

UAICC Constitution and Regulations 1992

Constitution

1. Affirmation

The U.A.I.C.C. affirms its faith in God the Creator. It believes God is reconciling the world to Himself through the life, death and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ. His salvation is offered to people through faith in Jesus Christ. God's Spirit is constantly nurturing, sustaining, empowering and liberating His people and the whole creation, calling people to repentance and witness.

The people of the Congress look forward with hope to the coming of God's Kingdom in its fullness, when Christ will reign over all nations and peace, justice and well being will fill the earth.

2. Wholistic Evangelism

In response to the commission of Christ "to make disciples of all nations..." the Congress gives priority to holistic evangelism. This means that Congress will seek to minister in love to people in all their needs: spiritual, physical, social and cultural. Believing that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the basis for true salvation and reconciliation between people and God, Congress will endeavour to bring people into relationship with Christ through faith and baptism. Mindful too, that it must witness to the hope and reality of the Kingdom of God, Congress will share the vision of this Kingdom with people in their need: it will offer hope to hopeless and apathetic; it will seek to empower the powerless to break the chains of their oppression; it will seek to build community on the basis of justice for all people.

3. Ministry and Congregations

In order that Congress can enter more fully into its holistic ministry, it will:

- (a) seek to identify and encourage Aboriginal and Islander people with gifts in ministry to witness to the Aboriginal and Islander people in Australia;
- (b) settle ministers, and
- (c) appoint lay people for the purpose of ministry.

By settling and appointing Aboriginal and Islander personnel to work amongst the Aboriginal and Islander people of Australia, the Congress will ensure that the Gospel is presented in the context of the people's own culture and language.

It will establish congregations and worshipping communities. Here people will be nurtured and encouraged in their faith, find strength in their struggle for justice and together offer praise and thanksgiving to their Lord.

Congress's vision and hope is that this will break the two hundred years domination of the indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and consequent dependence upon others, and begin the process whereby all members of the Uniting

Church belong with one Lord, in a diverse, but united church which lives out its mission to Australia and to the world.

4. Pastoral Care

Just as Christ took upon himself the form of a servant, so too will members of the U.A.I.C.C. seek to serve and be servants to one another, and to all people.

Just as God cares for people personally and individually, so too will Congress exercise pastoral care for its members and for others through its ministry of service and care.

5. Relationship to Assembly and Role within the Uniting Church

The third Assembly of the Uniting Church resolved that the Commission for World Mission "co-operate with Synods and the Commission for National Mission in making resources available to Aboriginal and Islander groups to help them in their struggle for human rights, dignity and community. It supports the building up of Aboriginal and Islander congregations with theologically trained Aboriginal and Islander leaders developing their worship, witness and service in their own ways". The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress assumes responsibility for these tasks. It seeks the assurance of the Assembly that the Uniting Church will support the Congress in its work, including the sharing of resources.

The Congress will assume responsibility for tasks, which other agencies have performed for Aboriginal and Islander people in the ongoing mission of the Church.

The Congress will relate to the Assembly and to the Assembly Standing Committee on the same level as other Commissions and Committees of Assembly.

Based on its own experience, faith and work, Congress will direct the Assembly and other Councils of the Church on all issues which affect Aboriginal and Islander people in Australia.

Congress invites all members of the Uniting Church to join in solidarity with it as it shares in the struggle for justice for Aboriginal and Islander people in Australia, and as it undertakes its ministry in other ways.

6. Sharing Understandings and Concerns with the Church

The Congress will reflect on the life of Aboriginal and Islander communities and congregations around Australia in the light of the Gospel, and shall;

- inform the church of unique theological and cultural elements in ministry to Aboriginal and Islander communities;
- direct and advise the Ministerial Education Commission and the Synod Boards on cultural implications of ordinations for Congress ministry;
- initiate a lively sharing of its Christian experience, liturgy, and theological reflection within the wider church, thereby contributing to the study of the

Word of God and broadening the outlook and understanding of the church in its life and mission.

7. Unity and Links with Other Churches

Recognising that it belongs to a worldwide fellowship of churches, the Congress will seek to create relationships with other indigenous Christian groups throughout the world. The Congress will seek to be recognised and accepted as a member in its own right of the Christian Conference of Asia, Pacific Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

In the Spirit of Christian unity, Congress will seek to establish close relationships with other Aboriginal and Islander Christian groups and people in Australia.

