



Social Justice Commission

Commission Members:

Chairperson

General Secretary

Staff

Members elected by Synod

Mark Brisbane
Rev David de Kock
Geoff Bice
Rev Sophie Lizares
Zaneta Mascarenhas
Dr Bob French
Cheryl Lawson
Alex Hutchinson
Rev Gordon Scantlebury
Mary Elton

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.

COVID-19: In 2020 much of the regular campaigning of the Commission was quickly adjusted to focus on the needs of vulnerable people impacted by COVID-19 and its associated restrictions. This remains a focus to ensure that nobody is left behind in the recovery process.

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 ending jail terms for fine defaulters (achieved), establishing justice

reinvestment trial sites in WA (Halls Creek, possibly Derby/Mowanjumb), pushing for an Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council and raising the age of criminal responsibility. People can watch and listen to the [Stories from the Inside](#) giving voice to people who have direct experiences with the justice system.



Social Reinvestment WA (SRWA) celebrates at Parliament House with MP Supporters of the Bill ending imprisonment for unpaid fines.

Refugees

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

- a. Ongoing advocacy with the Western Australian Refugee and People Seeking Asylum Network (WARPSAN) to the WA state government about: including Perth in the regional zoning for the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (ongoing); access to affordable TAFE (achieved) and healthcare for people seeking asylum (ongoing);



requesting access to JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments (ongoing) and rent relief payments (achieved) for people with Temporary Visa Status during COVID -19.

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. This event was held online due to COVID-19.

d. Participation in national refugee advocacy network and the Refugee Council of Australia's "I Choose Humane" campaign as well as "Refugee Week 2020". Although these campaigns were affected by COVID-19 there was still a strong community presence online.

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.

b. Supported Sorry Day events online on May 26 through promoting Noongar Dandjoo, Yokai Healing our Spirit and Bringing Them Home WA collaborations.

c. The Commission supported 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. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the Surrender conference will not take place this year.

d. Supported the Black Lives Matter movement through promoting events across a number of our online platforms.



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.



Homelessness and Housing

Celebrating the annual Pride Parade supported by the Christians with Pride float.

The SJC has advocated (in consultation with UnitingWA) on the increased concern for homelessness in Perth with support from our ecumenical social justice partners. Additionally, the SJC has pushed for social housing tenants to have access to energy efficiency retrofits and affordable renewable energy.

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. A statement was released from RenewWA calling on the State Government to commit to reliable jobs, renewable energy and a safe future for all.



RenewWA calling on the State Government to commit to reliable jobs, renewable energy and a safe future for all.

The SJC helped to establish the presence of a Western Australian branch of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change now known as ARRCC(WA).

The SJC has supported and promoted a couple of Climate Strikes in Perth both online and in-person.



School Strike for Climate September 2019.

Plastic Pollution & Forest Protection

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

It was pleasing to see the protection of the 2-tier Karri Forrest by the State Government, although concern remains for other classifications and areas slated for clearing or logging.

The SJC is awaiting confirmation on forming a relationship with “Precious Plastics Perth” in order to recycle plastic lids amongst the Uniting Church WA Office and Perth congregations.

The SJC are working towards providing resources for the Sustainable September campaign which will be distributed to Perth congregations.

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 traditions. The group is finding 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 Catholic Church 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 Social Justice Update fortnightly. These Updates are receiving positive engagement across the community allowing for our network to get involved and be proactive. 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 Social Justice Update by emailing social.justice@wa.uca.org.au or link to us via Twitter @JamUCWA or Facebook www.facebook.com/SocialJusticeUCWA or Instagram @social.justice.church

Social Justice Church

The Commission has supported the social justice focused monthly evening services at Wesley UCIC. Due to COVID-19, the service was held online however there are plans to hold in-person services from the second Sunday of August.



Sunday Night Service at Wesley UCIC.

Ethical Investment

Conversation has begun with the Investment and Corporate Finance Committee about reviewing our ethical investment policy.

Community Organising

The SJC is familiarising themselves with an online community organising tool created by Mark Brisbane. This will help when engaging with congregations in Perth.

STAFFING & MEMBERSHIP

Kate Leaney finished up in her role as Social Justice Officer in April 2020 after 2.5 years at the Uniting Church WA. We are deeply grateful to Kate for her hard work and contribution to the Commission and wish her the very best for her future endeavours.

We welcome Gabrielle Nind who has started her new role as Social Justice Officer. We thank Gabrielle for her contribution so far.

The Social Justice Unit is currently comprised of Geoff Bice and Gabrielle Nind.

Mark Brisbane

Chairperson, Social Justice Commission