

33. Social Justice Commission

Chairperson Rev Elizabeth Raine
General Secretary Rev David de Kock
Staff Geoffrey Bice
Kate Leaney

Members elected by Synod Rev George Davies
Rev Ruth Vertigan
David Gray
Rev Dr John Squires
Mark Brisbane
Rev Sophia Lizares

1. INTRODUCTION

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

Social justice is the mission, passion and ultimately the responsibility of the whole Synod, which is given focus through the SJC. 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 Social Justice Commission works primarily through and with the Moderator, the principal public spokesperson of the WA Synod.

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The SJC underwent a strategic planning process in February 2018 to review its strategic goals. This helped to give key focus to achievable goals within the topic areas covered by the Social Justice Commission.

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. COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Social Justice Action Groups are an initiative of the Social Justice Commission, inviting people from across congregations to connect more closely with grassroots action on social justice issues. Social Justice Action Groups are a place to source deeper understanding about justice issues, as well as promoting and seeking involvement in their solutions. If anybody is interested in starting a social justice action group, they can contact Kate Leaney at the Uniting Church Centre.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS

4.1 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 a holistic approach to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates by addressing the underlying causes of incarceration and implementing adequate and appropriate prevention, diversion and rehabilitation programs. Key focus areas include campaigning for justice targets in the Closing the Gap framework, ending jail terms for fine defaulters and establishing a justice reinvestment trial site in WA.

4.2 Refugees

The SJC again co-ordinated a coalition of churches and refugee advocacy groups to conduct the Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees 2018. This proved an effective collaboration, seeing 2000 people on the streets of Perth calling for more compassion in Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

The Social Justice Commission continues to support the Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD www.carad.org.au) in its work with refugees, asylum seekers and detainees. Thanks goes to Uniting Church in the City (UCIC) and many individual Uniting Church members who donate accommodation, money and time.

The SJC is currently working with a range of organisations on a co-ordinated state-based advocacy approach for fairer concessions and supports for people seeking asylum and refugees in the WA community, as well as advocating for fairer federal refugee and asylum seeker policy. This group is also engaged in resourcing and training people with lived experience in advocacy and lobbying work.

4.3 Aboriginal Justice/Covenanting

The SJC continues to support the work of Bringing Them Home WA (bringingthemhomewa.com/), including assisting with the organisation of the annual Sorry Day event (May 26) and resourcing other events of the Bringing Them Home Committee through the year. Since Sorry Day fell on a Saturday in 2018, the usual engagement with schools was not possible, so a greater focus was given to Stolen Generations survivors in a more intimate event across Yagan Square and St George's Cathedral. The SJC will continue to offer support to Bringing Them Home through administrative support, governance, program planning and organisational development. Geoff Bice, Justice & Mission Consultant, currently sits on the Bringing Them Home WA executive committee as secretary.

The SJC has been working closely with members of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) through the Covenanting Commission on a number of issues affecting Aboriginal communities including the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Mogumber Mission.

4.4 LGBTIQ

The Social Justice Commission 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.

The SJC welcomes the decision by the 2018 Assembly to allow ministers and congregations to choose to offer same-gender marriages.

5. ENVIRONMENT

The SJC has a dedicated website for its environmental resources (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 now awaits the findings of the related inquiry.

5.2 Climate Change and Renewable Energy Transition

The SJC is an active participant on a 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 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.

Discussions have also begun to advocate for public housing to have access to affordable renewable energy.

Geoff Bice is also a convener 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 Forest Protection

The 2017 Synod requested the SJC to organise a forum to discuss the issues relating to protection of South West Forests. While the forum was organised with a diverse panel of presenters, unfortunately the registration numbers were insufficient to proceed.

6. PEACE

For information on the priorities of the SJC's peace work please visit: 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 SJC continues to engage the government on the details and progress of these existing proposals.

6.2 Fairtrade / Human Trafficking

The SJC 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 Palestine

The SJC hosted the chair of Australian Palestine Advocacy Network on a visit to Perth and spoke at a couple of rallies organised by the Palestine Community of WA on behalf of the Synod.

6.4 Nuclear Weapons

The SJC was pleased to see the United Nations agree to a ban on nuclear weapons and continues to support the campaign for Australia to sign and ratify it.

6.5 Peace Conference

The SJC is co-ordinating an ecumenical peace conference to be held on the 100th anniversary of the Armistice on the weekend of 10 and 11 November, 2018 at Burt Hall, St Georges Cathedral.

7. OTHER WORK

7.1 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 collaborates annually in the Anti-Poverty Week Ecumenical service, which was hosted in 2017 by the Uniting Church at Uniting Church in the City, Wesley Perth.

7.2 Justice and Mission Update

Our commitment to share news and information to the wider church continues with the re-development of our weekly email update – the Justice and Mission Update. We continue to have strong reader interest in our update. Members of the Social Justice Commission are also committed to utilising 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](https://twitter.com/JamUCWA) or Facebook www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeUCWA

7.3 Engagement State and Federal Government

- Since the changeover of state government the SJC has helped prepare a number of letters to several new Ministers. Geoff Bice and Kate Leaney (and on occasion the Moderator and Chair of UAICC) have since met with or written to a number of parliamentary members (or their offices) to discuss issues pertaining to our areas of work, including:
- Hon Simone McGurk
- Jess Stojkovski
- Dr Anne Aly
- Hon Diane Evers
- Hon Sue Ellery
- Hon Jordan Steele-John

- Hon Ben Wyatt
- Hon Mark McGowan
- Hon Stephen Dawson

8. STAFFING AND MEMBERSHIP

The Social Justice Commission gives thanks to the Rev George Davies who has completed his ten years of service on the SJC. George has been a strong advocate for the social justice work of the Uniting Church and has championed numerous causes including the fair treatment of young people, drug reform and improved mental health services.

The SJC also thanks Rev Dr John Squires for his time on the commission and is sad to lose him, his support and expertise to the East Coast. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on the Commission, and as Chair, and wish the SJC all the best in the next season, as I take on a new role in Canberra with Tuggeranong Uniting Church.

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

Rev Elizabeth Raine

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