



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY

National Update

A Christmas Message from the President

The Assembly has released a video of my public 2012 Christmas message. I hope you like it.

The message was recorded at Port Adelaide Uniting Church earlier this month. My thanks to the Port Adelaide congregation and especially Norm Bennett and Melissa Neumann of the SA Synod Children & Family Ministry Team for helping make that happen.

The video is available for viewing on the Assembly [website](http://assembly.uca.org.au/video/item/1288-a-christmas-message-from-the-president-of-the-uniting-church-in-australia).
<http://assembly.uca.org.au/video/item/1288-a-christmas-message-from-the-president-of-the-uniting-church-in-australia>

Assembly Communications have also arranged for subtitling in a number of community languages including Korean, Chinese, Fijian, Indonesian, and Arabic. If you'd like a high resolution version to play, they'll be available for download and broadcast [here](http://vimeo.com/55899030): <http://vimeo.com/55899030>

An audio version of the message is also available for download at the same link. You can also contact the Assembly's Media Officer [Matt Pulford](mailto:mattp@nat.uca.org.au): mattp@nat.uca.org.au

A Presidential Reflection



At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who came "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10.10).

The 13th Assembly of the Uniting Church, held in July this year, took that word of promise as its theme: *Life Overflowing*.

That abundance of Life contrasts with the kind of abundance that many Australians are all too familiar with – the kind that leaves us cluttered, bloated and burnt out, at odds with each other and entwined in unjust, unsustainable economic systems.

By contrast, abundance of Life is expressed in love and friendship, in generosity to neighbours in need, in hospitality to strangers, in compassion for all who are struggling or hurt – the things that make for reconciliation, justice and peace.

I ask that we all take a moment at our Christmas tables to remember those who are alone, or confined in our prisons or detention centres, or trying to maintain dignity and confidence in "prescribed communities" under the Stronger Futures legislation.

I pray that this year our Christmas is not overflowing with things and obligations, but overflowing with Life.

Blessings, Andrew

You can follow the President's observations via his [blog](http://andrewfdutney.wordpress.com) <http://andrewfdutney.wordpress.com>, or click through from the : [Assembly Home Page](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au) www.assembly.uca.org.au

Just a thought: Associate General Secretary



End-of-year Reflection Process

In this time of slowing down, here are some questions to reflect upon. This process may assist you in celebrating and releasing the year that has gone, as well as helping you plant seeds for the year ahead.

The key is to quieten the mind before you answer the questions. You could do some deep breathing and prayer, yoga, stretching, meditation, go for a walk, look at a quiet nature scene etc. Then when you are more relaxed and centred you can allow the answers to emerge more easily and meaningfully for you. You may like to do all the questions or just focus on a few.

Questions for celebrating and meaningfully closing 2012:

- What am I most grateful for in 2012?
- What steps/risks/actions have I taken this year that have helped me to learn, grow and achieve/serve more (your own definition), personally and in ministry?
- What 'bad calls', 'mis-steps' or 'failures' did I experience this year? What were the most important and valuable learnings from each of these events?
- Who have I been helped or inspired by? Who have I helped or inspired?
- When/where did I worry greatly and unnecessarily in 2012? What perception or belief led to the worry? How can I be aware of this in the year ahead and choose more caring detachment, positive belief and/ or patience?

Questions for 2013:

- When do I feel most alive and expanded? i.e. activities, locations, people etc. How can I commit to and take more time for this in 2013?
- What new steps outside of the comfort zone would I like to take in 2013? Why do this – how will this expansion serve God, others and myself?
- What am I outgrowing that I have not noticed or acknowledged? Beliefs, choices, people/influences, past times, behaviours, clothing style, material possessions, self-image and worries. How can I let these go with appropriate grieving and gratitude to God?
- If I truly let these things go – ask yourself 'who am I now in Christ' (with 'I am' statements)? How does this new sense of self in Christ make me feel? What new choices are now made possible for the year ahead?
- What are 1-2 of my favourite emotions? E.g. joy, peace, excitement, strength etc. Perhaps make a list of ways to feel these emotions each week or daily next year. For example, if you choose peace then what actions could you take to experience more of this.
- What lost dimension (inner aspect of call, gift, dream, desire,) do I want to reclaim, nurture and grow in 2013? How am I likely to deny or forget this task? How will I/life be different when I integrate this?

