



Welcome to the **June** edition of **National Update** with latest news from the Assembly.

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Just a Thought

Rev. Terence Corkin, General Secretary



It seems that it is that time of year again. Around May / June each year a number of our State capital cities are visited upon by the Body, Mind and Spirit exhibitions. These events obviously pull a crowd because they roll around each year and exhibitors pay good money to show their wares in such places as the Darling Harbour Convention Centre.

I am not about to be critical of people seeking out the pleasures of free eyelash extensions or the benefits of “heart malas.” No doubt their advocates offer much to commend them to the general public. Also among the mix of exhibitors are the astrologers, mediums, tarot card readers and psychics. I expect that their advocates were also offering much to commend them.

I did not go along to the event but I expect that there were, as is usual, many people listening and sampling what wisdom they had to offer. What I can be very sure about is that there were no “progressive” astrologers, tarot card, readers, etc. holding stalls. None of these “spiritual” activities make any sense to the rational mind but there has not, to my knowledge, developed a cadre of people who wear the tags of these groups and tell people that unless you can understand everything we say from the perspective of a Western scientific world view then just leave it out. Yet

Protestant Christianity seems to have plenty of people who want to suggest that if they can't understand it then it should be left out of the message.

Trinity Sunday – now that is something that a lot of people have trouble making sense out of! So what do we do just leave it out of the proclamation? Explain it away or rework it to fit our society's current philosophical and intellectual dispositions? Well there are lots of things that I can't explain about God and the Trinity is high on the list. But just because I don't understand it doesn't mean it isn't real. I may not be able to explain the Trinity in a way that allows me to avoid falling into one of many heresies that have arisen over the years. But I do know that if we leave God the creator, Jesus or the Holy Spirit out of the mix then we lose our way and we wander into unhelpful and less life-giving paths.

My encouragement is not to stop telling what seems incomprehensible but to tell what we have seen of the work of God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (to use the traditional Trinitarian language). People are not so much interested in what we can explain but how we can help them get in touch with meaning, character and strength for living. That's what the spirit expos make clear – making sense is not the first test. Let's not disqualify ourselves from the conversation because we think that understanding is the first thing that matters to most people.

From the President

Rev. Professor Andrew Dutney, President



World Mission returns home

I write from Edinburgh, where I've just attended the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. It was a fascinating experience and will take a little time to think through all that I've seen and heard. At this Assembly two great missionary anniversaries were celebrated - the 200th anniversary of the birth of David Livingstone and the 1450th anniversary of the arrival on the Island of Iona of St Columba, the apostle to Scotland. So one of the things I've been thinking about is "mission", particularly what "world mission" might mean today.

I was part of a large group of international delegates, hosted by the World Mission Council of the Church of Scotland. We came from just about every part of the world - from Australia to Zambia. Talking with these sisters and brothers has driven home how the concept of "world mission" has changed. It used to mean taking the Gospel from here (wherever "here" was) into the un-evangelised world to win people and nations for Christ through worship, witness and service.

But that understanding of "world mission" assumed a distinction between the spiritual haves and have-nots - between sending and receiving nations, and between older and younger churches. Such distinctions really have no place in the world church today, even though they linger unconsciously in the imagination of many Western Christians.

These days the former "sending churches" recognise tremendous missional challenges "here" at home, where decades of decline have seen us shift from the centre to the margins of our communities. Meanwhile the former receiving churches have become dynamic, confident agents of God's mission in their own places and, as diaspora churches within the homelands of the missionaries of old like Scotland or Australia.

But they are not generally turning into new sending churches. Rather, they are more like partners who, seeing us face a great missional challenge in our own countries, gently share what they have learned with us. That the whole world is God's. There are no God-less corners or peoples. And that mission is also God's, not the churches'.

So "world mission" essentially means recognising that God is engaged in a mission of reconciliation and renewal throughout the whole world, discerning that activity of the Spirit in the bit of the world to which we have access, and joining in.

So "world mission" is going on where we live, just as it is in the communities of those from all the continents of the earth who were represented here in Edinburgh.

Join our Season of Teaching and Learning

2014 is shaping up to be a year of learning and sharing opportunities.

Next year has been designated by the 2012 Assembly as including "a season of teaching and learning" on Christian faith and discipleship. The Doctrine Working Group is preparing some new study resources and will also recommend other resources for congregations to use in 2014.

