



September 2005

# Message Stick



The monthly E-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.

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**A**s I reflect back on the month of September, I cannot help but sense the growing enthusiasm and embrace from the wider community at the steps forward Congress is making in its work in providing ministry and pathways for Indigenous people. We have had a pleasing response to 'Message Stick' and its format in showcasing the various initiatives Congress is undertaking in each State and I believe this communication is just one reason.

As an Indigenous organisation, Congress has consistently recognised and supported the role that Indigenous spirituality has had in positively transforming individuals and communities. Aside from ministry services that regularly affirm an individual's spirituality and God given abilities, we have implemented community response programs that support our people's aspirations to enable them to reach for greater heights. *'...the one who sows to please the spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up'* (Galatians 8:9).

Congress invites you to share our joy at the opening of Shalom's new Library and Information Technology Centre. This facility will no doubt be one important corner stone in our desire to equip Indigenous students with the academic skill set to become agents of positive change in their community and for the wider benefit of Australia. Some other activities occurring around the nation include the work of David Wright, who is now into his second year in providing remote ministry to Indigenous people from the southern Flinders Range to the Northern Territory. Sound progress is being made in Western Australia with a joint meeting between the Synod Covenanting Committee, Western Australian Regional Council of Congress and the Interim Management Committee of 'Treasure Road'. Draft plans are being developed to transform the dilapidated 'Treasure Road' site into a centre for future Congress Programs. We invite you to share in this journey through your support through prayer and donation. We also are also pleased to present an on-going series of Indigenous reflections on various matters from Pastor Bill Hollingsworth, the Chairperson of the National Elders Council.

**Rev Shayne Blackman**  
National Administrator  
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress



## SHALOM OPENS NEW LIBRARY AND IT CENTRE



## PATROL MINISTRY SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Board of Shalom Christian College has realized its vision in equipping its Indigenous students with the skill set in library research and information technology with the recent opening of the new Shalom Library and Information Technology Centre.



*Part of the Shalom vision...the new state of the art Shalom Library and Information Technology Centre.*

The new centre will aid Shalom's achievements as a leading State and National Award winning literacy College. The much needed library boasts an array of information technology resources including computers and IT peripherals and an ever growing collection of books and other learning material.

The opening ceremony took place on Friday the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2005 and was attended by the Shalom Board, Shalom staff and students and many members of the Indigenous and non Indigenous community.



*The commemorative plaque is unveiled by Pastor Bill Hollingsworth (left) and Rev Shayne Blackman on behalf of the Board of Shalom.*

The opening honours were conducted by members of the Shalom Board and the Federal Member for Herbert the Hon Peter Lindsay MP and the State Member for Thuringowa Mr. Craig Wallace MP.



*Shalom students and guests inside the new Shalom Library and Information Technology Centre.*

Guests were treated to an assortment of traditional Indigenous cultural performances staged by Shalom students. The new centre was majority funded by Shalom with contributions from the Australian and Queensland State Government.

The Mobile Aboriginal Patrol in South Australia is a joint ministry of the Congress and Frontier Services funded by Frontier Services.

David Wright is following the Patrol Ministry work of Murray Muirhead, and is now into his second year of his patrol ministry.

This patrol ministry involves meeting people in small towns such as Copley, Nepabunna, Marree, and Oodnadatta, visiting people working in National Parks and on Aboriginal owned stations and conducting ministry in the Port Augusta prison.



*David Wright preparing for nightfall at Pukatja.*

*"... a highlight of my work is sharing in the lives and spirituality of Aboriginal people..." David Wright*

The area of David's patrol ministry ranges from the southern Flinders ranges to the Northern Territory border near Dalhousie Springs. It is far greater than that from Adelaide to Melbourne. This area



*David Wright (left) on patrol ministry, yams with community leader Gary Lewis at a creek bed at Pukatja, in South Australia. Patrol ministry is proving effective in reaching to members of the Church in remote and isolated communities.*

demonstrates the sheer size and scope of the ministry area being serviced.

We pray for David's continued energy and enthusiasm as he continues on his journey in bringing enrichment to the Church.



## ROBINVALE MINISTRY IN VICTORIA

The tireless ministry at Robinvale continues to evolve with the involvement of Auntie Judith Williams. Auntie Judith is an Elder to the Regional Committee of Congress in Victoria and Coordinator of Women's activities, and has been located in Robinvale for many years. During that time she has been a strong advocate for ministry to her people in the area.

Initially The Uniting Church struggled to find appropriate ministry for the area. The Rev Steven Appledore was an exit appointment to the Uniting Church congregation in 1996 and after serving the Uniting Church congregation, he joined Auntie Judith in a Congress ministry to the region. The focus of Andrew's ministry was primarily with young Indigenous people and proved very successful.

