

JUSTACT

SOCIAL JUSTICE NEWS & RESOURCES

FEBRUARY 2018



NEW YEAR, NEW UNIT

As many of you know, the work of the JIM Unit has been going through a restructuring process which is gradually coming to fruition. We are now part of an exciting new Unit called 'equipping Leadership for Mission' (eLM). The role of the new unit is to increase the capacity of congregations, communities and individuals to thrive in their missional work within the 21st century.

The social justice and environment work will now be part of a new team called Priorities, Focus and Advocacy and includes a range of focused ministries with children, young people, families, multi-cultural churches, the arts, disability inclusion as well as new and renewed communities of faith. It will be great to have

these aspects of the church's work integrated with the social justice and environment work.

Rev Nigel Hanscamp will officially begin as the Director, Priorities, Focus & Advocacy on 1 April. Nigel brings experience in the field of missional engagement with congregational life, management of staff involved in missional resourcing, and a passion for faith development and growth.

The staff carrying forward the social justice and environment work and their new roles are:

Mark Zirnsak – Senior Social Justice Advocate

Jill Ruzbacky – Social Justice Advocate (on sick leave)

Denisse Sandoval – Social Justice Advocate (on maternity leave until April)

Chris Rummery – Social Justice Researcher (until September)

Jenna Mizzi – Social Justice Researcher (until mid year)

Cath James has decided to move on and will finish up on 23 February.

Thank all of you for being supporters of the former JIM Unit and hope you will continue to support the work of the Priorities, Focus and Advocacy Unit as we move into this next stage. At the moment the JustUpdate email list is the best way of staying up to date with news. If you are not already on the list, you can subscribe by sending an email to: chris.rummery@victas.uca.org.au.

RENEWABLE ENERGY TARGET EXCEEDED

As far back as 1977, in the Uniting Church's first statement to the nation, the Uniting Church has been advocating for increased update of renewable energy. In more recent times the church has campaigned for protection of the Renewable Energy Target (RET) to help shift away from polluting fossil fuels and play our part to address climate change globally. The campaign we were part of was largely a success and the RET was maintained, although at a reduced level.

In great news the RET of 33 gigawatts of power supply from renewable sources by 2020 will be exceeded thanks to a surge in investment in wind and solar farms largely driven by

the Victorian and Queensland Governments.

Also rooftop solar power generation on Australian homes has continued to increase with over 1 gigawatts of new rooftop solar capacity added in 2017, beating the previous record set in 2012. Houses and businesses adding rooftop solar has grown 50-fold in the last decade.

Proposed investments in wind and solar power generation mean that half of Australia's power supply will be from renewable sources by 2030. The catch is that many of the proposed projects do not yet have a financial commitment or a long term power purchase agreement to support them and may not get built unless there is a strong policy to replace the RET when it comes to an end in 2020.

The tide globally and in Australia is turning against on-going use of coal as a fuel source, out of concerns that the pollution it causes is causing harm through climate change.

The National Australia Bank announced in December 2017 that it would stop providing finance for new thermal coal mining projects, making it the first major Australia bank to do so. However, it continues to finance corporations with existing coal mine and energy facilities and new coal-fired power stations although this reduced between 2014 and 2017.

However, significantly greater action is required by the Commonwealth Government for Australia to do its fair share in reducing greenhouse gas emissions to curb the harms human-induced climate change will cause. Australia's greenhouse gas emissions increased by 5% over the last two years. Significant contributions to the growth came from greenhouse gas emissions related to transport and emissions from industries that burn things as part of their business activity.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in support of maintaining the RET.

As part of our broad campaign to stop the harm caused by privatisation, we invited you to write to the Victorian Government asking them to stop electricity businesses gouging excessive profits from families. This profiteering has seen vulnerable people having their electricity cut off as they cannot afford to pay the excessive electricity charges. In the 2016-2017 financial year, almost 50,000 families had their gas or electricity cut off for being unable to pay their bills and around 80,000 people used a hardship program to manage debts related to electricity and gas.

One of the things we requested you write in support of was an independent energy broker for families.

The Victorian Government has responded to this request and promised to introduce an independent energy broker who will collectively bargain for a cheaper deal for vulnerable families. The scheme will initially target 10,000 of the most vulnerable people in Victoria. The broker will start operation in April.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in support of reforms to rein in the greed of electricity businesses.