Several conferences have also been planned for 2014 and these link up well with the emphasis on teaching and learning. This applies to Ministers, who are able to take two weeks study leave to engage in some form of continuing education, and to all members of the church who are encouraged to be lifelong learners as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Following the pattern of previous Presidents, there will be three National Ministers' Conferences in 2014. These will be as follows:

1. **Charleville** (30 June – 4 July) with a focus on renewed commitment to remote Australia.

2. **Sydney** (21-25 July) with a focus on “living faith and life cross culturally.”
3. **Jerusalem** (22-26 September) with a focus on the foundations of faith and ministry in Biblical history and geography, the challenges of witnessing to Christ among people of other faiths, and the UCA’s continuing commitment to fellowship and solidarity with the Palestinian Christian community.

There will also be other conferences as follows.

National Conference on Mission and Evangelism, “A Clear Call” (Friday 29 – Sunday 30 March) to be held in Adelaide.

This conference came from a desire expressed at the first national Young Adult Leaders’ Conference in February 2012 which was taken up by the National Mission and Evangelism Network. This conference is open to anyone but particularly those involved in leadership, ministry, missional innovation and in service across a variety of contexts – congregations, schools, agencies. Uniting College for Leadership and Theology will offer an intensive on mission and leadership as an adjunct to the conference in the week that follows.

The Doctrine Working Group, in conjunction with the United Theological College and Uniting Mission and Education, will hold “back to back” conferences on the Basis of Union and Preaching to enable people to attend both easily.

Basis of Union (Friday 22 – Sunday 24 August) to be held in Sydney at the Centre for Ministry.

This conference will be something of a follow up to the successful conference held in Melbourne a few years ago.

Preaching (Monday 25 – Thursday 28 August) to be held in Sydney at the Centre for Ministry.

These conferences will constitute Seminar week for the NSW/ACT Synod in 2014.

“Deficit of Justice”

I responded to the recent 2013 Federal Budget by urging politicians and policymakers from all sides to do more for the most vulnerable people at home and abroad.

Important policies like the full funding of DisabilityCare Australia are being tarnished by our continued punitive approach to asylum seekers and our decision to postpone the promised aid increase to countries not as lucky as Australia.

My greatest concern was not for the national deficit, but the deficit of justice and compassion, particularly in relation to asylum seekers.

Sadly the Federal Government announced shortly after the Budget its decision to excise the Australian mainland from the migration zone.

A deplorable decision which begs the question, what will it take for our country to welcome the stranger?

Church Anniversary Address

I have recorded a short video address for congregations and faith communities wishing to mark the 36th Anniversary of Union in 1977.

Please keep an eye out for it on the Video section of the Assembly website in the next few days.

Outback care and community services

Rosemary Young AM, National Director, Frontier Services



Report shows FIFO has eroded ‘liveability’ of remote communities

Frontier Services welcomed a parliamentary report which highlighted the negative impact of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out work practices on remote communities and has urged all levels of Government and mining companies to act on the report’s findings.

The Parliamentary Inquiry, which began in 2011, found the growth of the resources industry and the accompanying FIFO/DIDO workforce practices “are exacerbating to an extreme level the divide between the cost of living in metropolitan and regional Australia”.

Frontier Services National Director Rosemary Young said she welcomed the view of the report that while the development of the resources industry should be a national priority, this should not come at the expense of regional Australia.

“The Inquiry has found, as we have found, that FIFO and DIDO practices have made it harder for remote communities to thrive and has eroded the ‘liveability’ of some remote communities.”

In its submission to the inquiry, Frontier Services explained how the enormous salaries offered to FIFO workers in the mining sector had made it harder to recruit people to work in essential services such as health, counselling and family support.

“We have seen the escalation of accommodation prices which is pushing out local people, we know community organisations are struggling to get numbers and we have observed the disconnect of people who fly in and fly out and do not belong in the community where they live or where they work,” Ms Young said.

The report identified the urgent need for a comprehensive Commonwealth Government Policy regarding FIFO/DIDO workforce practices and their impact on regional communities.

“We agree that steps must be taken to ensure that FIFO/DIDO should be the exception rather than the rule and that measures can and should be in place to encourage workers to live in the communities where they work.”

