
Social Justice Board

Chairperson

Associate General Secretary

Staff

David Gray

Rosemary Hudson Miller (until July 2016)

Geoff Bice

Rev Eira Clapton

Rev George Davies

Rev Ruth Vertigan

Jessica Morthorpe (until Jan 2016)

Trish Thomson-Harry

Glen Banks

Alison Xamon (May 2016)

Ashley Macmillan

Karen Sloan

Members elected by Synod

Members elected by General Council

The Social Justice Board (SJB) has participated in a wide range of activities over the last 12 months within the areas of human rights, the environment, peace and other areas as required by our mandate.

Due to the large volume of issues captured within these areas, we regularly review our own strategic plan to ensure an appropriate distribution of resources to the various issues. We are also mindful of the Strategic Directions approved by Presbytery in the May 2015 meeting. Our work falls within all of the four strategic directions.

We adopted a three year Strategic Plan in November 2014 to direct our work through to 2017. Copies of the Strategic Plan are available from the Social Justice Unit.

The SJB's Goals for 2015-2017 are:

1. To influence an increase in understanding of, and attitudes towards, human rights and social justice issues within the Uniting Church, its congregations and the community.
2. To influence change in government policies and practice that deny human rights and social justice.

SJB's priorities for 2016 which define the Board and Board staff annual work-plan are:

1. Human Rights, especially as they pertain to:
 - a. Refugees – ongoing support of CARAD and advocacy in this area. (25% of our work)
 - b. Indigenous – ongoing advocacy, active support to UAICC (Congress), Bringing Them Home WA and ReconciliationWA. (10% of our work)
2. Environmental issues – informing and educating within the Uniting Church. (25% of our work)
3. Peace – in the context of (25% of our work)
 - a. The campaign in Iraq and Syria
 - b. The ongoing issue of terrorism
 - c. The 100 year anniversary of the First World War
 - d. Campaigns for nuclear disarmament
4. Other issues when time permits – (15% of our work)

I. HUMAN RIGHTS

I.1 Anti-Protest Laws

Staff from the unit and members of the Board have been involved in a community network which has been advocating that this bill (which has passed the WA upper house) not be passed.

I.2 Suicide Prevention

We have been collaborating with other synods on a suicide prevention resource, and discussions are taking place with UnitingCare West about this.

I.3 The Safe Schools Controversy

As Rosemary Hudson Miller was on the steering committee formed by the Equal Opportunity Commission, she participated in the debates which arose and met with several members of parliament to brief them. The Social Justice Board wrote letters in support of this anti-bullying strategy.



1.4 Human Rights concerns

The Uniting Church Synod of WA wrote a letter following concerns raised with the social justice unit about the assassination of an African activist. This involved a proposed mining operation in South Africa which is being led by a company based in WA. Copies were sent to the company and the Federal Government.

1.5 Prison Justice

The Social Justice Board has engaged with a broad network of concerned groups to develop an advocacy plan for a WA based justice reinvestment model. The coalition, Social Investment WA, has been developing an holistic approach required for reducing Indigenous incarceration rates, reducing the numbers of Aboriginal children going into State care, and improving a wide range of other connected social issues. This continues the long and significant work of the UCA in the legal justice area.

1.6 Refugees

The political discourse relating to asylum seekers and refugees has seen a continued increase in its severity.

In response to this, the Board co-ordinated a coalition of churches and refugee advocacy groups to conduct the Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees 2016. This proved an effective collaboration, seeing 1000 people on the streets of Perth calling for more compassion in Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

The Social Justice Board was also pleased to be involved again in the Refugee Welcome Fiesta with CARAD and community groups for Refugee Week.

We also helped to organise and run the Walk Together in Victoria Park in October. Over 1000 people attended this family activity day promoting acceptance of people from all cultural backgrounds.

We are happy to see the growing involvement of congregations and individual Church members in our refugee work. The Board continues to support CARAD in its work with refugees, asylum seekers and detainees. This organisation is funded via some philanthropic and government grants and by the generous and ongoing support

from the Uniting Church in the City and by many individual members of the Uniting Church and others who donate accommodation, money and time. CARAD (<http://www.carad.org.au/>) is faced with the ongoing need to provide support for people released from detention centres on Bridging Visas, with no right to work, and no right to English lessons.

The 'Fair Go for Asylum Seekers' appeal to provide legal support to asylum seekers is being supported by Uniting Church WA SJB.

Rev Eira Clapton, Justice & Mission Assistant, is currently the Vice Chairperson of CARAD. The so called 'Fast Track' processing of asylum applications has required both CARAD and The Humanitarian Group (previously Case for Refugees) to extend themselves in new ways to try to support people through this difficult process.

After some period without the funding for a Manager of Volunteers, CARAD secured important funding and was able to make an appointment.

Eira Clapton is and Rosemary (up until the end of July), was, involved in the National Council of Churches led Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, whose website <http://www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au/> has good resources on this topic.

1.7 Sanctuary

In response to a cohort of children who were threatened with being returned to Nauru after being in Australia for medical treatment, Church leaders around the country are invoking the historical concept of sanctuary. Eight Uniting Churches in WA are part of this offer. The churches are being coordinated by the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, with the staff of the Justice & Mission Unit involved. This included Rosemary and Geoff running training sessions and providing technical advice for those involved.

We were instrumental in the distribution of the UnitingJustice election resources for the federal election of July 2016 and also the new Assembly UJA resource 'Shelter From the Storm'.



