



Message Stick



The bi-monthly Magazine of the

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

Our Mission: The UAICC is made up of ordinary people who do extraordinary things with God promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians through: Holistic Evangelism, Justice, Transformation and Empowerment.



As I reflect back at the passing months of April and May and I am heartened by the solid progress being made nationally by our various congregational activities and community response programs. This is especially uplifting for all of us at Congress as we endeavor to keep raising our bar in the face of so much negativism being portrayed in the mainstream national media. The press's democratic freedom to report the state of Indigenous affairs also carries with it a serious responsibility to be balanced in their reporting, which we as a people often question. While we acknowledge, and are working to address, the broad spectrum of issues confronting our communities, I wonder if the mainstream population is equally aware of the many and inspirational stories occurring each and every day in and amongst Indigenous people and our communities. Let us not be disheartened however, but inspired by our successes and the many more that lay before us, as we take hold of our future through embracing leadership and commitment to equality and justice.

Just some stories in this issue – the UAICC National Conference is being held from the 26th – 1st July. The theme of the conference 'Tomorrows Leaders Today' reflects the importance placed by Congress on identifying, nurturing and encouraging our leaders to affect the positive change needed in our communities. We take a look at Narana Fest and the bridges of friendship and understanding it has, and will no doubt continue to build between Indigenous and non - Indigenous people. The money raised from this landmark event will be directed toward the 'Respect for Spirit' Program. We congratulate Ellen Roughsey on her milestone graduation in the Certificate III in Theology and look forward to her coming contributions. Congress welcomes Howard Amery to the new position as Resource Officer for the NRCC and we celebrate the formation of the new NSW Regional Committee. Our second year students in the Certificate IV in Christian Ministry are progressing well in their studies and we interview two participants who like the rest of the students are ready and willing to take the leadership mantle. The new UAICC website will soon be on-line and will be a rich information resource and an integral part of the overall national communications strategy and we present another Congress reflection by Pastor Dennis Corowa.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Message Stick as much as we enjoy sharing our achievements and challenges with you. If you know someone who would like to subscribe for future editions, please have them send an email to the editor at: rpuaicc@bigpond.com

Rev Shayne Blackman
National Administrator
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

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NARANA FEST - A DAY OF MUSIC AND CONNECTION



ELLEN ROUGHSEY THEOLOGY GRADUATION

On Easter Monday, April 17th 2006 3000 people gathered at Narana Creations in Grovedale Geelong to join in the Narana Fest celebration. We were to have a fest of enjoyment as Xavier Rudd and his colleagues drew together a variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to entertain and challenge those attending the out door venue.

Beginning at 2pm. and going through to about 11pm it was a great feast of entertainment. Xavier had gathered together some great bands and dancers. There was, of course, Xavier himself, with his powerful lyrics and dynamic sounds, as his one man band of percussion, guitar and didj entertained us for well over two hours. Knaan, an Indigenous dance group danced with him at times. Then there was, blues band, Ash Grunwald, Indigenous Hip Hop group Local Knowledge, and Rob Sawyer.



Proceeds from Narana Fest 2006 will be directed to the 'Respect for the Spirit' Program which aims to deliver cultural education to the youth of Geelong.



Narana Creations a winner of several Victorian Government Tourism awards.

Narana also provided an alternate feast, a feast to stave off the pangs of hunger and thirst. We served coffees endlessly from our Cafe, and a group of volunteers from a local Uniting Church congregation sold soft drinks and water to the people who developed a thirst with their dancing. Our Juvenile Justice Group helped by a group from one of the local Uniting Church schools served "snags and onions" in slices of bread with lashings of sauce to keep the wolves from the door.

This was however no ordinary event. Money raised from this event will go to what Xavier is calling his "Respect for the Spirit" program, that is, to funding cultural education, "the passing of sacred knowledge to the youth of Geelong." He has asked Congress in Victoria to deliver this cultural education. It is an exciting concept and one that will certainly further the well being of Indigenous youth in our local community.

We would like to thank the many volunteers who helped us make the day so successful.

Imagine flying over 700 kilometres just to get to theology classes. This was the regular journey that Mornington Island Uniting church and community elder Ellen Roughsey undertook every time that she attended Theology studies at Wontulp B-Buya College in Cairns.