“As a nation we should make every effort to build strong and sustainable communities in remote Australia.”

Changes in Patrol Ministry

Pilbara Patrol, WA

After nine years of lending a hand and a listening ear to the people of outback SA as the Parkin Patrol Minister, Rev. John Dihm moved to WA in March to fill the role of Pilbara Patrol Minister.

John and his wife Marilyn are based in the iron ore mining town of Tom Price at the edge of the Hamersley Range. John will work with the local community but also spend a large portion of his time on the road travelling across the Pilbara. He will be a listening ear and a helping hand for the people he visits, travelling to cattle stations, mining camps, Aboriginal communities, national parks and remote towns.

John said he had been warmly welcomed by the community so far and looked forward to meeting new people.

“Patrol Ministry is a ministry of friendship,” he said. “You’ve got to be with people, mix with them, work with them and cry with them. You have got to become part the community.”

Mr Dihm follows Rev. Judy Knowling who was the Pilbara Patrol Minister for nine years before finishing in February 2012.

Midlands Patrol, Tasmania

Midlands Patrol Minister Rev. Meg Evans retired in April after 10 years of service.

Meg was the first minister appointed to the Midlands Patrol when it was established in 2003. While supporting the Uniting Church congregations in the region, Meg’s ministry has always focused on supporting and advocating for the wider community.

The Southern Midlands Council recognised Meg's contribution on Australia Day with a Certificate of Appreciation for all she has done.

Meg reflected on the role of a Patrol Minister in isolated communities like those in the Midlands.

"As more and more services leave these rural areas, the presence of the church is really significant," she said. "It's important just to be there."

"It has been such a privilege to be a part of people's lives, to have people trust you, and to share in the hard times and the good times."

Rev. Dennis Cousens will take over as the Midlands Patrol Minister in August.

Tennant Barkly Patrol, NT

In May, Frontier Services welcomed Rev. Peter Wait as the new Tennant Barkly Patrol Minister for Frontier Services.

Based in Tennant Creek, Peter will spend much of his time on the road travelling across the north of the Barkly region visiting people in hard-to-reach places, offering a listening ear and a helping hand.

Peter will offer emotional and practical support to people across the Patrol, providing a source of spiritual care and trust that otherwise might not be there. He will also be a part of the community in Tennant Creek and support the local Uniting Church congregation.

Coming from Adelaide, Peter said he felt called to his new role in the outback with Frontier Services.

"It is privilege to serve in the tradition of Frontier Services and Uniting Church in remote Australia. I look forward to meeting people and having conversations about significant things," Mr Wait said.

Like his work as a prison chaplain, Peter said the role of a Patrol Minister was simply just to be there for people.

"We call it an incarnational ministry. We send a message by our physical presence. When we are there for people in hard to get places we embody God's love for them."

Peter is taking over from Rev. John Flaherty who finished up as the Tennant Barkly Patrol Minister in May last year.

National Volunteer Week

As part of National Volunteer Week from 13-19 May, Frontier Services put out the call for more volunteers to lend a hand in the bush through its volunteer program, Outback Links.

Each year, more than 500 families receive vital assistance from Outback Links volunteers in rural and remote parts of Australia.

With farmers across the country facing worsening drought, the need for extra support in remote communities is greater than ever before.

“The helping hand of an Outback Links volunteer makes an enormous difference to people in isolated locations who cannot easily access support,” said Outback Links Coordinator Davida Melksham. “The practical help, as well as the goodwill the volunteers bring with them is invaluable.”

Mrs Melksham said that Outback Links responded to the changing needs of people in the bush, filling the gaps for people in a variety of situations. Often, simply providing an extra set of hands helps ease the pressure and allows people to catch up on the jobs that otherwise would get pushed aside.

“With tough economic conditions on the land, at least a third of the families we support have been forced to find work off property to supplement their income. This leaves a big gap in the work that needs to get done on the station, and usually it is just one or two people carrying the whole workload.”

“Having a volunteer come and stay and pitch in where needed helps people keep going.”

The Outback Links workforce is extremely diverse. Volunteers include retired people, city professionals, young families and university students, among others.

Louise Salmon recently had volunteers Ian and Fay Laurie assist with flood repairs on her station near Monto, QLD. She said: “We had almost given up, but the volunteers restored our hope.”

