution earlier.

We lament not finding a way to end quickly an untenable situation with trespassers and squatters at the Treasure Road site. We were shocked to hear that these people have denied Congress and BKI ownership and wanted to take control of the land.

We regret our part, knowingly or unknowingly, in this situation which has included the abuse of Congress leaders and members, the defamation of past Elders, and the damage this has been caused.

As Christians, we are not immune to struggle with how to respond to complex situations.

So, we come to you members of Congress WA; we confess our shortcomings, we regret the ways our actions have knowingly or unknowingly failed you, and we ask for your grace and forgiveness.

We ask that together we can learn from these experiences.

We commit to the Covenant we have made, and we pray that, through the grace of God, even as we stumble or make wrong turns, we will come back together and journey alongside each other as First and Second Peoples.

We meet today as the Synod. 'Synod' literally means being on the way together. As the people of God on the way, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we seek to go forward together in sole loyalty to Jesus, bearing witness to the unity which is both God's gift and will.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Moderator reminded us of the letter Y which he had used at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Synod of Western Australia. His "why" is summed up in his theme, 'Being with Jesus in Ministry' - a call to be with Jesus who always goes ahead of us, calling us to offer our service and care and witness and love.

CLOSING PRAYER

The closing prayer was led by Ian Tozer, and this was followed by the hymn Amazing Grace TiS 129.

The meeting was closed at 4.35pm.