In March 2006 after three years of study Ellen finally received her Certificate III in Theology.

When she returned home, she shared in church that Sunday the following words:

"There came times I thought I'd quit, but when we talked about the importance of leadership training, that encouraged me to go on and finish. I wanted to encourage others to take up studies and develop themselves too." - Ellen Roughsey



Ellen Roughsey displays her Certificate III in Theology.

Ellen is a church elder who participates in leading worship, supports the minister and also serves in one of the community programs the church runs, by working at the Gununa Post Office.

Through Ellen's sharing, she has inspired a younger couple Lyndon and Megan from Mornington to commence their studies. Ellen has made the trip too, commencing a Community Organizing and Development Course at Wontulp.



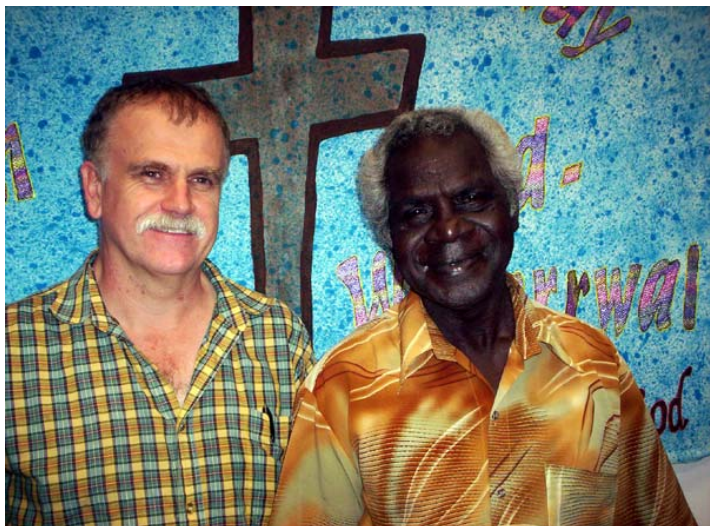
The Congress Church at Gununa on Mornington Island.



HOWARD AMERY NEW NRCC RESOURCE WORKER

The Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) is made up of 3 ministry regions with congregations in the East and West Arnhem Land region, the Pitjantjatjara region of S.A. and at Mowanjum in the Kimberley.

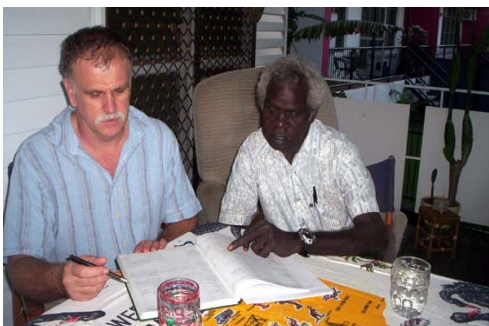
Following the resignation of Stuart McMillan as Resource Worker in May 2005, NRCC has been seeking a suitable replacement. The Executive of NRCC believes they have found such a person and, at their March meeting, approved the appointment of Howard Amery to this position.



Howard Amery and NRCC Chairperson Rev Mawunydjil Garawirtja

Howard worked with NRCC as Parish Educator from 1991-94 and has since worked with Aboriginal Resource & Development Services Inc. (ARDS) as a community educator and more recently as Language Services Manager based in Darwin. He brings with him a wealth of experience and knowledge of the challenges currently facing NRCC. Most importantly, Howard's knowledge in the area of Aboriginal languages, and Yolngu Matha in particular, will be a great asset in providing support to the leadership of NRCC.

Chairperson of NRCC, Rev. Mawunydjil Garawirtja, is delighted to have Howard on board and looks forward to traveling with him to conduct consultations with congregations in the Arnhem region in the near future.



Howard Amery and Rev Mawunydjil Garawirtja work on an Arnhem region congregational consultation program.

Due to his remaining commitments with ARDS, Howard will initially work in a part-time capacity from April to June and be available for to take up his resourcing responsibilities with NRCC from July 2006.

Please pray for the continued success of the strategic support Howard is providing to the NRCC.