Mrs Melksham said: “It is a really different way of volunteering, allowing our participants to experience and better understand life for people in the outback. They come away with a whole new appreciation for life in rural and remote Australia and become advocates for the outback and its people.”

“As for the families we support, just knowing that someone cares enough to come and lend a hand means so much to them.”

To find out more: go to www.outbacklinks.org or phone 1300 731 349.

Relations with Other Faiths

Rev. Glenda Blakefield, Associate General Secretary



Uniting Church and Islamic communities share a common word

A joint conference between members of the Australian Islamic Cultural Centre (AICC) and the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly was hosted by Al-Faisal College in Auburn on the 17 April 2013.

The Assembly's Working Group on Relations with Other Faiths brought together fifteen ministers from around Australia who joined Muslim leaders, scholars and teachers to discuss the theme 'to Love God and to Love Neighbour'.

Rev. Professor Andrew Dutney, President of the Uniting Church Assembly, said that the day was a chance for the Islamic and Christian communities to learn from each other and to discuss faith more broadly.

"Muslims and Christians make up the majority of the human population. Without peace between Muslims and Christians, there cannot be meaningful peace in the world."

"This conference is an opportunity to not only talk about our differences, but to talk about our similarities."

Participants talked about their experiences within their faiths including the challenges they face, training for religious life and perceptions of their customs and beliefs.

Both Islamic and Christian scripture were emphasised, with prayer in both Arabic and English.

The open letter '[A Common Word Between Us and You](#)' was presented by Dr Zachariah Matthews and Rev. Dr Matthew Wilson and was the focal point for the afternoon session.

The document, published in 2007, is a call from Muslim religious leaders to the Pope, Christian leaders and Churches and quotes verses from both the Quran and the Bible affirming the love of God and the love of neighbour which are central themes to both faiths.

Both communities discussed ways in which they could move the dialogue forward, including the reading of 'A Common Word' by UCA ministers and Mosque leaders and holding future informal meetings between the Uniting Church and the AICC.

“The day had excellent foundations for more discussion and action,” said Rev. Glenda Blakefield, Associate General Secretary of the Uniting Church Assembly.

“We are building stronger relationships between Christians and Muslims so that in times of crisis, our two faiths can stand beside each other.

“We are one community.”

Worship, theology and discipleship

Rev. Dr Chris Walker, National Consultant, Theology and Discipleship



The Doctrine Working Group has been working on the resolution on marriage that came from the 2012 Assembly. Initial consultations led by some trained facilitators in selected presbyteries and other groups will take place in the coming months. Rev. Dr Rob Bos will then collate the responses which will inform the discussion paper on marriage that will be written and distributed across the church.

Studies and recommended material for the Season of Teaching and Learning in 2014 are being developed by members of the Doctrine working group.

As mentioned by the President ‘Back to back’ conferences on the *Basis of Union* and *Preaching* will be held on 22-24 August and 25–28 August 2014 at the Centre for Ministry in Sydney.

The Worship Working Group has produced another teaching DVD. This time the subject is Holy Communion with Paul Walton and Anita Monro conducting a service of Holy Communion and then discussing the various parts that make up the service.

The first 40-50 brief biographies of notable Christians have been placed on the Worship resources section of the Assembly website under [A Calendar of Other Commemorations](#).

The Mission and Evangelism Network, through Peter Armstrong and Ruthmary Bond, are organising a national Mission and Evangelism conference, “A Clear Call,” to be held in Adelaide on 28-30 March 2014. Key speakers will be John and Olive Drane from Scotland. In the week following there will be an intensive led by the Dranes at Uniting College.

For more information please contact Rev. Dr Chris Walker, National Consultant, Theology & Discipleship at the National Assembly.

National Photographic Images Competition 2013

The Songs That Unite website is hosting its inaugural photographic images competition.

The competition is seeking photographs that capture the theme “worship” and be appropriate for use in congregations and faith communities. The winning images will be made known across Australia through Uniting Church news networks with opportunities for promotion of other work by the successful photographers.

Prizes: \$250 first prize and \$100 each for up to 4 highly commended entries

The photo should be appropriate for use in any situation relating to worship such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, newsletters, brochures, presentations and more.

Entries open on the 1st of June and close on the 1st of July, 2013. Winners will be announced on the 31st of August, 2013.