When Andrew left, Congress was unable to replace him. Through our local contacts we were able to connect with Robyn Roberts – a local youth worker. Robyn had pick up much of the work of Andrew and conducted it from a 'drop in centre' owned by the local community health centre. Robyn was able to bring together young people from both the Indigenous and Tongan communities and was successful in building bridges over the often violent tensions that existed between them.



*Auntie Judith Williams, a tireless worker and advocate for justice and unity for Indigenous people.*

Unfortunately, the Community Health Service required the property for another service and closed the youth program much to dismay of Congress, but ministry still continues. Auntie Judith works tirelessly for her people, advocating within the Uniting Church and the Congress for effective and appropriate ministry responses.

The Regional Committee has recently made a decision to go into partnership with the Uniting Church to deliver ministry in the region but The Uniting Church in no longer able to designate full time ministry in the town. Congress, likewise, is unable to afford full time ministry either. Negotiations are underway with the Presbytery of Mallee as to the shape of this partnership. In the meantime, Auntie Judith moves forward, with strength and courage, and a devotion and exemplary commitment to her people.

## Congress Profiles: Rev Sealin Garlett National Chairperson of the UAICC



Rev Sealin Garlett National Chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) is a Noongar man from the South-West of Western Australia.

He was born in the wheat belt town of Bruce Rock, 270km to the east of Perth. He was one of nine children of Aboriginal parents Snowy and Cadgie. His father was born at Yealering, 220 kms south east of Perth. His mother was born on New Norcia Mission, about 130 kms north of Perth.

Sealin is married to wife Marilyn and they have seven children. Lynette, Keith, Cheryl, Selina, Mitchell, Shonae and Janelle. They have twelve grand children.

In 1964 at the age of 7 he and his siblings were taken from the family camp and did not see their parents again for ten years. Sealin was taken to the Methodist Mission at Mogumber with one sister and one brother.

His other sisters and brothers were sent to different missions. During this hard time, he was prohibited from going back to his parents in their community until he was 18 years old because of the Native Welfare Act.

In 1979 after meeting Marilyn and starting their family he attended a church service and listened to an Aboriginal preacher called Ronnie Williams. It was at that point he made a commitment to Jesus Christ, the church and to his Aboriginal people.

***"...no matter where I have been around the world my heart is always with my people – one should never forget their grass roots..." Rev Sealin Garlett***

In 1988 while sitting in Theological Hall he heard a voice say "Sealin, you've got to cross the line!" It was though part of him did not want to forgive what Europeans had done to him. But all his emotions came out – He crossed the line! Since that day Sealin's ministry has always included his passion for reconciliation. He has worked tirelessly to promote the journey of our individual cultures.

Sealin is an ordained minister of the Uniting Church in Australia and his local parish is in the suburb of Coolbellup just a few km's from Fremantle.

Sealin is also currently Chairperson for UAICC in Western Australia and has held this position for approximately 12 years. Other positions include being a Director of Congress Funerals, which is a not-for-profit Indigenous company which caters for the needs of Indigenous and non – Indigenous families.



## CONGRESS (WA) MOVING FORWARD

The month of August saw Congress (WA) engage in a series of meetings involving the Synod Covenanting Committee, Western Australia Regional Council of Congress and the Interim Management Committee of Treasure Road - the former Sister Kates Orphanage that came into the Uniting Church at the point of union.

The results arising from these meetings and conversations with other interested people are 1) the site plan review presented in early 2004 has been endorsed in principle, and now forms the basis for developing the model for the future development of the Treasure Road site. 2) The Regional Council and the Interim Management Group have adopted the concept of an all-Indigenous Board. Nominations have been received and forwarded to Synod 3) A draft incorporation document has been prepared and is moving to finalization. The proposed name of the company is Beanang Kwartt (New Heart).



*Transforming the Treasure Road Site for future Congress programs.*

The model being developed for future program initiatives at Treasure Road fall into three categories: 1) Teaching Centre 2) Cultural Centre 3) Gathering Place

Processes are now in place to further develop program ideas, to look at refurbishment of badly/vandalised buildings and moving towards the planning for the development of a Cultural Centre. Funding is an enormous issue. We need to look at our own limited resources to ascertain how best to use what we have, reach outside of the Church to its periphery to find the donation dollar that will aid moving the project forward and ask Government for funds support particularly in the areas of Family Support, Rehabilitation Programs, Crisis Care, Vocational education training, school to work transition program etc.

We are looking for people with a heart to support our work through their generosity and through prayer support, by offering volunteer time either individually or collectively by joining a work party. Are you one of those people who would like to see reconciliation implanted into our community in a real and practical way? Treasure Road offers that opportunity.



## 'REFLECTIONS MEMORY SPACE'

UAICC Tasmania have almost completed a "Reflections - Memory Space" at the ministry centre, Leprena, in Hobart.