8. God's New Creation

In all of these tasks the Congress will herald Jesus Christ, sharing in the creation of a new order of righteousness and love as congregations and communities are built up in faith, in dignity, in hope and in health. BY health Congress means the total well being of people in spiritual, physical, cultural, social, economic and political aspects of life. This is God's shalom.

This holistic Gospel will also be reflected in the witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of pastor, of prophet and martyr, as members of Congress share the struggle of all Aboriginal and Islander peoples for justice in Australian society.

Congress seeks renewal and justice not only for its own people, but for all Australians. As it shares in the work of God's new creation, it will endeavour to provide leadership to the whole nation, sharing the wisdom and richness of Aboriginal and Islander cultures with all people, so that a more responsible and just society may be built.

Regulations

These Regulations set out the way the Congress has decided to work. They were adopted by the National Conference on the 11th December 1992. They may be amended at any time.

1. Membership
2. Congregations and parishes
3. Regional committees
4. National conference
5. Leadership and Ministry
6. Finances
7. Pastoral care and discipline

1. Membership

1.1 Members of Congress, (apart from honorary members) are Aboriginal and Islander people.

1.2 The Congress recognises five forms of membership: -Baptised members - Confirmed members - Life members - Members in association - Honorary members.

1.3 Baptised members are people who have been Baptised in any Christian denomination and who have been accepted as members of their Parish by the local Council of Elders. (Where there is no Council of Elders, the minister in consultation with the Regional Committee shall act.)

1.4 Confirmed members are people who have been Baptised and confirmed and who have been accepted as members of their Parish by the local Council of Elders. (Where there is no Council of Elders, the minister in consultation with the Regional Committee shall act.)

1.5 "Life members" are Aboriginal/Islander people who have made a very major contribution to the life of Congress. Life members are recognised as such by the Conference. Life members may speak and vote at meetings.

1.6 Members-in-association (baptised and confirmed) are members of another Christian denomination who wish to retain their membership in that denomination but who, *for the time being, share in the life of the Congress.

1.7 All confirmed members life members, and confirmed members-in-association may vote and stand for office.

1.8 People applying for membership will receive a program of education on the Congress, which will include information on the Constitution and Regulations of Congress.

1.9 Honorary members are non-Aboriginal people who have made and important contribution to the life of the Congress. Honorary members are recognised only by a majority vote of the National Conference. Honorary members may speak but not vote at meetings.

1.10 Adherents are people who worship regularly and share in the life of a congregation, but are not baptised or confirmed members or members-in-association. Adherents may attend and speak at meetings, but may not vote or stand for office.

2. Congregations and Parishes

2.1 The Regional Committee may recognise groups of worshipping, serving members as a Parish.

2.2 A Parish will have an elected Parish Council who will be responsible for the administration, property and finance of the Parish.

2.3 The Parish Council shall elect its own Chairperson.

2.4 A Parish will have a Council of Elders who will, with the minister, exercise pastoral oversight.

2.5 A Parish will, with the support of the Regional Committee, be responsible for funding its own work and will keep accurate books of account. The Parish Council will receive monthly financial reports. The books will be audited each year by an accredited auditor approved by the Regional Committee and a copy of the report is to be sent to the Regional Committee.

2.6 A Parish may have one, or more than one Congregations.

3. Regional Committees

3.1 The National Conference will set the boundaries for Regional Committees.

3.2 Where a Regional Committee is also a Presbytery of the Uniting Church, within the Congress it will be referred to as a Regional Committee.

3.3 Responsibilities of Regional Committees

Regional Committees will have the following responsibilities:

The pastoral oversight of all Parishes and Ministers within their bounds;

Creating or disbanding Parishes and changing their boundaries;

Dealing with matters referred to them by the Parishes;

Appointing and supervising the Development Team;

Carrying out the work of the Portfolio Areas(s) referred to them by the National Conference;

Appointing one woman (and alternate) to be the spokesperson on women's issues;

Helping the Uniting Church to struggle with the issue of the Covenant program;

Adopting Guidelines for their own well being;

Receiving reports from the Parishes and agencies;

Fulfilling such responsibilities of Presbyteries as have been referred to them.

3.4 Members of Regional Committees

The members of the Regional Committee shall be:

All ministers in parish settlement or other appointment within the bounds of the Regional Committee who are ministers of the Congress;

At least one lay person from each Parish;

Such other people as the Regional Committee may decide;

At least half of the members of the Regional Committee shall be lay persons;

The membership shall include at least two women wherever possible.

3.5 State Development Teams

Each Regional Committee will appoint a State Development team consisting of, as far as possible:

A Development and Outreach Officer;

A Consultant or Resource Worker;

A Pastoral Support Worker;

A Youth Worker.

