



## Social Justice Commission

<i>Chairperson</i>	Mark Brisbane
<i>Deputy General Secretary</i>	Rev Mark Illingworth
<i>Staff</i>	Geoff Bice
	Kate Leaney
<i>Members elected by Synod</i>	Rev Sophie Lizares
	Zaneta Mascarenhas
	Bob French
	Rev Craig Collas
	Cheryl Lawson
	Alana Moorman

### 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 a core expression of the mission of the Uniting Church and is 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 Commission works primarily through and with the Moderator, the principal public spokesperson of the WA Synod.

### COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Social Justice Action Groups are an initiative of the 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.

### HUMAN RIGHTS

#### ***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 (achieved), ending jail terms for fine defaulters (legislation soon to be tabled) and establishing justice reinvestment trial sites in WA (likely Halls Creek, possibly Derby/Mowanjum).

#### ***Refugees***

The SJC is committed to advocating for fair and compassionate treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum through:

- a. Ongoing advocacy with WA Refugee Support Network to the WA state government about: including Perth in the regional zoning for the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (WA Premier has requested this from Federal Immigration Minister); providing concessional access to public transport (achieved) and; access to affordable TAFE and healthcare for people seeking asylum (ongoing).



- b. Specific engagement and training of people with lived experience of seeking asylum and being granted temporary visas to take part in advocacy and lobbying work.
- c. Coordination of the Justice for Refugees WA group to organise and run the Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees with a strong turnout.
- d. Participation in national refugee advocacy network and the Refugee Council of Australia's "I Choose Humane" campaign.

### ***Aboriginal Justice/Covenanting***

The SJC continues to support First Nations Peoples to achieve justice and healing, through activities like:

- a. Administrative support to Bringing Them Home WA. Commemorated the 100 year anniversary of the Mogumber Mission in November 2018, successfully obtained significant state and federal funding, continuing other healing camps and assisting to design a Stolen Generations memorial at Wellington Square.
- b. Support to organise Sorry Day events on May 26 in collaboration with Fremantle Football Club with 150 Stolen Generations survivors attending the game at Optus Stadium.
- c. The Commission is supporting the inaugural WA Surrender conference on September 21st. "Surrender" is an ecumenical social justice oriented conference that is led by First Nations people. Congress is also involved and is appreciative of the Social Justice Commission's support.

### ***LGBTIQ***

The SJC 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.

### ***Religious Freedoms, Voluntary Assisted Dying***

The Commission continues to call for stronger protections for human rights, agreeing that there should be better protections from discrimination for people of all faiths, and for people who don't hold religious beliefs, provided these laws do not sanction new forms of discrimination against others.

The Commission discussed the proposed WA legislation into Voluntary Assisted Dying and recognised that there is diversity of opinion on the matter, is respectful of the different views held and while not seeking to promote a certain position at this time, recommended to the General Secretary the need for Synod to discuss the matter in close consultation with the church's agencies.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

The SJC has actively advocated on the following issues:

### ***Climate Change and Renewable Energy Transition***

The SJC is an active participant on state-based climate change advocacy networks. The RenewWA coalition is continuing its efforts to have adequate state level climate change strategies implemented to reflect the latest calls from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The SJC has been facilitating discussions with the Public Utilities Office and the social services sector to advocate for social housing tenants to have access to affordable renewable energy.

The SJC has been helping to establish the presence of a Western Australian branch of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change.

Submission is being prepared for the Environmental Protection Authority's climate policy.

### ***Forest Protection, Plastic Pollution***

Letters have been written following the resolutions of the 2018 Synod regarding protection of native forests and tackling of plastic pollution. A submission was made to the State Government's inquiry into single-use plastics.

The SJC is supporting the [TEAR Rubbish Campaign](#) addressing plastic pollution and encourages congregations to consider how they can phase-out plastic use.

### **PEACE**

For information on the priorities of the SJC's peace work please visit: <http://unitingforpeacewa.org>

### ***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 State government.

### ***Peace Conference***

The SJC organised and ran the Peacemaking Conference in Nov 2018 to coincide with the 100 year anniversary of the end of WWI.

### **OTHER WORK**

#### ***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, Churches of Christ 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 on the Anti-Poverty Week Ecumenical service, which will be hosted by the Anglican Diocese this year.

#### ***Justice and Mission Update***

Our commitment to share news and information to the wider church continues however, due to reduced staff capacity we now only send out the Justice & Mission Update fortnightly. Members of the 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](mailto:social.justice@wa.uca.org.au) or link to us via Twitter @JamUCWA or Facebook [www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeUCWA](http://www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeUCWA)

#### ***Sunday Nights @ Wesley***

The Commission has supported the trial of social justice focused monthly evening services at Wesley UCIC. The service has had variable attendance but is continuing in the second half of the year following a mid-year review.

### **STAFFING & MEMBERSHIP**

Marg Staffa has finished up in her role providing administrative support after 28 years of service for the Uniting Church WA. We are deeply grateful to Marg for her contribution to the work of the Commission over so many years and wish her well in retirement.

It is pleasing to see Kate Leaney being given a permanent 0.8FTE position.

The SJC gives thanks to the Rev Ruth Vertigan who has completed her ten years of service on the Commission. Ruth has been a strong advocate for the social justice work of the Uniting Church and will be missed from the Commission. We wish her well in her retirement.

The SJC also gives thanks for David Gray's contribution since 2012. David shared a great deal of knowledge, direction and passion with the Commission which include a period as chair.

The Commission is looking to recruit some new members and we encourage people to consider nominating.

The Justice and Mission Unit is currently comprised of Geoff Bice and Kate Leaney.

**PROPOSAL**

The Commission is supporting a few proposals from both the Covenanting Commission and the International Partnerships & Development Commission, but is the sole proposer of “A generous and compassionate Community Refugee Sponsorship Program” which is an outworking of our advocacy for refugees.

**Mark Brisbane**  
**Chairperson**  
**mark@improvesilence.com**