Funded through an ATSI/ICC grant and constructed by volunteers, the space provides an opportunity for families and community to gather to remember Elders and other loved ones who have died.



*A soothing water feature is a central theme at the 'Reflections - Memory Space'.*

The space consists of a paved area with a number of unique designs featuring footprints, petroglyphs, animals and birds as reminders of people of all ages and times long past whose lives continue to inspire us today. The calming central water promotes a soothing environment and the ti-tree backdrop is a reminder of island life.

Five curved coloured poles represent an incomplete rainbow, reminding us of those who have passed away and how their memory can fill the gaps in our lives and in our community.

In recent months a number of important Elders and other deeply loved people in our community have recently passed away. The 'Reflections' space is one way that we remember them and draw on their witness to deepen our own living.



*The gathering space is nearly complete and will be a welcome place in which to reflect and remember the people who have touched our lives.*



## THEOLOGY ON INDIGENOUS LAND

Rev Dr Chris Budden recently facilitated an Intensive course at the United Theological College in Sydney called 'Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land'. He said, "We were seeking to allow people to engage with the experience of Indigenous people and to discover what that means to the way faith and theology are talked about in Australia".

About twenty people were involved, including students, lecturers, members and friends of Congress. Issues of identity, power, culture and relationships were explored. A snapshot of some of the discussions included: 1) What is land? Is it real estate, or that which nourishes and gives life i.e. earth, water, air. 2) How was the world created? From nothing, or have earth and God co-existed in relationship from all time, with God is present in the earth, and people able to communicate with God, ancestors and creatures through the earth? 3) If God is a God of justice, how can one live on this land and not do something for the Aboriginal people? And if you do this, you need to be prepared to become family. 4) Can non-aboriginal people move from invader to guest to partner and how?

Some comments from participants include:

"It was very enriching, not just reading from a book, but having people physically present, we don't get that opportunity often. It has helped prepare me for ministry."



Participants on the 'Theology on Aboriginal Land' course, recently held at the United Theological College in Sydney.

"I am very grateful for the hospitality of the Congress people, sitting with us for so long, and sharing of themselves".

"When I preach, I hope this experience will feed into the way I think. Not just the stories, but also the pain, and desire for healing."

We will be meeting again in six months to share how the week has impacted on our lives over that time.

## INDIGENOUS REFLECTIONS FROM PASTOR BILL HOLLINGSWORTH



As a nation, we have become great miners. We are constantly exploring and announcing valuable mineral discoveries of one sort or another. We have built up a first class reputation in this field. Nothing hidden in the earth of this continent is safe from our miners and mining consortiums.

We tend to view our part of this planet as providing for us opportunities to plunder and mine from land and sea with scant regard of consequences. We have a long history of taking whatever we can from them, generally in total ignorance of the long term and irreversible consequences. This degrading of and extracting from the land and sea is still going on undiminished. To my way of thinking, there seems to be little or no serious attempt to move from this 'get rich quick' - plundering mentality to the traditional Indigenous cultural commitment to respecting, caretaking and managing the natural resources.

While much of the focus of our nation continues to be upon those minerals that we are able to sell to China, Japan and other countries desperate for the raw materials required for their industries and economic survival, other treasures of far greater worth lie untapped and, sadly, ignored. The way I see it, the most significant riches for Australia still lie 'buried' and yet to be discovered.

If we look into the realms of the physical, social and spiritual knowledge and understandings about this Australian continent of ours and the abundant life forms that go with it, there is a vast realm of untapped knowledge resources that the 'first people' of this nation discovered (or were given). I am thinking especially of things such as knowledge about the various life cycles of the plant and animal worlds and how humans can best blend in and harmonise with nature.

***"...how tragic that instead of harmony all around us we see the signs of decline and devastation to the natural environment by Australians lacking these insights..."***

This unwelcome tendency towards a decline in the vitality of the land and its life forms is not only confined to the environment. In our nation there has also been a relentless and often tragic move away from the spiritual and ethical dimensions of life. I believe this has been very much to our loss as Australians. Awareness and understanding of spiritual reality was the underpinning of all Indigenous cultural expression and life. It should be our underpinning too.

If my observations have any validity, it follows that there is an enormous responsibility on all Indigenous people to take up the challenging role of being the 'restorers of the nation'. This I believe is possible. It is my deep conviction that we are the gatekeepers to the knowledge and understandings that are critical for reversing the current trends we see everywhere in Australia.

Congress continues to be challenged and mobilized to truly become one of God's special agencies that is showing the way ahead. I am convinced that it is in traditional Indigenous communities that the most helpful understandings of life and creation for this land are to be found.



*Message Stick*

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Please forward this and future editions to parties that may be interested in the work and achievements of Congress.

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