NEW NSW REGIONAL COMMITTEE

The NSW Congress has held the first meeting of the newly formed Regional Committee in Ballina at the end of March. All the work put into workshopping, writing and establishing procedures, protocols and structures has now paid off. Elder Uncle Harry Walker said that re-starting the Regional Committee was "like coming out of a dark tunnel, and that while things will be challenging, the joy of the Lord is our strength". He also spoke about Nehemiah, and how rebuilding Congress in NSW has been like Nehemiah rebuilding the walls.

There were lots of exciting things about the meeting. A Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson were elected. The Elders Committee was confirmed, as well as a Woman's representative. A number of new younger members attended and took active part. Rev Shayne Blackman and Alan Randell visited, and provided valuable input into the sessions.



Participants at the first NSW Regional Committee meeting held in Ballina in March.

Diane Torrens from Evans Head is the new chairperson. Lance Waters from Moree (currently living in Armidale) is the new deputy chairperson. The Elders are Rev Harry Walker, Rev Dorothy Gordon, Aunty Sue Blacklock, and Aunty Annabelle Walker. The Elders bring a long history of involvement in Congress, great commitment, and spiritual discernment and power. The new Chairs are recent recruits to the NSW Congress team, but bring integrity and a strong faith too.

"The spiritual power in the room was just awesome. It was like fire hitting the room - extraordinary" - Gill Boner

Lorraine and Juanita Bamblett joined us as reps from Queanbeyan for the first time - it's great to see the wisdom of the elders balanced with the enthusiasm and interest of the new young folk. And according to our meeting facilitator, Gill Bonser, when Uncle Harry prayed near the end of the week, for the Congress, and different people in it, it was with incredible power and passion. "The spiritual power in the room was just awesome. It was like fire hitting the room - extraordinary".



REV WILLIE PICKETT MINISTRY IN ARMADALE/KELMSCOTT

In the book of Genesis chapter 12:1-6 – God speaks to Abram and tells him to leave his country his people and his fathers household and go to a land where he would show him.

Abram listened to God's voice and began a journey that would take him to new lands and he would encounter other people from different backgrounds, different cultures and traditions.

My journey has been bit like Abraham's for number of years I was ministering in a small country town and both my wife and I were fairly busy in the life of the Church there and at times we found like others in leadership that the work was really demanding and our home was a place of ministry twenty four seven.



Rev Willie Pickett, an instrumental figure in some of the Congress ministry activities in Western Australia.

And we were praying for a year or so asking God, "please send somebody to help us" during this time I had ideas about attending Bible College but finding the right time was going to be challenging.

God heard our prayer and sent another Minister to Katanning and although he was ministering with the Uniting Church he would become a close friend and brother and from that time my life and my families would take a different path. Through his contacts I was introduced to the UAICC – Congress, I candidated for the minister of the word and in 2000 I entered Theological Hall at Murdoch, graduated in 2004 was ordained in October 2005 and entered my first placement in Armadale/Kelmscott, Byford Congregations along with Congress.

From that time forward to now I have been busy with cross-cultural ministry especially ministering to two non-Aboriginal Congregations. This has allowed me to meet other Christians and other people from different backgrounds, different traditions and cultures. This experience has also given me and my wife Carleen an opportunity to minister here in Armadale. We have also been able to implement some new initiatives, one of them being our Sunday evening service which is more evangelistic and more youth orientated.

On a really good night we have had up to sixty people ranging from children to adults and from the success of this

night we have started our weekly teenager youth group which consists of both Noongar & Wudjellas.

In March we were able to host a Youth Concert here in Armadale along with Pastor Tim Edwards Church – 'Suburban Christian Fellowship in Gosnells' also with YWAM – (Youth With a Mission) and Team Extreme which are groups from USA and other parts of the world. We put together three schedule days which saw Team Extreme go into schools in this region and on Saturday 3rd March we held the Concert in a Basketball stadium, we also had other guests such as Adrian Ross and local talent as well our aim was to minister to young people in our area from Armadale and Metro Perth region. It was a free concert with Team Extremes high energy performance of breaking bricks and showing great feat of strength and the end of the evening a call was given and we saw close to a hundred people particularly many young people come forward and dedicate their lives to Jesus.