4. National Conference

4.1 The role of the National Conference

The role of the National Conference is:

To get the policy for the Congress;

To deal with any issues affecting Aboriginal and Islander people on behalf of the Uniting Church;

To create, disband or alter the boundaries of Regional Committees and to support Regional Committees in their work;

To receive regular reports from the Regional Committees and National Staff;

To appoint Committees and to receive regular reports from such Committees. Such Committees may include:

Congress Ministerial Education Board;

Covenant steering committee;

National pastoral care committee;

National discipline committee.

To allocate Portfolio areas to the various Regional Committees. In the first instance these will be:

Vision, theology, spiritual warfare N.R.C.C.

Youth and family matters S.A.

Ministry of the Word, pastoral Vic & Tas

justice and social issues W.A.

Training and leadership devt N.S.W.

Administration and finance Q1d

Community development Q1d

To appoint and supervise the work of national staff;

To appoint members to the Uniting Church Assembly and to Assembly agencies, including:

Assembly Standing Committee (Chairperson and Administrator)
Commission for Women and Men
Commission for Mission
Ministerial Education Commission.

To enter into relationships with other bodies as it deems appropriate.

4.2 Meetings of the National Conference

The National Conference shall meet every eighteen months in different parts of Australia on a rotation basis.

4.3 Members of the National Conference

The members of the National Conference shall be:

Up to seventeen members of Congress from each Regional Committee area;

The Office Bearers.

The National Conference may delegate any of its responsibilities to the National Committee or to Regional Committees.

4.4 National Committee

The National Committee will carry out the responsibilities of the National Conference In between meetings of the Conference.

4.5 The National Committee shall consist of seventeen persons: The seven Chairpersons of Regional Committees; Seven elders, one appointed by each Regional Committee; Two women's representatives; A youth representative.

4.6 The role of the National Committee is to do such things as it is asked to do by the National Conference and may include:

Deciding the national budget;

Relating to the Assembly and its Committees;

Relating to Aboriginal and Islander organisations;

Relating to overseas churches;

Relating to Councils of Churches;

Raising funds;

Ensuring Conference resolutions are implemented;

Assisting the Regional Committees as requested;

Making urgent decisions on behalf of the Conference in between meetings of the Conference.

4.7 The National Committee can not overturn a policy decision of the National Conference.

4.8 National Executive

The members of the National Executive shall be:

The Chairpersons of the Regional Committees;
The Women's Conference Co-ordinator;
The Chairperson of the National Council of Elders.

4.9 State Chairpersons will report fully on 'all business of the National Conference, National Committee and National Executive to their Regional Committee at the next meeting of the Regional Committee.

4.10 Officers

The officers of the Congress shall be:

Chairperson;
Deputy Chairperson;
Administrator.

The officers, other than Administrator, shall serve for three years.

4.11 National Chairperson

The role of the National Chairperson is:

To chair the National Conference, the National Committee and the National Executive meetings. The Chairperson may invite Chairpersons of Regional Committees to chair sessions of the Conference on a rotation basis;

To serve as the official spokesperson for the Congress;

To represent the Congress as directed by the National Conference, the National Committee or the National Executive; (This responsibility may be delegated to others.)

With the Chairperson of the National Council of Elders, to provide pastoral support for Regional Chairpersons and ministers of the Congress, and to assist in dealing with difficulties experienced by these people;

To help to develop Regional Committees and to conduct Consultations.

4.12 National Administrator

The position of National Administrator is normally a full time 3-year settlement.

4.13 The skills and qualities required of the National Administrator shall include:

Well-versed in the Christian ethos;
Proven management ability;
To be of a personable nature;
Highly motivated;
Good communication ability;
Expertise in planning and development;
Understanding of principles of financial management;
Decisive in decision making;
Supportive of staff and committee people.

4.14 The responsibilities of the National Administrator are:

To prepare and distribute materials for meetings: agendas, reports and policy suggestions;

To visit the regions for encouragement and discussion about Congress work and in this way to support and promote growth of Congress;

To provide support for the portfolio groups;

To develop an appropriate national administrative structure;

To relate to the Uniting Church on behalf of the Congress nationally and to communicate the decisions of the Congress to the whole church;

To work with the Director for Mission and the Secretaries of the mission committees of the Commission for Mission,

To help the Regional Committees work through problems;

To conduct workshops and seminars;

To attend to the minutes and correspondence of the National Conference, the National Committee and the National Executive and to ensure that the decisions are carried out;

To help the Congress in its planning;

In consultation with Regional Committees, to build up relationships between the Congress and other Aboriginal and Islander organisations and Government agencies at all levels;

To report to each Conference;

To attend to any other matters referred to him/her by the National Conference, National Committee or National Executive.

