



SYNOD 2023 REPORT SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

MEMBERSHIP

Chair	Mark Brisbane (to Dec, 2022)
Chair	Rev Gordon Scantlebury (from Jan 2023)
General Secretary	Dr Rev Andrew Williams
Staff Appointed by General Secretary:	Geoff Bice (to April, 2023)
	Wendy Hendry (to Feb, 2023)
Member	Mary Elton
Member	Rev Sophia Lizares
Member	Dr Bob French
Member	Libby Williams
Member	Dr Daniel Vuicich
Member	Alex McKellar
Member	Annette Boyle
Member	Simone Smalley

REPORT

Introduction

The Social Justice Commission views its work as a key embodiment of our vision to be a Christian community for everyone. In many ways the social justice work of the Uniting Church is one of our most visible and respected means of engaging with the community.

The Commission has worked well through much of the last year, ably supported by our Social Justice Officer, Geoff Bice and Assistant Officer, Wendy Hendry. Sadly, both of

these people finished up from their positions in the first half of 2023 and Synod funding constraints have meant that these roles could no longer be filled.

The loss of professional support from the Social Justice Unit has essentially crippled the Commission since that time such that much of the higher level work (e.g. researching of issues and monitoring of public policy, preparing submissions to government, maintaining networks ecumenically and in the wider community, advising the Synod and Moderator on social issues etc.) will no longer be possible in our current form. We continue however, to resource the Church on social issues and advocate for justice to the extent we are able.

First Peoples

- Raised the issue with the Western Australian state government minister regarding the poor situation at the Banksia Hill detention centre and the inappropriate practice of sending juvenile offenders to an adult prison (this largely affected indigenous offenders).
- Engagement with Congress and the wider community with regards the murder of Cassius Turvey.
- Engagement with indigenous community groups with regards the protection of the Burrup Peninsular as a heritage precinct.
- Supported and promoted the 'Yes' case for the Indigenous Voice to Parliament. This included purchasing 2 banners to be used at churches, promotion through social media, engagement in forums and the production of a worship resource for congregations (in conjunction with the Covenanting Committee).
- Supported the Bringing Them Home movement and the need of compensation for those affected.

Environment

- In assisting the Synod to become more aware of its environmental impact an audit has been done of the Synod's carbon footprint. This audit ('Net Zero') reports to the Synod's Standing Committee, with the work largely being done from a working group of the Social Justice Commission.
- Worship resources were produced for Sustainable September 2022 and will be offered for an environmental justice Sunday in September, 2023.

- Ongoing engagement with ARRCC WA (Australian Religious Response to Climate Change) with inter-faith worship at St Mary's cathedral and involvement in various forums.

Human Rights

- The Commission followed up from the resolution of the 2022 Synod meeting with regards social and affordable housing. Letters were sent to state and federal governments and the resolution was promoted in the media.
- We advocated for Healthy Homes for Renters, particularly around practical issues such as insulation in homes, longer term leases and access to rooftop solar plans etc.
- We advocated for the 'Raising the Age' of criminal responsibility in Western Australia. The age is currently set at 10 years old which we would aim to raise to 14 years old. This advocacy included letter writing to the state government, promotion on social media and Mother's Day postcards being distributed.
- Engagement and support of a Human Rights Act for Western Australia.
- Engagement and advocacy with regards human rights in West Papua.
- Attendance at the Palestinian Solidarity conference in support of Palestinian Christians.
- Supported the PALM (Pacific Australia Labour Mobility) scheme workers to connect with local churches.
- Promotion of the LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex and other) Pride Parade.
- Support for the Equal Voice WA forums on faith and sexuality.
- Advocacy against the abusive practice of gay conversion therapy, particularly in relation to the practices at Esther House.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- Advocacy to support permanency for refugees on short term and bridging visas.
- Production and distribution of a worship resource for congregations to be used for Refugee Sunday.
- Involvement in the Palm Sunday March for Peace that was also in support of refugees and asylum seekers.

General

- Following the 2022 Synod resolution regarding On-line gambling, media releases were sent out and there was media engagement on ABC radio. In particular we are seeking to abolish the use of credit cards for on-line platforms.
- The Commission wrote to the state government with our concerns about new laws being proposed that would allow arbitrary arrest in 'Protected Entertainment Precincts'. It is thought these laws could unjustly target indigenous people, the homeless and those with disabilities (particularly mental health).
- Promotion of 'Watch Your Language' – for the use of inclusive and understandable language in churches and meetings.
- Input was made into looking at how the Synod is engaging in ethical investment.
- A World Day of Social Justice worship resource was produced and promoted.

Rev Gordon Scantlebury

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