

Social Justice

<i>Chairperson</i>	David Gray
<i>General Secretary</i>	Rev David de Kock
<i>Staff</i>	Geoff Bice
	Eira Clapton (until July 2017)
<i>Members elected by Synod</i>	Rev George Davies
	Rev Ruth Vertigan
	Glen Banks
	Alison Atkinson-Phillips
	Wendy Hendry
	Ps Karen Sloan (retired)
	Ashley McMillan
<i>New Nominations</i>	Mark Brisbane

I. INTRODUCTION

The Social Justice Commission (SJC) continues to contribute on issues covered by our mandate including the areas of human rights for refugees, asylum seekers and aboriginal people; the environment; peace and other areas as required.

Social justice is the mission, passion and ultimately the responsibility of the whole Synod. Under its by-laws, the SJC informs and facilitates church initiatives, consistent with policies decided by Synod, and proposes continuing developments in policy to Synod. On issues requiring public comment, the Commission works primarily through and with the Moderator, the principal public spokesperson of the WA Synod. It supports the roles of church leaders in advocating desirable changes to the government's and the wider community's perspectives and policies on social justice.

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The SJC has initiated a strategic planning process to review its strategic goals. This has clarified some important aspects of functions and roles of the members, Chair and staff of the commission. This coming year and beyond will see those enhanced understandings being brought to bear upon the Commission's further planning. Broad aspects of strategic direction being discussed include:

- 2.1 Improving the execution of the Commission's role in communicating about the detailed background of particular social justice issues within the Church, including with church leaders, congregations, agencies and schools.
- 2.2 Establishing clearer governance relations between Commission members, staff and the Synod, including the General Secretary, the Standing Committee and the Synod in meeting.
- 2.3 Developing ways to work as effectively as possible within the limited resources available to the Commission, including the use of members as voluntary researchers and advocates.

Alongside this, the SJC has continued in numerous advocacy campaigns for the sake of the most vulnerable in our society and for the environment that sustains us.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS

3.1 Anti-Protest Laws

Following sustained pressure from the Protect Peaceful Protest coalition, in which the SJC participated, the draft anti-protest legislation was dropped down the parliamentary agenda and left unpassed prior to the state election. The new state government has committed against passing such laws.

3.2 Prison Justice

The Social Justice Commission has continued to be actively involved with a broad network of concerned groups to advocate for a WA based justice reinvestment model. The coalition, Social Reinvestment WA, is campaigning for an holistic approach to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates by addressing the underlying causes of incarceration and implementing adequate and appropriate prevention, diversion and rehabilitation programs. This continues the long and significant work of the Uniting Church in the legal justice area.

3.3 Refugees

The SJC again co-ordinated a coalition of churches and refugee advocacy groups to conduct the Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees 2017. 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.

We also helped to organise and run the Walk Together through the City of Perth in October 2016. Combining with Expressstival in Forrest Place, over 1000 people participated in the walk and activity day promoting acceptance of refugees, asylum seekers and people from all cultural backgrounds.

The Commission continues to support CARAD (<http://www.carad.org.au/>) in its work with refugees, asylum seekers and detainees. Thanks goes to UCIC and many individual Uniting Church members who donate accommodation, money and time.

The 'Fair Go for Asylum Seekers' appeal was relaunched as the 'Seeking Refuge WA' campaign to raise funds for legal support to up to 1500 asylum seekers in WA who need to apply for a protection visa by October. The campaign proved very successful, raising over \$90,000.

The SJC is currently working with a range of organisations to produce a co-ordinated state based advocacy approach for fairer concessions and supports for asylum seekers and refugees in the WA community.

Eira Clapton, 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.

3.4 Aboriginal Justice/Covenanting

The SJC 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 2017 commemoration was a great success with a broad range of high schools students participating in a wide array of activities. Being the 20th anniversary of the handing down of the Bringing Them Home Report, a special concert with Archie Roach was also held. The SJC 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 Consultant, currently sits on the Bringing Them Home WA executive committee as secretary. Geoff is also the non-Aboriginal delegate for WA to the National Stolen Generation Alliance.

The SJC has been working closely with members of the UAICC through the Covenanting Commission on a number of issues affecting Aboriginal communities including the Roe 8 project through the Beeliar Wetlands, Indigenous incarceration rates, Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and Remote Communities Reforms. The SJC was pleased to see the Roe 8 project halted by the new state government.

4. LGBTIQ

The SJC again supported the Christians with Pride float in the annual Pride Parade and continues to liaise with UnitingNetwork in support of rights for LGBTIQ people.