4.15 The National Administrator is accountable to the National Conference and the National Committee through the Chairperson.

4.16 The process of considering the appointment or re-appointment of a person to the position of National Administrator shall be as laid down in the minutes of the National Executive of 4-7 November 1992.

4.17 Vacancies

When staff positions, other than the National Administrator, are due to become vacant, the following procedure shall be followed:

The position is advertised nationally;

The applications are received and discussed by the National Committee;

A selection committee is appointed, who shall make a recommendation to the National Committee;

The National Committee may encourage persons to apply;

The appointment shall be made by the National Committee.

4.18 Consultants and Co-ordinators

The Congress may, from time to time, appoint Consultants and Co-ordinators for such responsibilities and for such terms as it sees fit, including:

National Consultant (Pastoral Care and Development);

Financial adviser;

Consultant to the National Administrator;

Youth Co-ordinator;

Office Manager;

Covenant Co-ordinator.

Such Consultancies and Co-ordinating roles may be full time, part time or temporary. They may be stipended or voluntary.

4.19 National Consultant (Pastoral Care and Development) The role of the National Consultant (Pastoral Care and Development) is:

Making pastoral visits, especially to isolated areas;

Preaching and challenging the Congress;

Helping the Congress to work on justice issues;

Helping the Congress to work through ways in which Government policy affects Aboriginal and Islander people and advising the National Conference and its officers on appropriate responses;

Preparing reports on the work of the Congress.

The National Consultant (Pastoral Care and Development) will be accountable to the Conference through the National Administrator.

4.20 Congress Ministerial Education Board (M.E.B.)

The responsibilities of the Congress M.E.B. shall be:

To represent the U.A.I.C.C. on all matters relating to the application, processing and education of U.A.I.C.C. candidates for the specified ministries of the church (minister of the Word, deacon, lay preacher, youth worker, community minister, lay pastor), such as:

To act as the liaison body on behalf of the U.A.I.C.C. with the Ministerial Education Commission and the various M.E.B.s;

To support Regional Committees, where appropriate, in the process of selecting U.A.I.C.C. candidates, and in assisting in the formation of selection panels;

To support Regional Committees in the pastoral care of U.A.I.C.C. candidates where appropriate;

To support Regional Committees in the process of approving candidates for ordination and settlement where appropriate;

To refer U.A.I.C.C. candidates to the U.A.I.C.C. Faculty to arrange their further education;

To enter into negotiations with other M.E.B.s concerning the meeting of costs of training students from their Synod area;

To assess and make recommendations to Nungalinya College regarding the education of U.A.I.C.C. candidates through its national education network, and any other institutions educating U.A.I.C.C. candidates to ensure the education offered meets with U.A.I.C.C. expectations;

To report on the qualifications of any minister applying for recognition into the U.A.I.C.C. on transfer from another church;

To nominate to the Conference of the U.A.I.C.C. two persons to represent the U.A.I.C.C. on the Ministerial Education Commission;

To report annually to the U.A.I.C.C. and the M.E.C.

Other responsibilities include:

To facilitate continuing education for ministers as necessary and make provision for this as finance and time allow;

To facilitate and arrange for lay education as necessary and resources allow. (11/88)

(Note: any changes to the role of the M.E.B. must be approved by both the National Conference and the M.E.C.)

4.21 Members of the M.E.B. may serve up to six years with half of the members of the Board standing down every three years. Those standing down may stand for re-election. The members of the M.E.B. shall include at least one woman.

(Note: In the first instance, there will be an election for half of the members at the 1994 National Conference.)

4.22 Congress Faculty

The role of the Congress Faculty is:

To engage in, encourage and, where appropriate, direct study, teaching and research in theological and allied disciplines;

To make recommendations to and co-operate with Nungalinya Faculty where courses are done at Nungalinya College through the national education network.

4.23 The Faculty is responsible to the Ministerial Education Commission for.

Prescribing approved courses for candidates;

Giving credit for courses done;

Upon completion of the prescribed course of studies, for requesting from the M.E.C. the Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Studies.

4.24 The Faculty will consist of.

The Dean of students of the N.R.C.C.;

The full time teaching staff of Nungalinya College who are members of the Uniting Church in Australia;

Two persons appointed by the Congress M.E.B.;

One student elected by the theological student body (the student will not be present during the discussion of confidential matters).