LOW INCOME FAMILIES TO GET ACCESS TO FREE ENERGY BROKER

Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
130 Little Collins Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000

Phone - (03) 9251 5271
jim@victas.uca.org.au

As part of our ongoing campaign to stop the proposed Adani coalmine, we have invited you to write various letters opposing the financing of the mine by various bodies.

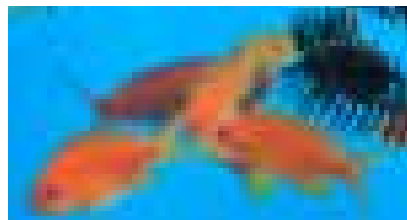
In good news the re-elected Labor Government in Queensland has used its power of veto over the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility who was looking to provide a \$1 billion concessional loan to Adani to build a rail link between the proposed mine and the port to export the

coal. In response, construction company Downer abandoned \$2 billion of construction contracts with Adani for the Carmichael mine.

In further good news, a number of Chinese banks have ruled out providing loans to Adani for the coal mine, making it harder for Adani to find finance for the project.

Thanks again to everyone who wrote back in April 2017 to oppose the mine.

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT BLOCKS LOAN FOR ADANI COAL MINE



PLANS TO DRUG TEST PEOPLE LOCKED OUT OF JOBS ABANDONED

The JIM Unit has long campaigned against the unfair treatment of those in need of government support and more recently the attack on people having their support reduced for not having a paid job, even when the jobs don't exist.

In September 2017 we invited you to write to cross-bench Senators to block the Federal Government's plans to conduct drug tests of people as a means of cutting off support. Similar programs have been tried and abandoned in the UK, New Zealand, Canada and some states in the USA. This type of drug testing is also opposed by health bodies that assist people suffering with a drug addiction.

Enough of the cross-bench Senators joined with Labor and the Greens to oppose the drug testing and the Commonwealth Government has now abandoned the plan.

Over 200,000 people with drug and alcohol addiction problems are unable to access treatment because the Commonwealth Government has not made funding treatment services a priority for its spending. Providing support to people who want to overcome a drug or alcohol addiction should be the priority for government, not punishing those that have been locked out of having a paid job.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in response to the September letter-writing action.

The Uniting Church has had a long standing position that prison should be a last resort and that prevention and rehabilitation are preferred options. In February 2017 we invited you to write to the Victorian Government urging reforms to the youth justice system to help young people get their lives back on track.

In December 2017 the Victorian Government announced it would help the Children's Court deliver on Youth Control Orders with \$23.9 million in funding. The Youth Control Orders are an alternative to

sending children to prison, where their chances of rehabilitation are lower. The Youth Control Orders involve intensive supervision and monitoring by the court for up to a year. They will commence in June 2018.

The funding will allow the Children's Court to hire additional staff including new magistrates and other staff to assist with helping children get on a path to a meaningful future.

Unfortunately, the Victorian Government is still committed to

YOUTH JUSTICE REFORMS

building a large prison for children, despite ample evidence from the US that such children's prisons are a disaster that fail to rehabilitate children, increase crime rates and waste valuable government revenue that could be used to make our community better and safer.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters back in February 2017 on the issue of youth justice reform.

One of the exciting things to emerge from the implementation of the Major Strategic Review is the focus on ministries to resource the church in a post-Christendom era. Christendom is a rather slippery term. It is a combination of the words 'Christ' and 'dominion'. It spans the era of history beginning under the rule of Constantine c.313 when Christianity became in name and in law the official religion of the Empire.¹ It also refers to a more cultural world view of what it means to be a Christian and part of the church. Loren Mead in his book, *The Once and Future Church* describes it in the following way:

*The ministry of the lay person was identical with being a good, law-abiding, tax-paying, patriotic citizen. One was to work hard and be obedient to the structures, institutions, and leaders of the community. One's sacred duty was to preserve the way things were and to avoid personal immorality, disloyalty, or disobedience to constituted authority.*²

We are now emerging into a new paradigm or way of seeing the world. Mead says, 'With each paradigm shift, roles and relationships change and power shifts. New structures develop. New directions emerge. Things that were of great value in the old era become useless in the next'³ This makes it hard for people in the old paradigm to understand those with a different world view. The lay person is now encouraged to take a 'Christian' view on a range of social issues and this can be deeply distressing if the person disagrees with the view put forward.⁴ Sometimes she or he finds it hard to understand why the church is so focused on particular issues and seems to ignore things one was brought up to think was important. For example why does the church worry about economic justice and ignore divorce and pre-marital sex?⁵

¹ Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, Alban Institute, 1991, p.14

² *ibid* p.22

³ *ibid.*, p.8

⁴ *ibid* p.36

⁵ *ibid*, p.36

rethink church



There can be a lot of pain associated with all this change. What characterises the new paradigm is diversity. There is now a diversity of views, authorities, truths, opinions and the church is still working out how it is to be faithful to God when the fabric around it looks so different.

