



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA
Maggie Johns mobile 0419 831 576

14 October 2020

Uniting Church says WA's \$1.2 billion surplus could be used to help people out of poverty

Today, WA church leaders gathered for an ecumenical Anti-Poverty Week service to consider what drives and sustains poverty in Australia.

Susy Thomas, Moderator of the Uniting Church WA, took the opportunity to call on the WA Government to consider the needs of those who are doing it tough rather than hoarding its surplus.

"The Uniting Church, along with all churches, has always had concern for people experiencing poverty and everyday our care agencies see the impacts homelessness has on people's health and wellbeing.

Today the Minister for Housing, Hon. Peter Tinley launched the WA Government's Housing Strategy. Ms Thomas welcomed the plan to coordinate progress across the housing sector, especially the commitment to increase social housing supply.

Ms Thomas said she was greatly encouraged by the plan but questioned why some of the measures couldn't be brought forward, given the budget surplus announced last week.

"Last week, the WA Government tabled its budget – one of the most important budgets that Treasurer Ben Wyatt has had to hand down, given the impacts of Covid-19.

"The WA Government have managed the economy well and there are definitely a number of encouraging announcements in the Budget. We are very grateful for the leadership displayed during the pandemic, but it is still troubling to us that the WA Government is choosing to retain a \$1.2 billion surplus when there are people who do not even have a roof over their heads."

Ms Thomas was keen to express her gratefulness for a number of the Government's initiatives on housing and homelessness, but questioned the need for such a large surplus when there are Western Australians in poverty.

"We welcome the commitments that have been made to reduce household energy costs, support remote communities and provide some new social housing. That is all very positive and fits with our vision for a fair and equal society. We want to encourage those efforts, however, we find it difficult to justify the retention of more than a billion dollars when there are people who are sleeping rough.

“We have significant numbers of people accessing homelessness services and the waitlist for social housing in WA has 14,000 people on it. Now is not the time to save for a rainy day – for people on the street, it is already raining.

Ms Thomas said she was encouraged that Anthony Albanese, Premier McGowan’s Federal Labor party leader, identified social housing as a priority investment point in his Federal Budget Reply speech.

Ms Thomas said “The Federal Opposition Leader has correctly recognised the dual economic and social benefits of creating jobs by building and repairing social housing.

“We hope that the Premier and Treasurer will see this surplus, which we are so blessed to have in WA, as an opportunity to fast-track key elements of the new WA Housing Strategy. With such low rental availability at the moment, combined with the looming drop-off of JobKeeper and JobSeeker, we don’t want to see a further surge in homelessness when the moratorium on evictions ends.

“Both wisdom and compassion suggest that now is the time to spend any surplus for the benefit of those most in need.”

Ends

*For media enquiries and interviews, please contact
Media and Communications Manager, Maggie Johns on 0419 831 576*