For more information please contact Annette Latham at admin@songsthatunite.org.au.



Launch of Lutheran/Uniting Church liturgy for shared ministry

Representatives of the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia have launched a new liturgy for shared ministry between their churches.

The Co-chair of the Lutheran/Uniting Church Dialogue, Rev. Dr Anna Grant-Henderson of the Uniting Church, said that the liturgy marks a significant step in the continuing relationship between the two churches.

“The dialogue is seeking a way forward for both churches to share in our traditions and to build relationships across our Christian communities,” said Rev. Dr Grant-Henderson

“There has been strong support for the new liturgy and much healthy debate over what was to be included.

“Communities with shared ministry arrangements will now have a truly ecumenical liturgy that identifies with both denominations.”

The media release is available [here](#).

The liturgy is available [here](#).

Holy Communion DVD

The latest educational DVD from the Worship Working Group is now available. It offers an in-depth look at the theology and conduct of Holy Communion, with a user-friendly index that facilitates ready access to the various segments. This is an ideal resource for presiders and elders, as well as members of congregations. It can be obtained free of charge from the Rev. Dr Chris Walker in the Assembly Office.

Calendar of Other Commemorations

As well as the 40-50 brief biographies mentioned earlier, it is our intention to add more articles to ***The Calendar of Other Commemorations*** on the Assembly website.

The webpage already includes a number of articles very suitable as a resource for sermon illustrations, children's talks, bible studies etc. as they are written. Anyone interested in helping with this project is encouraged to contact the Convenor of the Working Group, the Rev. Dr David Pitman at dpitman@westnet.com.au.

Calling all Hymn-Writers

The Australian Hymn Book Company (owned by Australian churches) has announced an international hymn competition for hymn texts on the theological emphases of St Paul. The closing date for submissions is 31 July. Full details are at www.togetherinsong.org

Rev. Dr Kerry Enright, National Director, UnitingWorld



Looking for a positive way to respond to disappointing aid figures?

UnitingWorld's annual end of tax year appeal offers an effective way to make sure \$1.2 billion people living on less than \$1.25 a day don't get left behind in all this budget talk. Take the 25 young women who have just started their training at one of South Sudan's only midwifery training schools; as one of the projects you can support this year through the Matching Gift Fund, your tax-deductible gift will mean they can be trained to provide desperately needed maternal health care in the most remote areas of South Sudan. For more information about how your gift to the Matching Gift Fund will go further with Australian Government funding, click [here](#).

UnitingWorld: Volunteer overseas – from regional NSW to Kiribati

Stan Tonkins from NSW recently spent two and a half weeks running a course in audio recording technology with young people in Kiribati, a small Pacific island home to just 102,000 people. The training will allow high quality recordings of radio programs and church services to be broadcast to even the most remote communities. This is incredibly valuable in a country where 96% of the population identify strongly as Christian.

Are you interested in volunteering with one of the Uniting Church's overseas church partners? UnitingWorld's Experience Volunteer Program still has available volunteer placements for the July 2013 intake. We are looking for people with a variety of skills and interests for placements from three months to two years in countries as diverse as Mongolia, Zimbabwe and Thailand.

For more information about available placements, or to enquire about the Experience Volunteer program, click [here](#) or call Laura on 02 8267 4411.

A Collaborative Approach to International Volunteering

6-8pm, Thursday 20th June
Hilton Hotel, 488 George Street, Sydney CBD

Austraining is contracted by the Australian Government to conduct their overseas volunteer program. UnitingWorld has a long relationship with Austraining as one of their active Australian Partner Organisations and with a history of successful engagement through our Volunteer Experience Program. Together with

representative from a Host Organisation in Tonga, this evening will provide first-hand experience of the value of this program.

Each of our highly communicative guest speakers will share perspectives on what it means to volunteer alongside local counterparts, as well as the real difference that is made towards sustainable development and capacity building through fully funded and well-supported volunteer placements. Hear from Austraining, a past volunteer, UnitingWorld and a representative coming especially for this event from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (Host Organisation).