Peace, Glenda

Outback care and community services

Opening of Centenary House

Frontier Services opened a new green building in Alice Springs on 8 December featuring a unique sustainable design. The building has been named Centenary House, in recognition of the centenary of the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) this year.

Minister for Regional Development and Indigenous Advancement Alison Anderson MLA officially opened the building, located on the same site as the Old Timers Aged Care Service.

Centenary House will be a base for senior Territory managers and staff involved in aged and community care programs. The community will also have access to a large training room. Planning on the building began some time ago when the Board of Frontier Services set the challenge of completing an environmental project in the centenary year.

“We looked for something we could do that would be an example of what’s possible in remote Australia,” Frontier Services National Director Rosemary Young said. “With more and more sustainable development in the Centre, we are delighted to be a part of this movement towards green, energy conscious architecture and construction.”

Built to the standard of a 4.5 Green Star rating, sustainable features are incorporated into all elements of the building, including a north facing aspect, natural ventilation, recycled materials, reverse brick veneer, solar panels and water tanks.

Costing \$1.3million, the building was a significant investment for Frontier Services signifying its commitment to continue to be there for the community in the Centre in the years ahead.

“It has long been a dream to have a home for the coordination of services in the community. Finally, we have a high quality facility not only for our own staff but one that will also be accessible by community.”

In her speech, Ms Anderson acknowledged the work of Frontier Services, adding that she was not afraid to grow old knowing Frontier Services was there.

Rev Terence Corkin, General Secretary of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church, gave a blessing for the new building.

State receptions honour Frontier Services

NSW Premier Barry O’Farrell hosted a reception at Parliament House on 16 November for the volunteers and supporters of Frontier Services honouring a centenary of support in remote Australia.

Mr O’Farrell praised the hard work and dedication of the volunteers and supporters of Frontier Services.

More than 60 NSW volunteers and major supporters of Frontier Services attended the morning tea. Mr O’Farrell thanked Frontier Services for the role it played in supporting the people of remote

Australia.

On the same day, the Governor of New South Wales Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO hosted a reception at Government House in honour of the century of support by the church in remote Australia.

Guests included the President of the Uniting Church in Australia Rev Prof Andrew Dutney, Moderators and General Secretaries of the State Synods of the Church and members of the Assembly Standing Committee.

Time to empower and resource remote Australia

The people of remote Australia must have the ability to participate equally in and have equal access to the community in which they live and contribute, Frontier Services National Director Rosemary Young told the 4th Australian Rural and Remote Mental Health Symposium on 203 November.

Ms Young spoke about the imbalance between the city and the bush in terms of resources, understanding and equity in a keynote presentation.

“The people of remote Australia are too far from the centres of power; their voices are relatively few and they are spread over a vast area – yet they are absolutely committed to being heard,” she said.

“We have to empower communities to reach solutions for themselves and ensure that resources are available to enable that to occur.”

Ms Young’s presentation addressed the question: “Has anything actually changed for remote Australia in the past 100 years”, looking from the perspective of Frontier Services and its predecessor, the Australian Inland Mission.

Reflecting on the challenges posed by mental health for people in rural and remote Australia, Ms Young outlined the following steps needed for change:

- Improved accessibility of mental health care services
- Recognising the effect disadvantage has on mental health and wellbeing
- Ensuring cohesive interventions not only by traditional health services but also by other services including financial counsellors, drought support workers, psychiatrist and psychologists and ensuring telehealth access to them and community capacity building
- Starting early on teaching children to care for their mental health
- Improving understanding of the dangers of the overuse of alcohol and other substances
- Providing mental health awareness campaigns and access to mental health first aid
- Attending to detailed research and best practise in the area of suicide prevention

Schoolies with a difference

While most of their peers headed for the coast to celebrate finishing school on the beach, two schoolies from Warragul in rural Victoria, Emma Grigg and Philippa Foot, spent their break-up holiday as far from the ocean as you can get.

The 18 year olds from Chairo Christian School in Drouin celebrated “Schoolies Week” in the

centre of Australia by volunteering for Frontier Services in Mutitjulu, an Indigenous community just a few kilometres from Uluru.

“We wanted to do something different that would be an adventure and where we would be helping others,” said Emma.

The pair signed up to the Frontier Services volunteering program Outback Links and spent the week assisting at two services run by Frontier Services - Mutitjulu Child Care Centre, which cares for up to 20 children aged between three months and five years, and the Mutitjulu Community Care and Respite Centre, which provides a safe place for elderly people or people with disabilities and their carers.