4.25 The Faculty will report to the Congress M.E.B. annually.

4.26 The Faculty shall report to the Regional Committees annually regarding their students. The Regional Committees shall report to the relevant Synod agencies on their students.

4.27 National Council of Elders

National Elders are people with the following qualities:

Christian maturity and standing;

Recognised seniority and respect in the Aboriginal community;

Christian gifts and graces;

Commitment to the Congress;

Spiritual insight and wisdom;

An ability to provide leadership and spiritual guidance through both example and teaching.

4.28 Elders shall be at least forty years of age.

4.29 The role of the National Council of Elders includes:

Helping to set the tone and giving strength to the Congress;

Giving encouragement, advice and wise counsel;

Counseling applicants and candidates for the various ministries of the church;

Arranging the cycle of prayer and fasting;

Exercising discipline;

Developing the Congress vision and programs;

Fostering the development of Aboriginal theology;

Helping the Conference to develop policy;

Providing spiritual leadership and pastoral care.

4.30 Each Regional Committee shall appoint a Congress Elder.

4.31 Women's Conference

The purpose of the Women's Conference is to ensure that issues of concern to Aboriginal and Islander women are heard by the Congress.

4.32 Each Regional Committee shall appoint one spokesperson and an alternate on women's issues.

4.33 The spokespersons from the Regional Committees shall together form the Women's Conference.

4.34 The Women's Conference may meet during the National Conference.

5. Leadership and Ministry

5.1 The Congress recognises that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to both women and men.

5.2 Before recognising people with special gifts or appointing such people to particular positions, the views of the local Minister of the Word, Parish Council (or the local Congress fellowship where there is not yet a Parish Council, Area Committee where there is one, Regional Committee and National Committee shall be obtained.

5.3 Applications for candidature

The procedure for applying for candidature for one of the specified ministries of the church is as follows:

The person makes contact with the Minister and is interviewed by the Parish Council or local Congress fellowship).

The Parish Council (or local Congress fellowship) makes a recommendation to the Regional Committee. The Regional Committee again interviews the person. The person is counseled by the National Elder(s). When the person is interviewed, representatives of the Synod Selection Panel are present.

If the person is accepted as a candidate, he or she is referred to the Congress Ministerial Education Board.

Copies of minutes, correspondence and documents are forwarded to the M.E.B.

The M.E.B. refers the person to the Congress Faculty who shall decide, in consultation with the Ministerial Education Commission, what the training process will be.

5.4 The Role of Ministers of the Word and Pastors

The role of ministers of the Word and Pastors shall include:

To provide spiritual guidance and direction through ministry of the word and counseling;

To develop worship life;

To be responsible for pastoral care programs for the parish and community;

To develop a visitation program;

To oversee the normal areas of church ministry (youth ministry, family ministry, clan and outstation ministry, community programs etc.);

To identify, nurture and release gifts for ministry already present within the members of the Parish;

To uphold the dignity of Christian norms and values;

To foster the ethos of Congress.

6. Finances

6.1 All members of Congress are encouraged to offer one tenth of their income to the work of the Congress.

6.2 Parishes and Regional Committees are encouraged to be self-sufficient.

6.3 Each Parish is encouraged to organise a special event each year to raise funds for the work of the National Committee. Each Regional Committee is encouraged to bring gifts at the time of the National Conference.

6.4 Congress will hold before the Uniting Church the urgent needs of Aboriginal and Islander people and Invite the Uniting Church's partnership in providing resources.

7. Church discipline

7.1 Discipline in the Church is the exercise of spiritual authority with a view to honouring Christ as the Head of the Church, and ensuring the spiritual well being of its members. It is to be exercised in such a way that justice is done and that the natural right of anyone to a fair hearing is assured. Careful process therefore needs to be observed. Disciplinary process and action is always to be preceded by counseling. If counseling does not resolve the matter, only then does it become a matter of discipline (7/92)

7.2 Pastoral care and discipline of members

Pastoral care and discipline of members will be through the local Council of Elders.

7.3 Pastoral care and discipline of ministers

Where a Regional Committee is a Presbytery, the normal procedures of the Uniting Church are followed. The National Elder(s) will, however, be asked to play a major role.

7.4 Where a Regional Committee is not a Presbytery, the responsibility for the discipline of ministers is shared between the Regional Committee, the Presbytery of which the minister is a member and the National Office, with the National Elder(s) playing a major role.

Adopted by the National Conference on the 11th December, 1992