So when and how did we change? Mead relates a personal story when on a Sunday evening in 1963 in Greenville, South Carolina, the Fox Theatre opened on a Sunday, in defiance of the state's time-honoured blue laws. He and six of his friends all regular attenders at the Methodist Youth Fellowship 'made a pact to enter the front door of the church, be seen, then quietly slip out of the back door and join John Wayne at the Fox.' Entertainment went up against tradition and duty and won! There were no doubt many of these moments along the way where the old way was irrevocably challenged and broken. Mead acknowledges that the Christendom paradigm probably began losing its power centuries ago.⁶ The Uniting Church was born at the very time church numbers were on the decline, not because of anything we did, but because

that was the world we emerged into.

Stuart Murray in his book *After Christendom* defines 'post-Christendom' as 'the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence'. One of the seven transitions he identifies that mark the shift from Christendom to a post-Christendom culture is that in Christendom churches operated mainly in institutional mode, but in post-Christendom we must become again a Christian movement.⁷

In social change theory, a social movement is defined as a loosely organised but sustained campaign to achieve a change in society's structure or values. All the issues we work on in the social justice unit centre around the undue power of the corporation against the wellbeing of people and our planet. Because we

Continued on back page

⁷ <http://thecrowdedhouse.org/living-in-a-post-christendom-context/>

⁶ *ibid.*, p.24



SUPPORTER PROFILE

ROHAN PRYOR

Rohan is currently the Lay Leadership Educator and will be taking up the position of Synod Liaison Minister in Tasmania in April. He shares some of his thoughts about social justice and congregations.

The Uniting Church, like other churches in the Western world, are facing major challenges; dwindling membership, money and energy, but at the same time increasing responsibility for buildings, budgets and compliance.

Sunday morning liturgical worship or its equivalent also places large demands on local faith communities. What if we spent all that time and energy differently to build discipleship and work together for a better world?

The current generations of church goers have often been unconsciously socialised to prioritise worship as the heart and first purpose of the Church, but corporate worship is only one of many ways to grow disciples in faith and build authentic Christian community. Liturgical worship is great for those who like it and grew up with it, but creates many hurdles for contemporary society. 'Unchurched' people often struggle to make sense of the language and rituals, the worldview and the social patterns that surround this form of gathering, as well as the often rigidly expected timeframes.

People who have been formed to be church-goers rather

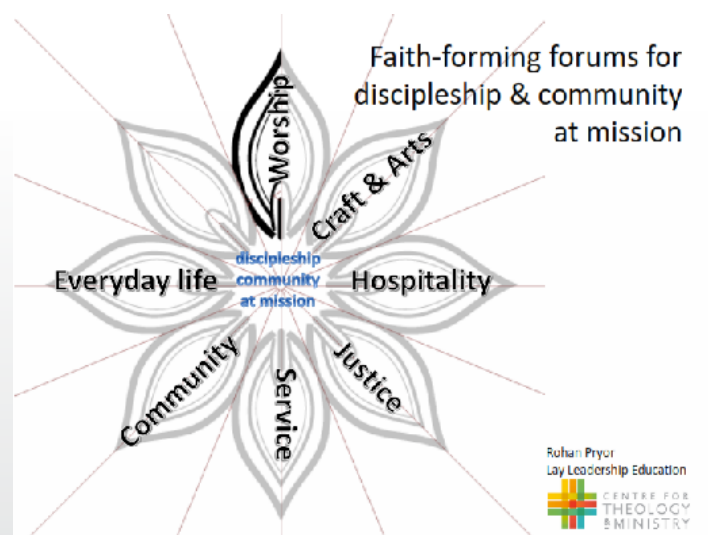
than disciples often don't see the connection between faith and social justice. They are not asking questions like: How does social justice have implications for how you live or how you make decisions? Most people have been formed as passive recipients rather than passionate advocates.

In the diagram below each forum (leaf) has a wide range of practical ways to explore social justice and discipleship. 'Messy Church' is one currently prominent way of using craft as a forum for intergenerational faith formation and developing disciples in community, which may or may not lead to (liturgical) worship on a Sunday

morning. A messy church station could also involve signing a postcard or a letter, making a peace crane or other craft idea in compassionate response to an issue in the world.