Emma and Philippa tidied and cleaned, assisted the child care staff, delivered meals to community members in their homes and did a range of other odd jobs.

When asked whether they wished they were partying with other schoolies on the beach, the girls were adamant.

“No definitely not,” said Emma. “Our parents were more than happy that we decided to come here.” Their School has also been very supportive of their alternate Schoolies plan. It was a school trip to Darwin that inspired their decision.

Philippa added: “Coming here is a lot better. We have a purpose – we are actually doing something rather than just sitting around.”

Emma, who plans a career in Early Childhood Education, was excited to see how this service is delivered in remote Australia and was full of praise for the job being done by Frontier Services staff.

Find out about Outback Links [here](http://www.frontierservices.org/outback-links) : <http://www.frontierservices.org/outback-links>

Give a gift of hope to remote Australia

It's not too late to find a gift for your loved ones this Christmas that will bring hope to someone in remote Australia.

Frontier Services Christmas Gift Cards provide you with an opportunity to buy a gift for someone you know that will have a direct impact on the quality of life of someone in remote Australia throughout the year to come.

“Many of the families with whom Frontier Services works are a long way from mainstream services. It can be very hard – or at times impossible - for them to access support,” said Frontier Services National Development Manager John Dickinson.

“By purchasing a Frontier Services Christmas gift card you will help us to ensure that no one is alone – no matter where they live.”

After selecting your gift, you will be sent a card with a description of your gift and a Christmas message for the person who is to receive it.

Check out the Frontier Services gift cards [here](http://www.frontierservices.org/frontier-) : <http://www.frontierservices.org/frontier->

[shop/christmas-cards](#)

A Christmas gift idea...At the Very Heart

At the Very Heart, written by Storry Walton AM, is a beautiful coffee table book which celebrates the work begun by outback legend John Flynn through the Australian Inland Mission and the continuation of Frontier Services.

Weaving together stories and images from across the century. *At the Very Heart* would make a special gift this Christmas. To order phone 1300 787 247 or visit the **[Frontier Services Shop](#)**: <http://www.frontierservices.org/frontier-shop>

Relations with Other Faiths

Uniting Church National Dialogue with the Jewish Community in Australia

Tuesday 13 November 2012 was the date for the latest meeting of the regular dialogue between the Uniting Church and the Jewish Community in Australia.

Six Uniting Church members and seven Jewish participants met in the offices of the Uniting Church Assembly in Sydney for a day of sharing, discussing, and exploring.

This is the 22nd year of these dialogues, which encourage mutual understanding and respect in relationships between members of the two faith communities which are represented.

You can read more **[here](#)** : <http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/rof/news/387-uniting-church-national-dialogue-with-the-jewish-community-in-australia>

Interfaith Dialogue Class

With increasing religious diversity in Australia, what is the place of Christian faith and witness in our growing multicultural and multi-religious context? The Interfaith Dialogue Class will help you develop key competencies in both the theory and practice of interfaith dialogue. This course is open to anyone who has a keen interest or who would like to deepen their knowledge in the theology of interfaith dialogue and practice, or for those who are just beginning this journey of witness and faith.

The learning objectives of the course include:

- examine the beliefs and practices of a number of religious traditions
- address basic key theological principles of interfaith dialogue
- explore key issues arising from the historic relationships between Christianity and other faith
- develop relationships with people of other faiths through visits to places of worship and by spending time in conversation with theologians and practitioners from a variety of faiths
- comprehending the various denominational practices and ecumenical understandings of ordination.

To register, contact Renee Kelly on 02 8838 8914, or visit the UTC **[website](#)**: <http://www.utc.edu.au/courses>

Worship, theology and discipleship

A Church for Australians: The DNA of the Uniting Church

What are some of the salient features of Australians in the 21st century that might inform how we do church?

Let me suggest the following. Australians are individualistic and consumer oriented yet proud of national heroes whether they are on the sporting field or in relation to cultural, academic and business life. We are now a very multicultural society, no longer dominated by those of British descent - though that heritage still sets the tone of mainstream cultural life.

Australians are secular but while allegiance to what were once mainstream churches has declined, most people are conscious of a higher power which is spiritual. Australia is now a very multicultural society and this means multi-faith also.