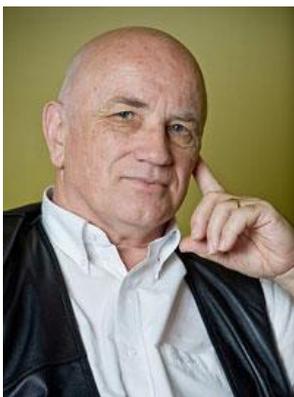
A must for anyone considering a volunteer placement overseas, other NGO's interested to develop as an Australian Partner Organisation, and for those interested in learning more about how UnitingWorld engages with its overseas partners. Students of International Studies and leaders of Social Justice Groups may find this volunteer pathway of great interest for future consideration.

RSVP by Wednesday, 12th June: [Click here to register](#) or call Fiona on 02-8267 4449. You are welcome to bring a friend.

We hope you can join us for an evening that will depict a colourful expression of the fullness and breadth of UnitingWorld's partnerships through Experience Volunteering!

Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Ministry

Rev. Dr Tony Floyd, National Director of Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Ministry



Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry National Reference Committee Meeting

Members of the Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry National Reference Committee met in Sydney from 28-30 May to discuss issues faced in cross-cultural ministries and congregations across Australia.

The National Reference Committee reflects the diverse and respectful nature of the Uniting Church in its membership and processes, said Rev. Glenda Blakefield, Associate General Secretary of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly.

“This is a chance for us to discuss community and what being a part of the Uniting Church means to different cultures, including the dominant culture,” said Rev. Blakefield.

“Through our multicultural life and cross cultural ministry we are able to recognise the gifts and calling of peoples of diverse cultural and language backgrounds.”

The Reference Committee meets twice a year for three days to discuss topical community and national issues and upcoming events.

Committee members discussed growing congregations and community initiatives, including the growing Dinka congregation in Adelaide under the ministry of Rev. Amel Manyon and the successful Marhaba Cross Cultural Community in Perth.

Rev. Dr Tony Floyd, National Director of Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry, said that these programs show ways in which cross-cultural communities and ministries are thriving within the Uniting Church.

“These communities are a strong part of our present reality and central in the future of our church, as it becomes increasingly intentional in working across cultures,” said Rev. Dr Floyd.

“Supporting initiatives like emerging congregations and cross-cultural community centres makes us a church for all of God’s people.”

Over 800 people will live on-site and hundreds more daily visitors are expected to attend the Tongan National Conference (TNC) in the Blue Mountains over the June long weekend.

“This is a powerful time of celebration and affirmation of Tongan culture and presence in the Uniting Church here in Australia, a time when our voices are heard,” said TNC Chair Rev. Jason Kioa.

Committee members discussed a number of important issues across the Uniting Church including cultural understanding and expectations of marriage within their communities, access to culturally appropriate theological education and training, and their sense of homelessness felt by many communities trying to find appropriate places to worship, especially for emerging churches.

Representatives of the committee will next meet in July with national theological educators to discuss cross cultural considerations in the methods and content of theological training.

“It is important to think about how we educate in our theological schools as we have students from many backgrounds and cultures,” said Rev. Dr Chris Walker, National Consultant, Theology and Discipleship.

“In this year’s candidature for ministry at the Centre for Ministry in North Parramatta, for the first time ever, every candidate is from a different cultural background.”

“We are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries.”

“Discussing how we educate candidates for ministry from culturally diverse backgrounds is just one way in which we can do this.”

The Uniting Church in Australia declared itself a multicultural church at its 4th Assembly in 1985, and affirmed that it is a church for all God’s people at the 11th Assembly in 2006.

The area of Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry falls under the mandate of Uniting Faith and Discipleship and is a unit of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Justice and advocacy

Rev. Elenie Poulos, National Director, UnitingJustice



A Just Society – Our 2013 Federal Election Resource

The Uniting Church in Australia 2013 Federal Election resource is making its way to presbyteries and congregations around the country.

The resource titled “A Just Society: your faith, your voice, your vote” invites Uniting Church members and others to consider the values which underpin the policies of the political parties and candidates who are asking us to entrust them with the good of all people and the planet, now and into the future.

Uniting Church justice officers and agencies have joined together to produce the booklet, which lays out the Christian perspective on a number of prominent national issues. These include justice for Aboriginal Australians, the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, climate change, life in regional and remote Australia, human rights, aged care, multiculturalism, as well as aid and international development.

There is also an “election toolkit” to help your congregation or faith community hold a “meet the candidates” event in the coming months.

The election resource is available online at www.unitingjustice.org.au/election2013.