From this ministry base I have been able network with other ministries as well. My wife Carleen coordinates a breakfast club at one of the schools here in Armadale, everyday. Along with other mums, she prepare breakfast and lunches for all the Noongar children and any other children who come to the breakfast club as well.

Since leaving the region where I was brought up the Lord has blessed us in many ways often times we get to busy to realize and see his hand on us but time after time he has reassured us that he will never leave us nor forsake us. I look forward to the coming years of ministry here in Armadale & Kelmscott and the work the Lord has for me within the Congress.



The ordination of Rev Willie Pickett in 2005 at Armadale was marked by traditional Indigenous performances.

"I want to encourage others out there in ministry sometimes it easy to give up and throw in the towel especially when there seems like there is no support. I have found God has a funny way of doing things and a lot of time he will send help and support from places we don't expect, it to come from. Friends don't stop praying for assistance because one day soon Jesus is going to send you somebody to help you, all you need to do is be ready and listen to his voice.

If there are any Congregations out there in Australia that feel they could contribute financially to Gods work amongst Aboriginal people please remember us here in Armadale/Kelmscott - Reverend Willie Pickett



KIDS OF THE UNITING CHURCH AUSTRALIA

The Annual Kids of the Uniting Church of Australia (KUCA) Camp Out held at West Beach in Adelaide attracted the usual 3,000 children and adults from across South Australia and Broken Hill.



The KUCA Camp allowed children of many different backgrounds to experience the wider Church family.

This year Congress (SA) had two groups attend from Port Augusta and Salisbury. Port Augusta brought 60 people, including 40 children, while Salisbury had a smaller group of nearly 20 people. Included in the group from Port Augusta came five boys from Hawker and Copley, which is in the ministry area of the Mobile Aboriginal Patrol in the Flinders Ranges. Their attendance at KUCA was supported by the offering at Camp Out.

Event organizer, Linda Driver said, "The aim of Camp Out is to provide an opportunity for children from many different backgrounds to experience the wider church family through fun, worship and learning."

Each group provides their own food and accommodation, and joins in the centrally run program. Activities include worship, craft, swimming, the carnival, fireworks and other small group work. This year's theme was "Step! Skip! Stomp!"



KUCA participants from left to right (back) Tiffany Waye, Jayarnha Dare, Shellander Champion (front) Amisha Dingaman & Michelle Mitakiki

When asked what he thought about the camp William Bendessi said "I reckon KCO is cool and gives me the opportunity to meet and share experiences!



LEPRENA MINISTRY SUPPORTING ELDERS

It was an inspiring day as Congress members gathered recently at Leprena, the Congress ministry centre in Hobart, Tasmania. Elders shared dreams for our future and we outlined some steps for further ministry development among our community.

The recent handover to the community of a long term lease on land at *Irapuna* in the north east of the state coupled with the participation of many people in the recent mutton birding season, was strong reminder of the important role of significant sites in the spiritual and cultural growth of our people. In response to this, Congress' congregation at Leprena plans to host a series of gatherings at important places during the second half of this year. Guided by our Elders, the preparations will involve reflecting on the traditional and contemporary knowledge of a local area and interweaving Indigenous and Christian traditions in a way that enriches people's spiritual and cultural identity.

During the afternoon of our workshop we discussed 'the ministry role of Indigenous Elders within the UAICC' and focused on way to restore the role of Elders and supporting them as 'keepers of culture' and leaders within our congregation.



Attending the Leprena Workshop from left to right are Rob Henderson with Elders Girlie Purdon and Eva Richardson.

One way we do this in our Sunday Gatherings is that Elders are custodians of the Christ candle. The lighting of the Christ candle marks the beginning of our Gathering. It reminds us of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

It reminds us of the light of Christ within each of us, and it reminds us of campfires as places where communities gather, where wisdom is shared, and where people's spirits are renewed.

"The Congress National Conference theme, 'Tomorrow's Leaders Today' challenges us to support the leadership of Elders amongst us, while we grow new younger leaders who can take up the mantle of ministry" - Rev Grant Finlay

We sense a stirring of God's Spirit among us and around our community and we look forward to the coming months.



CONGRESS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

CERTIFICATE IV IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

The Certificate IV in Christian Ministry has been designed by Congress for members of UAICC Congregations who have a desire to undertake a leadership role. It is an integral part of the Congress's strategic drive to nurture and train tomorrow's leaders today.