Using the hospitality principle you might like to have intentional discussions over dinner on a particular social justice topic and invite someone to share their thoughts to start off or hold public prayer space in response to what's happening in the world.

Think about your everyday life - what is it that reflects your desire for justice in the world? Share that desire with your local Church, and your community.



LAWS INTRODUCED TO STOP BRIBES

As part of our campaign against corruption, due to the harm it causes particularly to those living in poverty, we invited you to write to the Commonwealth Government in July 2017 in support of a number of reforms they have been considering to stop bribery of foreign government officials, tax evasion and tax avoidance across borders and fraud.

Legislation has now been introduced into Parliament that allows corporations to be prosecuted for not having systems and procedures in place to prevent bribes being paid by agents and contractors on their behalf. These laws already exist in the US and UK.

The legislation also prevents bribes being paid by Australian companies to politicians overseas. Australian phosphate company Getax was named in *The Sunday Age* in 2013 as having bribed then opposition candidates in Nauru in order to obtain a phosphate mining permit when those candidates

were elected to government. Leaked e-mails to the ABC alleged that hundreds of thousands of dollars were paid to current Nauruan politicians whilst they were in opposition to allegedly help install a government amenable to allowing Getax to buy phosphate at prices below market value.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in July in support of reforms to end some of the harmful practices of Australian and multinational corporations both in Australia and overseas.

Also as part of our campaign against corruption we have been advocating for laws to stop stolen money being hidden in Australia. When money is stolen from developing countries by people engaged in criminal activities, it normally means the governments of those countries have less money for things like health clinics, schools and services to support people with disabilities.

On 19 December 2017 the then Minister for Justice,

Michael Keenan, who was one of the people who we invited you to write letters and send off postcards to, announced that the Commonwealth Government had allocated \$5.5 million to create a new international financial intelligence program, to share information about financial crimes with Malaysia, China, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, the UK and the USA. The sharing of intelligence will be used to target those people engaged in cross-border tax evasion, fraud,

DIRTY MONEY NOW HARDER TO HIDE

illicit drug trafficking and the funding of terrorism.

Thanks to everyone who has been part of the campaign so far, this is a great step along the way.

END OF POKIES IN TASMANIA?

The JIM Unit has been working with Tasmanian Uniting Church members as part of a broader campaign in Tasmania to get pokies out of Tasmanian pubs and clubs due to the harm they cause in the community. Pokie businesses cause increases in suicides, depression, relationship breakdown and increased levels of fraud and other white collar crime in

the community. In a major breakthrough, the Labor Opposition announced in mid-December 2017 that if it forms the next State Government it will phase pokies out of pubs and clubs by 2023. It would make Tasmania the first state in Australia to have introduced pokies and then got rid of them. Western Australia is the only state in Australia to have never allowed pokies into pubs and clubs.

By contrast the Tasmanian Liberal Government has stated that they will continue

to allow pokies in pubs and clubs, but will cap them at 2,350, up from 2,233 currently in Tasmanian pubs and clubs (with another 1,160 in Tasmania's existing two casinos). They will allow for two more casinos to be built and operated in Tasmania.

Thanks to our Tasmanian church members and the members of the broader community that have supported this campaign.

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

As part of our campaign to ensure fair treatment of people with disabilities, we invited you to write to the Victorian Government advocating for better safeguards for people with disabilities against neglect and abuse.

In December 2017 the Victorian Government announced it would develop an Autism Plan to drive inclusion, support and the well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), within our

neighbourhoods, schools, health services, work places, recreation settings and live experiences. The Government committed \$22.43 million towards actions while the plan is being developed. The funding will be used for a public education campaign that informs the Victorian community about people with ASD and their needs, deliver additional professional development in ASD to supplement existing online autism professional learning for school staff and appoint eight autism specialist coach roles across the state to provide outreach support, training and guidance around best practice in supporting students with ASD.

The Government is also expanding the Disability Worker Exclusion Scheme, using a registration and accreditation scheme for people who want to work with people who have disabilities to screen out those people unsuitable to be disability care workers. There is also additional training being provided to formal Community Visitors who visit places where people with disabilities are being cared for so the Community Visitors can better identify and report abuse.

Thanks again to everyone who wrote letters back in August 2016 in support of reforms for better treatment of people with disabilities.