While some Australians excel most are happy to make their way; they work, earn money and enjoy spending it, and like relaxing with family and friends. A hedonistic approach to life is common with the desire that life be pleasurable. Most just want their children to be happy. They are postmodern with a relativistic outlook that is sceptical of absolutes except in extreme cases such as child abuse.

The close association between church and society is no longer, though in Australia it never was that close with religious figures and the churches regarded with some suspicion from the beginning of Australia's history of white settlement. Now the churches find themselves more marginalised.

Australians are an independent lot not appreciating being told what to think or do. They see themselves as their own person and mostly have a practical rather than theoretical approach to life.

What kind of church then might Australians look to if they were to consider a church community? How might the church seek to address this?

There are in fact two contrasting responses to this question by churches. On the one hand is the accommodating approach in which the church seeks to fit into the prevailing spirit of the times. The other is the contrasting approach which consciously sets itself against prevailing attitudes if these are regarded as not in line with scriptural or gospel values. While some churches are more one or the other, inevitably there are elements of both approaches at work.

Australians, if the above description is reasonably accurate, might look to a church that is relevant to their concerns and is not simply critical or focused on matters that are not important to most Australians.

Multiculturalism is not only a fact of life in contemporary Australia but to be embraced and other religious faiths respected. Recent migrants in fact are more likely to seek to be in touch with the church as they establish themselves in their new context. Churches are expected to emphasise the spiritual dimension of life and those that are so liberal as to question this will appeal to a small number only. Fundamentalists of any kind are likely to be rejected.

Australians are looking for resources to help them to cope with life. So the churches can offer spiritual resources for dealing with life which are more than just to make one happy or prosperous. Failures in moral and spiritual matters are serious for the churches for they are expected to live by a higher standard and their leaders should reflect this. Those that abuse their position and others are rightly regarded critically. Churches and their leaders no longer have authority simply by right but need to demonstrate they are trustworthy guides. They are judged by their deeds more than by their doctrine.

How does the Uniting Church in Australia stand in relation to all this?

Here are some of the distinctive features of the Uniting Church.

- The Uniting Church is meant to be a church for Australians. It is deliberately called the Uniting Church 'in Australia', not 'of Australia', to indicate that it is located in Australia but its primary allegiance is to God revealed in Jesus Christ by the Spirit.
- It is a church that wants to be for Australians which means affirming the gifts and talents of all people. This includes the full equality of women in ministry and leadership.
- It is known as a church that is concerned about social justice and advocates for those who are disadvantaged. It is in a strong position to do so with its extensive network of congregations and caring agencies across Australia. It also has contacts overseas with a number of partner churches in the Pacific, Asia and Africa.
- The Uniting Church has developed a covenant partnership with indigenous people in the church who are now organised as the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. A new preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church recognises the experience of the first peoples.
- The Uniting Church has identified itself as a multicultural church and inclusion is a primary value. It has many ethnic and language groups within it and is learning how to ensure that all voices are heard and not only the formerly dominant British heritage ones. It readily accepts people whoever they are wanting them to discover the good news of Jesus Christ for themselves and to know the enabling of the Holy Spirit.
- This also means commitment to dialogue with other Christian denominations and other faith traditions. This does not result in a "believe in anything" approach for it does have a particular tradition going back to the beginning of the church. So the Uniting Church identifies itself as part of the Catholic, Reformed and Evangelical tradition. This means continuity with the church universal, a recognition of the need to engage in continual reform and a desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ.
- This also involves a willingness to discuss contemporary issues even when they are controversial. It does so with an emphasis on the freedom of members to form their own views on these issues rather than tell them what to think.
- The structure of the Uniting Church is distinctive. Decisions and oversight is via councils rather than individuals. A consensus model of discernment and decision making is now used. This is not simply a matter of involving people in the decisions but seeks to discern the will of God by being sensitive to the Spirit of God who may speak through minority voices.

The Uniting Church in Australia is well placed to be a church for Australians as well as be a conscience to the nation. It has yet to do so as well as it might.

Peace, Rev. Dr. Chris Walker

Cross cultural and international ministry, relief and development

Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry

Advent is a look both ways while living in time in between. The biblical stories look backwards to God's persistent and faithful acts through the generations, while looking forward to a time of completion and fulfilment in God's promised end. Yet they are told to people who live somewhere in between, in the now, hoping, waiting, even longing to see and to share in that promised end – the reconciliation of all things in God.

So we in the MCM team look back over 2012 with delight and wonder.