The diverse course units range from Understanding the Bible, Developing Work Priorities, Pastoral Care, Indigenous Theology to Supporting Community Participation, Christ, the Centre and Supporting Community Leadership. We interviewed two of the participants to gauge how they were traveling with their studies.

What subjects are you studying at the moment?

Ed Story: "I am in my first year of a four year Diploma but am aiming to achieve the Certificate IV in Christian Ministry first. I am undertaking the following subjects at the moment: Developing work priorities and Time Management which are really useful in organizing time for devotion and study and balancing family and personal time. I feel it will help me enormously for my work at Narana.



Left to right: Ed Story, Rev Richard Wallace (Christian Ministry Course Coordinator) and Bradley Dodds.

Bradley Dodds: I am in the same courses and I feel they are excellent to have at the start of the programs as they set the foundation for what is to come and the expectations required of us.

What are your aspirations:

Ed Story: I wish to complete the course and then apply what I have learnt to the Victorian region of Congress and the Melton Uniting Church and their work. Specifically I would like to help Congress develop its worshipping services.

Bradley Dodds: I would like to continue to do youth work and apply what I have learnt to help the youth at Mt. Druitt as they have a lot of untapped potential to go where they want to in life.

CONGRESS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

COMMUNICATION CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

As part of the UAICC's desire to equip its future leaders with a holistic range of leadership skills, a communications course has been integrated into the Certificate IV in Christian Ministry. Both courses are run by the Yalga-binbi Institute for Community Development.



Christian Ministry students undertake a communications unit as part of their course.

Rev John Adams conducts the communications unit which incorporates just some of the following units:

- The theory of communication
- Practical communication skills
- Conflict resolution strategies and counseling
- Conducting interviews
- Public speaking and giving professional presentations
- Writing Exercises and business writing
- Running a meeting

To find out more about either the Certificate IV in Christian Ministry or the Diploma of Community Development, please call the Yalga-binbi Institute for Community Development on (07) 4773 5077.



Rev John Adams guides Christian Ministry students through various business writing exercises.



NEW UAICC WEBSITE SOON TO BE LAUNCHED

A new Congress website has been designed to compliment the UAICC's national public affairs program. The soon to be launched website will be a rich information resource and an integral part of the organisations overall national communications strategy and ability to communicate to wider audiences.



The home page of the soon to be released UAICC national website. Some key features include an interactive map of Australia that showcases UAICC community response programs and congregational fact sheets.

The new national website will be the main portal that links all existing individual UAICC related websites together such as Narana and ARDS in one easy to navigate attractive site.

Increasingly, Congress is working toward a more unified and holistic model to affect positive change to the lives of Indigenous people and the new UAICC website has been designed to reflect this direction. Some key features of the website include:

- An **Interactive Map of Australia** showing Congress Community Response Programs and congregational information fact sheets + pictures.
- An **'About Us'** section that provides information on such areas as 'A Background to Congress', Membership of Congress, Statement of Beliefs, Resolution and Regulations, Meaning of the UAICC Symbol but to name a few;
- A complete and up to date **UAICC National Directory**;
- A **Publications Centre** that will allow one to download editions of 'Message Stick' and other Congress related publications;
- A **Media Centre** which will enable one to view all Congress media releases and the UAICC's regular Koori Mail 'Uniting Ways' column;
- A **Latest News Section** that will showcase the latest Congress news which can be linked to third party websites.

Stay tuned for the web address....

NEW NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF INDIGENOUS CHRISTIAN BODIES

A new national Indigenous Christian body - the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA) has been formed, following the landmark unification of existing Indigenous Christian organisations at a forum in Melbourne on the 11th - 12th May.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA) is a resolute move to create a new nationally consistent platform that will aim to improve both the ability to minister to Indigenous people and to advocate for their rights and responsibilities with one voice.

NATSICA spokesperson, Rev Shayne Blackman said that the unified but flexible structure of (NATSICA) has been designed for us to collectively bring to bear, the necessary resources, expertise and energy to effectively minister to Indigenous people and to uphold their rights and responsibilities in an integrated fashion.



