



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA

Thursday, 27 September 2012

Memorial Day Marks Backward Step

The Uniting Church in Western Australia will join with others to commemorate John Pat Memorial Day at 12noon on Friday 28 September, outside Fremantle Prison. John Pat, 16, died from head injuries 29 years ago in a police cell in Roebourne.

Since Mr Pat's death, the Uniting Church in Western Australia and the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA Inc have worked tirelessly together to bring justice for those who have died in custody, especially highlighting the alarming statistics of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal prisoners in our prisons.

Rev Sealin Garlett, chairperson of Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, believes that the recent change to policy, which means prisoners cannot attend funerals held more than 100kms away, is further administrative punishment to prisoners and their families.

"Aboriginal people will be the most adversely affected by this budget cut, a cut that was made without consultation with the Aboriginal community. This recent decision has come, not with the health and wellbeing of prisoners and communities in mind, but with concerns only for the bottom line."

Rev Ron Larkin, Moderator of the Uniting Church in Western Australia, said that people in prison are already some of the most vulnerable. Further disconnecting them from family and culture is not the way to rehabilitate or care for troubled people in prison, their families and our communities. These issues have been extensively highlighted in Royal Commissions and enquiries. It is time for the WA Government to give heed to those recommendations.

The intended plan for funerals to be screened via the internet will also be inappropriate for cultural reasons, as filming ceremonies such as this is culturally offensive to some communities.

"Cost cutting to serve the Department of Corrective Services will harm people in our community who are already vulnerable," said Rev Larkin. "The hope, connection to community and country, and the health and wellbeing of prisoners during rehabilitation must be our main priority."

The Moderator and Rev Sealin Garlett are available for interview. For media enquiries, please contact Maggie Johns, Media & Communications Manager, on 0419 831 576.