We remember meetings with communities and leaders from the Vietnamese community from West Footscray in Melbourne, the National Young Adult Leaders Conference, Fijian, Chinese, Tongans, Niuean, Samoan, Armenian, Korean, Arabic, and Cook Island and South Sudanese along with a rich variety of conversations and collaborative meetings with members and leaders involved in all manner of cross-cultural ministry across the country.

We remember the opportunity in WA to share with leaders and educators from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in workshop and Conference focussing in putting down roots in Australian soil and building relationships cross-culturally.

We remember the very first national gathering of members of this UCA whose background and homeland is the world's newest nation – the Republic of South Sudan. In November we met in Adelaide and celebrated together, shared stories, and dreamed of our future together in this country and UCA: sometimes in 4 languages – Dinka, Nuer, Arabic and English. We set in place a process to help us plan how to build a strong, national network of South Sudanese members of the UCA, sending down deep and nourishing roots into both this country and the UCA.

We remember the joyous celebration in Darwin as the Indonesian National Conference met in Darwin, graciously hosted by the Darwin Memorial UCA. It was especially significant for the presence of the Indonesian Consul to the Northern Territory at the opening service of worship, and for the support of his office and staff who provided transport to and from the airport for interstate participants. The final worship on Sunday morning, shared jointly with the congregation at Darwin Memorial, also marked the first visit after his recent hospital stay by the Rev Rronang Garrawurra, chair of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. He told me how important it was for him to show support for and solidarity with the Rev Thresi Mauboy (Chair of the INC and minister in Darwin), and the brothers and sisters of the National Conference.

The meeting with Rronang was also an opportunity to thank him personally for his public support for a policy paper that we presented to the Assembly in July: "One Body, many members, living life and faith cross-culturally". At that discussion Rronang, in his first language and through an interpreter, spoke of the respect and commitment that we show one another when we try to speak one another's language. A wonderful moment of support, challenge and encouragement from first peoples for the diverse community of second peoples!

Our journey to become what we claim – a truly multicultural church, living life and faith cross-culturally – remains partly realised. Like the intention of God (sometimes referred to as the reign/realm of God), we see it at times, we live in it sometimes, we even live it out sometimes, because in between the stories of promise and the hope of their fulfilment is where we live,

remember and dream.

We thank God for your continued faithfulness to our calling and commitment in Christ participating in God's vision for all peoples equally. We pray God's continued blessing on your family, community and ministry. May Advent be a time rich in silence and reflection, pregnant with the promise of newness and hope, and may the remembering of that infant birth fill you, your community and family with joy and peace.

We look forward to the promise of 2013, beginning with the National Young Adult Leaders Conference in January and beginning the process of embedding "One Body, many members" into the heart and life of the UCA nationally.

Grace and peace,

Tony Floyd, Bronwyn Thompson and Elizabeth Plant – *MCM team, National Assembly.*

UnitingWorld: Everything In Common

Yes, we know there are many gift catalogues to choose from – every year, more and more choices hit the market. So why go with *Everything In Common* – the Uniting Church's very own gift catalogue?

Well, we work with Uniting Church partners on creative projects that save lives, it's true. Your gift of medication for tuberculosis victims in North Korea, for example, is just one way we're helping stem the tide of needless deaths worldwide.

But we don't just leave it there. We're committed to seeing people living dignified lives that genuinely have meaning and are well prepared for the future.

Read more [here](http://www.unitingworld.org.au/donate2/everything-in-common-the-gift-catalogue/): <http://www.unitingworld.org.au/donate2/everything-in-common-the-gift-catalogue/>

UnitingWorld welcomes new Manager – Church Partnerships, Asia

UnitingWorld is delighted to announce the appointment of the Reverend Dr Ji Zhang as Manager – Church Partnerships, Asia. Dr Zhang will take up his role on 31 January, 2013.

Dr Zhang is minister of St Andrew's Gardiner Uniting Church in Melbourne, Australia and was chaplain for the Reverend Alistair Macrae when he was President of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly 2009 - 2012. Dr Zhang grew up in Shanghai and moved to Australia where he undertook theological studies. He has presented and published widely and earlier this year the book version of his doctoral thesis covering a comparison of Daoism and Plato was published.

Dr Zhang has been involved with UnitingWorld for the past 3 years, serving on committees and facilitating engagement with the China Christian Council. Dr Zhang brings to UnitingWorld a strong capacity to reflect theologically, to manage programs and to help the whole Church understand more about emerging trends in what is popularly referred to as "the Asian Century".