As Christians called to reach out with the love of God for the good of all, we have a particular responsibility to think carefully and cast our vote with the needs of the most vulnerable in mind.

At a time when many are disappointed at the lack of vision and passion in the current political climate, I hope this resource will encourage you to raise your voice and share our Church's vision for a just society.

Another national failure to welcome the stranger

The President of the Uniting Church in Australia Rev. Professor Andrew Dutney has deplored the move by the Federal Government to excise the Australian mainland from the migration zone.

The move means that no asylum seekers arriving in Australia will have the automatic right to remain in Australia while their claims for a humanitarian visa are being processed.

"Yet again Australians of compassion are ashamed at the lengths our Government will take to avoid its obligations to some of the world's most vulnerable people," said Rev. Prof. Andrew Dutney.

"Jesus called his followers to welcome the stranger and he commanded that we love our neighbour as we love ourselves."

"His command directs us and all people towards a life of peace and justice. I fear that this move is another example of the nation being led away from Christ's teachings.

"It is frustrating that in the week that we fully fund assistance to Australians living with disabilities, we also decide to flout the basic human rights and dignity of people who seek refuge in our wealthy country."

Responding to the 2013 Budget, Rev. Prof. Dutney said the national lack of compassion for asylum seekers is distorting our priorities.

"Additional funding for offshore processing in places like Nauru and Manus Island is more than 10 times the amount of funding allocated for onshore processing.

"With more than 90% of arrivals later found to be refugees, we are damaging people who are already vulnerable," said Rev. Prof. Dutney.

"We are denying asylum seekers the ability to start their healing process and contribute to our society."

Rosemary Hudson Miller, acting national director of UnitingJustice, said that the move shows the Government is neglecting their promise to enact more compassionate policies for asylum seekers.

“This is a sickening move in policy, showing that the moral compass of the Government has lost its way,” said Ms Hudson Miller.

“The enactment of this recommendation from the Houston Panel Report shows that the Government has no regard for the safety or wellbeing of some of the world’s most vulnerable people.

“The Government has back flipped. They said in 2007 that this policy is a stain on Australia’s national character and now they are the party supporting the legislation.”

The Uniting Church is a long-standing supporter of onshore processing of asylum seekers with good case management, access to adequate services including healthcare and education.

Work Rights for Asylum Seekers

UnitingJustice has joined with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) in a campaign to secure basic human rights for asylum seekers released into the community on a bridging visa.

In November 2012 the Government announced a change in policy for asylum seekers who arrived by boat after 13 August and who were released into the community on a bridging visa. The policy shift prohibits any type of meaningful engagement for asylum seekers in the community – no right to work and very limited opportunities for volunteer work.

We know that when asylum seekers are denied to opportunity to work, they not only struggle to support themselves and their families, but they find it more difficult to settle into a new life here in Australia.

National Director of UnitingJustice Rev. Elenie Poulos spoke out about the importance of securing this fundamental human right for newly-arrived asylum seekers.

"Asylum seekers who have left everything behind in search of safety from persecution want to build new lives for themselves. The right to work is fundamental because it's one of the most important ways we find meaning and purpose in life," said Rev. Poulos.

"Asylum seekers are just like us – they want to build a good life for their families and make a positive contribution to society. The Government must do what is right and give back to asylum seekers the right to work."

You can learn more about the campaign by visiting the ***Right to Work*** [website](#).

Justice Staff Meeting

Justice staff from around the country gathered in Sydney in March to share ideas and collaborate on upcoming campaigns. For many of those present, it was the first opportunity to meet face-to-face after months (or years) of emails and phone calls!

National Director of Uniting Justice Rev. Elenie Poulos said that the two-day meeting was an opportunity to share our most valuable resource - the people who staff the justice offices around the country.

"Justice staff work long and hard advocating on social justice issues that speak to the heart of who we are as a Church," said Rev. Poulos.

"This meeting allowed us to come together, undertake some valuable planning for the upcoming twelve months, and reinforce our commitment to the shared Christian values that underpin all that we do."

Social Justice Officer in the VicTas Justice & International Mission Office, Jill Ruzbacky said that the meeting was an invaluable opportunity to connect with people working in this important area of the life of the Church.

