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ESSAY: WHEN CHRISTIAN WOMEN SPEAK UP (/13386-essay-when-christian-women-speak-up)

20 September 2019

LIBBY SANDERS

This past week I had the privilege of joining 40 women leaders from across the Australian church in traveling to our nation's capital. We came together at the invitation of Micah Australia (<http://www.micahaustralia.org/>), to amplify the voices of people in the Pacific in a collective call for a compassionate, principled aid budget and policy for engaging with our nearest neighbours.

Granted, Christians in Australia may be unaware of the context in the Pacific. Up to 90 per cent of people living in the various island nations in the region affirm a Christian faith. Or that these neighbours face acute poverty and experience a range of compounding challenges in the midst of this, with more than 60 per cent of women in some Pacific Island countries having experienced violence, and one in four adolescent girls experiencing physical violence regularly, according to a recent report (<https://www.worldvision.com.au/UnseenUnsafe>). Our closest neighbours, our brothers and sisters in Christ, are facing crises that diminish their flourishing and that we as the Australian Church must recognise and respond to.

I've been a Christian advocate and member of the development sector for almost a decade. I've lost count of the number of times I've been privileged to travel to Canberra to meet with politicians as a delegate with Micah Australia's flagship event, Voices for Justice (<http://voicesforjustice.com.au/>). And I've watched as the Australian Aid budget has been cut time and time again, by both the Coalition and the Labour party when in government, to stand now at the lowest apportion of our total national budget ever, at 0.22 per cent of GNI.

I've been broken-hearted for the world's poorest and most vulnerable whose pressing and oppressive situations are forgotten by Australia in these budget cuts. I've been broken-hearted also for the spirit of our nation when these cuts are met with apathy and even praise from the Australian electorate. A nation that does not know its own blessing as a



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images/essays/Micah_Challenge_womens_delegation.jpg)
Members of the delegation met with South Australian MP Tony Zappia. From left to right: Libby Sanders, mercy and justice program manager at Anglican Deaconess Ministries in Sydney, Naomi Chong, co-director of the RICE Movement, Tony Zappia, member for Makin, South Australia, Donna Hall, senior pastor at Lifepoint Church in Adelaide, and Rev Dr Melinda Cousins, deputy state executive minister, Baptist Churches of South Australia. PICTURE: Supplied.

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prosperous people and forgets how to be generous has found itself in a different kind of poverty.

So to see a delegation of almost 40 women leaders from across the church take up the call to advocate on these issues stirred hope in me. I saw already busy women in ministry respond in their roles as Christian leaders, following God's call to love and care for our neighbour. They used their giftings, their voices, their platforms, their time and their citizenship to elevate the needs of vulnerable women and children and to call for leadership on this in our nation's capital.

And these women were a force. I watched Beck Wilesmith, the senior advisor from Micah Australia, lead our delegation with a wealth of political insight and experience in guiding the church to respond to these injustices through their political advocacy. I saw Rev Dr Seforsa Carroll, a gifted theologian from UnitingWorld, educate the group and our elected leaders, speaking from both her deep theological training and her years of experience working directly with the local church across the Pacific.

I listened as Brooke Prentis, an Aboriginal Christian Leader and a descendant of the Waka Waka peoples, offered an Aboriginal blessing (https://www.commongrace.org.au/aboriginal_blessing) she had herself written in the group's meeting with the Prime Minister, praying for all in the room to continue walking on this ancient land in truth, justice, love and hope. And I heard Dr Kate Harrison Brennan, my own CEO of Anglican Deaconess Ministries, serve as a consistent and fluent spokeswoman on Australian policies from a biblical perspective. Overall, I saw how a diverse group of Christian women stood united in this moment of Kingdom work.

As this delegation of leaders from across the church return home, we remain committed to continuing to speak on these issues to our local churches. We know that discussion and action on these concerns can't simply be left behind us in the halls of Parliament as we return to our communities.

We urge our church members and Christian friends to pray and act with us. We pray that the conversations held in Canberra this week were both a blessing and a challenge to our elected representatives. We pray that our nation can truly see its opportunities and responsibilities as a neighbour in our region, and that our brothers and sisters in the Pacific, especially women and children, would see justice flow in their nations and know relief from the oppression of poverty.

We also ask that those reading this would speaking to their elected representatives, letting them know that the Australian Church stands united for an aid budget that is informed and strategic in meeting the needs of the people in the Pacific. The call to love our neighbour is clear, and this week reminds me again that we can do more together in responding to that call than we could ever do on our own.

Micah Australia organised the women's delegation trip to Canberra to advocate on behalf of the Australian church and in alignment with Christian aid agencies who are part of the Micah coalition. Libby Sanders is mercy and justice program manager at Anglican Deaconess Ministries (<https://www.deaconessministries.org.au/>), Sydney.

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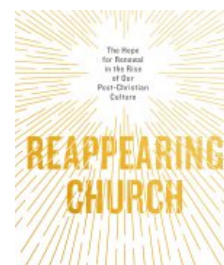
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