Take Action: Australian Government, don't punish the poor at Christmas

The Australian Government has recently announced a decision to divert \$375 million of the foreign

aid budget from assisting the world's poorest to paying for Australia's own domestic asylum seeker policy. This decision will cost lives. We join with other agencies and citizens around Australia in calling for overseas aid to be used as intended: to save the lives of people in desperate situations overseas.

"In complete contradiction to the Christmas spirit, the Government is stealing from the poor to support a system that punishes the vulnerable," said UnitingWorld National Director Kerry Enright.

A full statement from UnitingWorld including remarks from President Andrew Dutney can be found [here](http://www.unitingworld.org.au/2012/take-action-australian-government-dont-punish-the-poor-at-christmas/): <http://www.unitingworld.org.au/2012/take-action-australian-government-dont-punish-the-poor-at-christmas/>

You can take action by telling the Australian Government: don't punish the world's poor by diverting aid to Australian domestic policy.

How to make your voice heard by contacting:

Foreign Minister [Bob Carr](mailto:foreignminister.carr@dfat.gov.au): foreignminister.carr@dfat.gov.au or by phone on (02) 6277 7500
Treasurer [Wayne Swan](mailto:wayne.swan.mp@aph.gov.au): wayne.swan.mp@aph.gov.au or by phone on (02) 6277 7340.

In your email, let our representatives know that diverting funds from our commitment to supporting people overseas is unacceptable. The world's poorest should not have to pay for our domestic asylum seeker policy.

Share this information through your Facebook networks and on Twitter. Use the hashtags #foreignaid #dontdivertaid and send to @bobjcarr @SwannyDPM

Justice and Advocacy

Treatment of asylum seekers hits all-time low

The release of a report by Amnesty International Australia outlining the conditions for asylum seekers on Nauru has been described as one that should "turn the stomach of all compassionate Australians" by National Director Rev. Elenie Poulos.

Elenie criticised both major political parties for what she called their abject moral failure to show compassion to those in need.

A full copy of the media release may be found on the UnitingJustice [website](http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/news/item/884-treatment-of-asylum-seekers-hits-all-time-low): <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/news/item/884-treatment-of-asylum-seekers-hits-all-time-low>

President of the Uniting Church Rev. Professor Andrew Dutney wrote a piece for the ABC Religion and Ethics website. Andrew noted that "Australians are generally generous, hospitable people but have been enabled to be mean and cruel in this situation by having 'the problem' kept well out of sight and beyond hearing.

You can read the full text of Andrew's article [here](#):

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/11/27/3642256.htm>

Justice for Asylum Seekers: A Call to Prayer

The Federal Government has now begun to process asylum seekers on Nauru, with plans for an offshore processing centre on Manus Island well underway.

Offshore processing breaches one of our most fundamental obligations under the Refugee Convention to process the claims of all asylum seekers who arrive in our territories. Such legislation will effectively close the door to those who come seeking our care and protection against persecution and torture.

In response to the many queries we have had about what can be done, UnitingJustice, together with the Assembly Working Group on Worship, have produced a prayer resource that we hope may inspire Uniting Church groups and congregations to pray for asylum seekers and their family, and for our country, that we may one day soon return to be a place of welcome.

Hard copies of the resource may be obtained from your synod office, or by emailing UnitingJustice Senior Policy Officer **[Siobhan Marren](mailto:siobhanm@nat.uca.org.au)**: siobhanm@nat.uca.org.au

You can also download a PDF version of the kit from the UnitingJustice **[website](http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/information-and-action-resources/item/879-justice-for-asylum-seekers-a-call-to-prayer)**:
<http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/information-and-action-resources/item/879-justice-for-asylum-seekers-a-call-to-prayer>

National Director Rev. Elenie Poulos heads to Geneva

National Director Rev. Elenie Poulos attended a 2-day dialogue in Geneva on Faith and Protection, hosted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Elenie has written about her experiences in Geneva.

"On 12-13 December, I had the privilege of attending this year's Annual Dialogue on Protection Challenges, convened and hosted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Antonio Guterres, at the United Nations in Geneva.

The theme for the Dialogue was Faith and Protection. This was the first time UNHCR had engaged in any form of structured dialogue with religious leaders.

The aim was to explore the shared values and principles of the world's major religious traditions in the protection of refugees and begin the development of a more strategic engagement by UNHCR with faith-based organisations and religious communities.

