

Northern Synod

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Synod's geographical area is all the Northern Territory, a 200km deep strip across the northern portion of South Australia and all the Kimberley region of Western Australia, around to and including Broome.

The Northern Synod has two Presbyteries; the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) and the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA). The NRCC Presbytery is responsible for ministry to Indigenous people and remote Indigenous communities with the PPNA responsible for ministry non-Indigenous ministry and less remote non-Indigenous communities.

There are six ministry placements that are undertaken in partnership with Frontier Services, reflecting the diverse and dispersed nature of ministry in the Northern Synod.

CONTEXT

- Indigenous people comprise 35% of the population of the Northern Synod.
- The land area of the Northern Synod is more than 1/6th of Australia, with less than 1% of the nation's population.
- Given the large land area and small, dispersed population, the support provided by each Presbytery to the other Presbytery is crucial.

CHANGES WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE NORTHERN SYNOD

Over the last three years, major changes within the Synod include:

- Strengthening the Area Ministry Council structure whereby the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) operates as a Presbytery of the Northern Synod through its four Area Ministry Councils (Ananguku, East Arnhem, West Arnhem and Kimberley). The Area Ministry Council model provides for autonomy for Indigenous ministry by Indigenous people of a regional basis. Each Council has their own budget and is accountable to the Presbytery.
- Further development of the partnership approach whereby the Synod and its two Presbyteries, the Northern Regional of Congress (NRCC) and the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA), are more closely working together. For example, more congregations, based in urban areas, have formed a partnership and cooperation links with remote congregations, based in Indigenous communities. Another partnership activity was the joint Induction Service held this

year to install the new NRCC Resource Worker and PPNA Presbytery Minister.

- Establishment of the Centre for Support of Indigenous Scriptures (CSIS). CSIS is based at Nungalinga College in Darwin and is supporting Indigenous scripture and other worship/study materials being developed in local Indigenous languages. The main way in which this is occurring is through use of *Our Word*, a software program that shows the Bible in one language, eg Djambarrpuynu on the left side of a split screen, which enables a group to gather around and together develop a version of the existing text in another Indigenous language.
- Determining that as a Synod, we wish to remain committed to Nungalinga College. This means a greater focus on the work of the College, which is a partnership activity with the Anglican and Catholic Churches.
- Our recent past has seen major changes in key personnel in the Synod with new appointments for:
 - General Secretary, Mr Peter Jones
 - NRCC Resource Officer, Rev Dr Murray Muirhead
 - PPNA Presbytery Minister, Rev Jenny Tymms
 - Synod Finance Manager, Mr Kong Mu.

With these changes in key Synod and Presbytery staff we are looking forward to a period of stability in being able to hear and act upon what God is saying.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- Expanding the work of CSIS so that more Indigenous people may be involved in Indigenous scripture and other resource translation projects. This is a key activity because it enables Indigenous people to be directly involved in translation work, thus generating resources for use by local groups whose first (and often their second, third or fourth) language is not English. Use of the *Our Word* software also directly involves local community members in a most intensive form of Bible study as they translate portions of scripture into their first or heart language.
- Further developing the partnership between the Synod's two Presbyteries in mutually beneficial and supporting ways.
- For the Synod and PPNA Presbytery to continue to stand with the NRCC Presbytery so that NRCC remains responsible for the ministry it is undertaking with Indigenous people within the Synod.
- Riding the financial storm arising from reduced returns from investments (we

know we are not alone) and a reduction in the Assembly grant to the Northern Synod.

WHAT ARE THE HOPES/PLANS/MAJOR MATTERS OF ATTENTION THAT FACE THE NORTHERN SYNOD OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Over the next three years, it is our prayer that:

- The Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia will be revised to give recognition to Indigenous people as the first people of this land.
- A way will be found to give voice to calls from the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) for responsibility in Indigenous ministry, without diminishing the current arrangements of the NRCC as a Presbytery of the Northern Synod.
- The wider church will see the importance of and want to support CSIS as a way whereby Indigenous Christians can to a far greater extent engage with the scriptures through having resources available in their own languages.
- New areas and ways of being in partnership within the Synod and with external partners will emerge and be taken up.
- The Australian Government will adopt a consultative approach in redesigning the Commonwealth's Northern Territory Intervention and that Northern Territory Government will positively respond to calls from NRCC concerning bilingual education. .
- We will ride out all the storms that come our way – Thanks Be To God

Mr Peter Jones
General Secretary