5. ENVIRONMENT

The SJC has developed a dedicated website for its environmental resources (<http://ecochurcheswa.net/>) and has actively advocated on the following issues:

5.1 Fracking

Following its educational and advocacy campaign requesting a moratorium on fracking the SJC was pleased to see the new state government commit to a moratorium across WA and a ban in the South West and Perth metropolitan area. The SJC is now seeking clarification on some of the terms of the moratorium and awaits the findings of the related inquiry.

5.2 Climate Change and Renewable Energy Transition

The SJC is an active participant on a couple of state-based climate change advocacy networks. Geoff Bice is currently on the steering committee of the RenewWA coalition which came together to advocate primarily for the implementation of the WA renewable energy target. This campaign is ongoing in its efforts to have adequate state level climate change strategies implemented including a fair and timely plan to transition to renewable energy.

Geoff Bice is also a convenor of the WA Climate Network which is a forum to facilitate discussion of climate change responses across diverse sectors of the WA community.

5.3 Sustainable September

Every year the Social Justice Commission works on a resource for Sustainable September. Last year the theme was "Time to Act" and the 2017 resource has the theme: "For the Beauty of the Earth". The materials produced for Sustainable September are intended to be a comprehensive resource for use in congregations and is also used by some small groups and school chaplains. We are grateful for the work of Rev Eira Clapton in compiling the 2017 resource.

5.4 Five Leaf Eco Awards

The SJC encourages congregations to work towards obtaining Five Leaf Eco Awards as was resolved by the meeting of the 2016 Synod. The SJC congratulates UCIC, Pinjarra and Swan View Uniting Churches for the awards they have received in the last 12 months.

6. PEACE

Due to time and resource pressures the SJC has not been able to give as much attention to some aspects of its peace work as it would like, but the following issues have still been addressed. For more information on the priorities of the SJC's peace work please visit: <http://unitingforpeacewa.org>.

6.1 Uranium Mining

The SJC was pleased to see the new state government re-introduce a ban on all future uranium mine proposals, however concerns remain over the fate of the four existing proposals approved by the previous government. The Commission continues to engage the government on the details and progress of these existing proposals.

6.2 Fairtrade / Human Trafficking

The board continues to encourage the use of Fairtrade products and supports various campaigns against human trafficking, forced labour and exploitation. The SJC encourages congregations to use the Freedom Sunday worship resources produced by Stop The Traffik.

6.3 Nuclear Weapons

The SJC was pleased to see the United Nations agree to a ban on nuclear weapons following protracted campaigning by the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons. However, it was disappointing to see Australia vote against the ban.

7. OTHER WORK

7.1 WA State Election Resources

The SJC produced and distributed resources about social justice issues relevant to this year's WA State election, highlighting key topics the Commission has advocated for.

7.2 Ecumenical Social Justice Roundtable

The Social Justice Commission is involved in regular roundtable meetings with our ecumenical social justice partners in the Anglican, Catholic, Salvation Army, and Quaker churches. The group is finding many 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 the Uniting Church at the Wesley UCIC, 1pm, October 17.

7.3 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. Members of the Commission are also committed to utilizing social media to reach out to a wider range of people. 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

7.4 Media Appearances

The SJC co-ordinated several media appearances for different issues including:

- the launch of the Climate Consensus Statement
- the promotion of the UCIC solar panel array
- the opposition to the Roe 8 project with UAICC
- Highlighting the impact of climate change:
 - in the Pacific with Rev James Bhagwan and;
 - the Frack Free Future forum

7.5 Engagement with new WA state government

Since the changeover of state government the SJC has helped prepare a number of letters to several new Ministers. Geoff Bice (and on occasion the Moderator and Chair of UAICC) has since met with a number of parliamentary members (or their offices) to discuss issues pertaining to our areas of work, including:

Hon. Bill Johnston

Hon. Fran Logan

Hon. Alison Xamon

Hon. Stephen Dawson

Hon. Allanah MacTiernan

Ms Janine Freeman

Hon. Simone McGurk

8. STAFFING

The Justice and Mission Unit is currently comprised of Geoff Bice, with Marg Staffa providing administrative support.

The SJC recognises that the current staffing level in the Justice & Mission Unit is inadequate to sustain the existing level and scope of work. The SJC therefore wrote to the General Secretary requesting an increase. Due to stated budget restrictions a reinstatement of a portion of previous staffing levels was not deemed possible.

The SJC wishes to acknowledge with great appreciation the work of Rev Eira Clapton, whose five-year contribution to the Social Justice Commission has been greatly valued. Eira has chosen to begin her retirement and will be deeply missed. Eira's passion for justice as a fundamental expression of the gospel, her deep compassion for others and her dedication to the work of social justice through the Uniting Church have sustained her enormous contribution.

We thank Eira for her efforts and insights and wish her well in retirement.

David Gray

davidmgray@westnet.com.au