1.8 Indigenous Reconciliation/Covenanting

The Board continues to support the work of the Bringing Them Home WA Committee (<http://bringingthemhomewa.com/>), including assisting with the organisation of the annual Sorry Day event (May 26) and resourcing other events of the Committee through the year. The Sorry Day 2016 commemoration was a great success with a broad range of high school students participating in a wide array of activities. The Board will continue to offer support to the Committee through participation at meetings, some administrative support and support to events such as Sorry Day. Geoff Bice, Justice & Mission Officer, currently sits on the Bringing Them Home WA executive committee as co-secretary. Geoff is the non-Aboriginal delegate for WA to the National Stolen Generation Alliance.

The SJB has been working closely with members of the UAICC through the Covenanting

Commission on a number of issues affecting Aboriginal communities including the proposed Roe 8 development through the Beelie Wetlands, Indigenous incarceration rates, Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and Remote Communities Reforms, in consultation with Northern Regional Council of Congress.

The reform of remote Aboriginal communities is an issue of great concern to the UAICC and the SJB is assisting in ongoing advocacy work in this area. Geoff is participating in the Homelands Coalition supporting remote communities to advocate for their rights.

Following the resolution at the 2015 Synod about 'paying the rent' a Task Group was set up. Several meetings have taken place but further discussions are required before an adequate arrangement is achieved.

2. ENVIRONMENT

The Board undertakes general support and advocacy in line with resolutions in Synod and Assembly about the environment. For example we were co-signatories to the Letter to the Treasurer on Fossil Fuel Subsidies and we made submissions regarding the proposed Mulga Rock, Yeelirrie and Wiluna Uranium Mines.

Further resources for congregations interested in the environment can be found on our EcoChurchesWA website at <http://ecochurcheswa.net/>

2.1 World Environment Day

Members of the Board worked together with environment representatives from other Synods on a national resource, branded under UnitingJustice, for World Environment Day, 5 June. This was available online, and distributed to congregations in the WA Synod for use on the Sunday following World Environment Day.

2.2 People's Climate March

Members of congregations and the Social Justice Board attended the People's Climate March, Staff of the Unit were involved in the organisation of the 29 November 2015 march through Perth in advance of the Paris talks.

2.3 WA Civil Society Climate Roundtable

The SJB is a member of the WA Civil Society

Climate Roundtable which exists to drive action to address the causes and effects of climate change. The focus of the group has shifted to promoting the development of renewable energy as a key alternative to coal and gas.

2.4 Sustainable September

Every year the Social Justice Board works on a resource for Sustainable September. Last year the theme was 'Unlimited love for a limited planet – consume with care', the 2016 resource has the theme: 'Time to Act'. The materials produced for Sustainable September are intended to be a comprehensive resource for use in congregations, they are also used by some small groups and school chaplains. We are grateful for the work of Rev Eira Clapton along with Rev Brenton Prigge and Rev Dr Bill Loader for their contributions to the 2016 resource.

2.5 General Council Environment Task Group

Following the adoption of several Green Church policies, the Social Justice staff have been assisting the staff in the Uniting Church Centre to look at modifying our office practices to improve our green credentials.



2.6 Other Environmental Work

Following the successful God of Sea & Sky conference, we held an evening in which Jessica Morthorpe gave a report on the trip to Rome which was connected with the Emerging Leaders Multi-Faith Climate Convergence.

Discussions with UnitingCare West about solar energy are continuing. They are keen to explore ways for their low-income housing tenants to access solar energy.

The Social Justice Unit hosted a Masters Student, Christie Marsh, as an intern through Curtin University. She has written a briefing paper on the effects of climate change on our international partner churches around the Indian Ocean Rim. This paper forms the basis for a congregational study resource planned to be available next year.

3. PEACE

We created a new website to help prioritise the work of peace: <http://unitingforpeacewa.org>

UnitingJustice created a resource for the International Day of Peace, to which we contributed. We helped to distribute this resource in WA congregations.

The Board is working on a plan to have a peace conference in the near future.

3.1 Fairtrade / Human Trafficking

The board continues to encourage the use of Fairtrade products and supports various campaigns against human trafficking and forced labour.

3.2 Nuclear Weapons

The board continues to support ICAN, the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons as it gathers more momentum for a UN agreement.

4. OTHER WORK

4.1 Ecumenical Social Justice Roundtable

The Social Justice Board is involved in regular round table meetings with our ecumenical social justice partners in the Anglican, Catholic, Salvation Army, Baptist and Quaker churches. The group is finding many areas of commonality. They are seeking ways to share resources and speak in the community as an ecumenical voice. This group has been able to collaborate annually in the Anti-Poverty Week Ecumenical service which will be hosted by our Anglican partners in October.

4.2 Justice and Mission Update

Our commitment to share news and information to the wider church continues with the development of our weekly email update – the Justice & Mission Update. We continue to have strong reader interest in our update and find it to be one of our best communication tools. Members of the Board are also committed to utilizing social media to reach out to a wider range of people and connect with other advocacy groups on a range of issues as they arrive. It also allows interaction in public debate as it happens.

You can subscribe to the Justice and Mission Update by emailing social.justice@wa.uca.org.au or link to us via Twitter @JamUCWA or Facebook www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeUCWA

4.3 Staff

The Justice & Mission Unit is currently comprised of Geoff Bice, Eira Clapton and Marg Staffa as staff.

We also acknowledge with great appreciation the work of Rosemary Hudson Miller, whose 17 year contribution to the Social Justice Board has been immense. Rosemary's boundless passion for justice, deep compassion for others and profound commitment to the work of social justice through the Uniting Church has seen her gain great respect across many sectors of society.

We thank Rosemary and all members of the Social Justice Board for their contribution.

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