Delegates from the proposed Alliance of Indigenous Christian Bodies.

"We are aiming to build upon and complement the solid track record and achievements of The National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) and the broader Indigenous Christian community but under some new operating principles and contexts that will enable us to better respond to the challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous Christians today" said Rev Blackman.

"We are in the process of endorsing a mission statement and examining a range of operating structures that will best identify the measures required to address the bleak spectrum of socio-economic outcomes facing Indigenous people and importantly the steps needed to support our many aspirations.

Indigenous Christian Bodies that participated in the historic meeting included World Vision, The Evangelical Alliance, Anglican Church Sydney Diocese, Churches of Christ, The National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC), The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), Koori Lighthouse Ministry, , Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF), Macarthur Indigenous Christian Fellowship, Wiradjini Christian Development Ministries, The Baptist Church and the Lutheran Church" said Rev Blackman.



CONGRESS REFLECTIONS PASTOR DENNIS COROWA



UAICC NATIONAL CONFERENCE



How do Indigenous people read scripture? We do it out of 60,000 years of culture. We were and remain the owners and custodians of this land. God was known and active among Indigenous people prior to colonisation by Europeans.

The author of Acts would suggest that the presence of Indigenous Australians was not a matter of chance or mere accident.

"[God] made all nations to inhabit earth, and he allotted the times of their existence, and the boundaries of the places where they would live so that they would search for God ..."

Acts 17:26 (NRSV).

God determined that Australia would first be occupied by the Aboriginal and Islander peoples. We are the first peoples of this land.

Our place in creation...

We are part of nature – part of God's creation, not apart from it. As Indigenous people we look at God in nature and our spiritual dreaming. Spiritually through our dreaming, we are linked to nature through our totems. It is about relationship and survival, as our dreaming is linked to plants, land, animals, birds and fish.

God placed Adam in the Garden, and instructed Adam to "work it and care for it" (Gen 2:15). Man was made as a divinely appointed steward of creation. God formed us out of the earth, "Man was created from the dust of the ground, and God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). This is a very organic concept and to survive we are linked to this. Indigenous people are secure in their place in creation, following the seasons and food for survival. We speak of land as our 'mother'.

Romans 1:20 describes seeing God in nature: "From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see the invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God."

The incarnate process of Eternal life in The Spirit is something Indigenous people always celebrated through their totem beliefs. My Totem is milmarjl - the barramundi. My spirit lives on in something that is alive, is of nature. I have to protect it and cannot eat it. I am a custodian of it. Each Indigenous person has a totem. In this way we help to keep God's creation in balance so that it sustains all of us. The way Indigenous people read scripture may reveal truths in new ways. Our respect for the past traditional ways helps us view with scepticism and different eyes, new ideas and visioning. This is grounded in creation. This is just some of what we bring as we read and understand the Gospel, through different eyes.

Dennis was born in Murwillumbah, NSW, and lived most of his life in Mackay. Dennis was called to minister amongst Indigenous people in Townsville in 1989. He is a father and grandfather, co-author of two published books on Indigenous Theology, and is chairperson of Calvary Presbytery.

The tri-annual UAICC National Conference is being held from the 26th June to the 1st July 2006 at Alexandra Park on the Sunshine Coast. The theme of the conference is: 'Tomorrow's Leaders Today' and reflects increasing moves by Congress to identify, nurture and equip our future Indigenous leaders with the skill set to make a positive difference firstly to their communities, regions and ultimately the nation. Part of the conference will incorporate pre-forum reports from our Elders, Women and Youth.

A series of five workshops has also been integrated into the forum to examine the areas impacting Indigenous people today; 'Education and Training, Employment, Health, Training Congress Leadership and Resourcing Congress Ministry. The workshop approach embraces a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) model to firstly map the present environment and to then articulate the pathways and initiatives needed to affect positive change where needed.

As Matthew 5:13-16 says: You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

As we identify and nurture our Indigenous leaders, they, like the rest of Congress as reminded of our collective task to be the salt of Indigenous society, preserving, reconciling, adding taste, giving meaning where there is no meaning, giving hope where there is no hope and delineating the pathways to a more wholesome and prosperous future.

- RESPONSE -

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QLD, 4817

Thank you



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