UNHCR has recognised the importance of faith in the lives of so many refugees, as they struggle to cope with violence, fear and persecution and the solidarity and service of faith communities, religious leaders and faith-based organisations is often the most constant source of material as well as spiritual care and support in humanitarian crises in so many countries. They have also recognised that working with faith-based organisations is different to working with secular humanitarian agencies and the relationships would be enhanced with a better understanding on their part of religious traditions and communities.

It was heartening to hear of the extraordinary work being done by Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Christian leaders in refugee protection around the world and a great honour to

represent the Uniting Church in such a forum.

I hope we can look forward to more opportunities to work with UNHCR as it seeks to better engage with faith-based organisations for the sake of so many of the world's most vulnerable people."

Rev. Elenie Poulos

Aboriginal Recognition Act the first step to Constitutional change

UnitingJustice welcomed the announcement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition Act as an overdue and vitally important first step forward on the path to a referendum and Constitutional reform.

While a referendum on the issue has been delayed for two years, we support the introduction of the Recognition Act and welcome the bipartisan commitment to an education campaign that will help ensure the success of any attempt to amend the foundation document of our nation.

The joint Uniting Church and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress press release may be accessed [here](http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/justice-for-indigenous-australians/news/item/885-aboriginal-recognition-act-first-step-to-constitutional-change): <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/justice-for-indigenous-australians/news/item/885-aboriginal-recognition-act-first-step-to-constitutional-change>

UnitingJustice have also released an updated Stronger Futures Information and Action Kit which you can download [here](http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/justice-for-indigenous-australians/information-and-action-resources/item/886-towards-a-truly-stronger-future): <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/justice-for-indigenous-australians/information-and-action-resources/item/886-towards-a-truly-stronger-future>

UnitingCare Australia

Affordable Energy

The rising cost of electricity bills has been a concern for some time and our agencies have become increasingly aware of the impact of rising energy prices on low income and disadvantaged households. The Federal Government released its Energy White Paper in November, and in December the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) negotiated ways to cut power bills for Australian household.

UnitingCare Australia is a long-time advocate for affordable energy arguing low income households should not have to pay more than four per cent of their income in order to get access to the energy they need to live a decent life. But energy prices have almost doubled in the last five years.

National Director, Lin Hatfield Dodds said this hike is felt most acutely by lower income and disadvantaged households and is driving increased demand for emergency relief and financial counselling services.

Low-income households are cutting back on fresh food, medicine and visits to the doctor in order pay their power bills.

Affordable energy is a key issue for UnitingCare Australia in 2013.

More information is available at www.unitingforchange.org.au or contact UnitingCare Australia on

02 6249 6717.

Gambling Reform

UnitingCare Australia has been central to moves to reform the harm caused by poker machine gambling. Our efforts stepped up after the 2010 federal election when Independent member for Denison, Andrew Wilkie agreed to support the minority Labor government in return for significant poker machine reform measures.

But the Government failed to uphold that agreement in the face of an aggressive \$40 million industry campaign, which proved to be politically damaging, especially in marginal seats in NSW and Qld. UnitingCare Australia established the Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce in mid 2011, and provides the secretariat for the Taskforce.

The Taskforce is made up of the heads of the major Christian churches in Australia and the heads of their social services agencies nationally. The Taskforce is united by a commitment to limit the harm caused by poker machine gambling. It provides a strong, unified, national voice advocating for individuals, families and communities affected by poker machine addiction and has been central to the debate in recent years.

On 29 November 2012, the federal Government, with the support of the Australian Greens and key independents, passed the historic National Gambling Reform Bills. The Bills require all poker machines in Australia to be fitted with the technology that will allow players to decide ahead of time how much they are willing to lose and to set their own limits. Once that limit has been reached, players will have to stop playing for a given period.

While the laws passed will enforce only voluntary pre-commitment technology, a long way from the mandatory pre-commitment technology first proposed in the Wilkie Gillard agreement, these reforms help give power and dignity back to problem gamblers and are a solid platform for further reform.

Synod News

To find out about what is happening across the country visit the Synod news sites below:

New South Wales and the ACT - [Insights](#)

Northern Synod - [Northern News](#)

Queensland - [Journey](#)

South Australia - [New Times](#)

Victoria and Tasmania - [Crosslight](#)

Western Australia - [Revive](#)