In October 2017 we invited you to write letters to end military assistance to the Philippines Administration of President Duterte, which is engaged in a campaign of mass murder against drug users and human rights activists.

The Australian Government has replied to the JIM Unit arguing that the assistance is going to the Philippines military and it is the Philippines National Police that are carrying out the campaign of mass murder. However, this ignores that the targeted campaign of murders of human rights activists involves the Philippines military. For example, on 3 December 2017 Pastor Lovelito

Quiñones of the Kings Glory Ministry was shot dead by members of the Regional Mobile Group (RMG), part of the Philippines security forces. Pastor Quiñones' family said that the pastor was riding his motorcycle, five minutes away from his home when he was shot dead. The 203rd brigade of the military claimed that Pastor Quiñones was a member of the New People's Army (NPA), an armed communist group.

The pastor's family and congregation have refuted that Pastor Quiñones was an NPA member. Pastor Quiñones' family also stated that RMG members planted a pistol next to his body to link the pastor

AUSTRALIAN GOV'T DEFENDS DUTERTE

to the NPA. Pastor Quiñones yielded negative to a gun powder residue test, confirming that he had not fired the weapon planted on him.

President Duterte has publicly promised to pardon, reinstate and promote police officers who get convicted of sanctioned murders.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action we issued. If you did not get a chance to do so, it is not too late to write a letter now.

WHISTLEBLOWER SENTENCE OVERTURNED

In February 2015 we requested that you write letters on behalf of Antoine Deltour who was

the chief whistleblower in the 'LuxLeaks', which revealed a huge system of global tax-dodging. In March 2017, Antoine was sentenced by a Luxembourg court to a six-month suspended sentence and a \$2,300 fine. In good news, on 11 January 2018 the Luxembourg Court of Cassation (a higher appeal

court) recognised Antoine as a legitimate whistleblower and overturned his sentence, sending the case back to the Luxembourg Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal is expected to confirm the dismissal of the sentence against Antoine.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters for Antoine.

continued from page 5

believe in God's love and compassion for all people and Jesus' consistent challenging of the powers or empire of the day, this is what underpins today's Christian social movement.

One of the key things the church has always wrestled with is how it understands the call to be in, but not of the world, how it is to be accepting and loving and to honour its principles and beliefs. Social justice is not a uniquely Christian calling. Many people are passionate about working for a more just and loving world and do so out of no religious belief. So what is the specific calling of the church in this new era?

Jurgen Moltmann says, 'As a witness to salvation, the Christian testimony must be related to the sicknesses of a given society *in a healing way*'.⁸ What are the sicknesses in our society? In the Western world, the increase in addiction of all sorts of things – our phones, social media, games, drugs and alcohol, gambling, shopping, suggests we need deep inner healing so as to re-find our sense of purpose and transform our society away from the corporation's need for an anxiety-inducing consumerist treadmill to one where we organise around the wellbeing of others and God's beautiful creation. This ability for inner transformation and desire for that to be made manifest in the world is the incredible gift Christianity has to offer. The future church is still emerging. Perhaps it will be some time before we see what it looks like. Until then we need to gather around the core truths of our faith and focus on what it might mean to be a Christian movement again.

⁸ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A universal affirmation*, SCM, 1992, p.171



SOCIAL JUSTICE FAMILY CAMP

The theme for this year's camp is 'Belonging and Becoming' and it will be led by Mark and Lisa Scandarete, the authors of a book by the same name.

Together we'll be working with Mark and Lisa on diving deep into creating a vision for our family life that reflects who God is calling us to be. What are the justice practices and spiritual approaches that will help us to be strong, enriched families where each member is loved and supported to become all that they were made to be, and enabled to thrive?

9-12 March, 2018
Mt Morton Lodge, Belgrave Heights
To register contact Merryn:
03 9340 8815; explore@ctm.uca.edu.au
or register online:
<https://ucavt.goregister.com.au/ssjfamilycamp2018>

PRAYER FOR CHANGE

God help us to change.
To change ourselves and
to change our world.
To know the need for it.
To deal with the pain of it.
To feel the joy of it.
To undertake the journey
without understanding
the destination.
The art of gentle revolution.
Amen.

Prayer courtesy of Michael Leunig
<http://www.leunig.com.au/works/prayers>

2018 MAILING DATES

30 April, 25 June

3 Sep, 12 Nov

Please contact Mark on 9251 5265
or mark.zirnsak@vicatas.uca.org.au
if you can spare a couple of hours
with good company to help us collate
the mailing.