"It was fantastic to be given the opportunity of meeting with social justice staff from across the different Synods. On top of the personal connections that come from meeting with people one-on-one, was the chance to explore what different Synod Units will be focussing on, and exploring the possibilities of where we may be able to work together," said Ms. Ruzbacky.

"I think this is really helpful when many of the issues that we discussed are national social justice issues and not just State issues. I came away excited about the possibilities that lay ahead in 2013!"

Uniting Church President Rev. Prof. Andrew Dutney stopped in for a visit during the meeting and offered his encouragement and prayers to all staff members for their advocacy work over the coming months.

Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director, UnitingCare



Funding the things that matter: UnitingCare Australia's 2013 Federal Budget response: budget built around the icons

UnitingCare Australia's National Director, Lin Hatfield Dodds has welcomed modest measures in tonight's budget that begin to redistribute existing revenue and scale back wasteful tax concessions, paving the way to fund important reforms.

In challenging circumstances an additional \$25.5 billion in revenue will be raised by the end of the forward estimates, including:

- \$4.1 billion closing business tax loopholes
- \$1.5 billion limiting open ended personal income tax concessions related to education and medical expenses
- \$11.8 billion from the Medicare disability levy
- \$720 million in superannuation reform

"But at the same time superannuation concessions will top \$50 billion a year in the forward estimates. Eighty per cent of our superannuation concessions are currently directed to the wealthiest 20 per cent of superannuants. Funding very wealthy Australians' retirement is a poor use of public money," Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

"We are pleased to see the Australian Government stepping up to fund the historic disability insurance reforms. DisabilityCare will make a significant difference in the daily lives of nearly half a million Australians, who will be better able to participate in their community.

"Scaling the baby bonus down, from \$5000 to \$2000 for the first child and tying this payment to the Family Tax Benefit A better targets families in need.

"However, it's very disappointing to see no additional support for unemployed Australians through direct increases to unemployment benefits.

"The lift in the tax free threshold to \$100 per fortnight, which is indexed for the first time, is welcome.

"But while the extension of the pensioner education supplement and longer access to the pensioner concession card will materially assist Australians moving into employment, unemployed Australians will continue to struggle to make ends meet.

“If budgets are about choices, this year the budget challenges the free ride for the top end of town while investing in iconic disability and education reform,” Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

Join us – Uniting for Change

The Uniting Church community will have a stronger voice on the things that matter following the launch of a new website that encourages citizens to get active on important social issues.

Uniting for Change is UnitingCare Australia’s new online social advocacy and discipleship platform that aims to build an Australia where all people have access to the means for a decent life.

National Director Lin Hatfield Dodds said the reality is too many Australians are being left behind.

“But when we bring together our expertise, our voices and our passion for our communities and our nation we can bring about lasting change,” Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

“A more just, inclusive and equitable society is achievable when everyday people come together to learn, share and respond to the substantial challenges facing vulnerable and disadvantaged people and communities in Australia.

“The site encourages people to learn, to share and to act on the things that matter.

“Uniting for Change offers a toolbox of advocacy and theological resources that help people advocate for change both locally and nationally as well as create change in their own lives and in their communities.

“The site currently looks at five important social issues: aged care reform, energy poverty, disability reform, income support justice, and gambling reform.

“Resources include liturgies on energy poverty and disability reform. These worship resources allow congregations to engage in current advocacy issues and consider their theological implications.

“Daily news clips bring you up to the minute details and fact sheets ensure you’ve got the issue in a nutshell. Hear people’s stories and share your thoughts online. You can contact your local Federal politicians using the easy link to contact details and advocacy messages which will be available in the weeks ahead,” Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

You can find out more at the website www.unitingforchange.org.au, and get involved on social media or by signing up for the eBulletin.

Other Assembly news



The Transit Lounge rebooted

The Transit Lounge is back after a short hiatus and is now accepting contributions for articles on faith, life, world news, justice and more.

The Transit Lounge is the youth online publication of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly. You can find the publication at www.thetransitlounge.com.au.

If you know any young communicators or young people with writing skills who would like to contribute, please [contact us](#) via the Transit Lounge website.

[Subscribe to the Transit Lounge!](#) You'll receive monthly newsletters with the latest church, world, faith and other news right to your inbox.

Lastly, head over to Facebook and ['like' our page](#). We post lots of relevant links from blog posts to pictures to events. Come join the conversation!

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](#)



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