

JUNE 2019

# Our Vision for a Just Australia

LOOKING AHEAD



Uniting Church in Australia  
ASSEMBLY



Uniting **Justice**  
AUSTRALIA



# How can I use this statement?

This document expresses our Uniting Church vision for a just Australia and why our Christian faith calls us to work towards its fulfilment. The document is deliberately broad in scope. You may connect with the vision as a whole or choose to focus on one or two issues.

## The statement:



**Calls us to look beyond ourselves, our own needs and concerns, to take a wider view of our country and our world.**



**Invites us to engage in conversations with an openness to listen and learn from each other.**



**Encourages us to think deeply, challenge our assumptions and what we might think we already know.**



**Asks that we take seriously our democratic privilege and responsibility.**

Here are some practical suggestions for using this resource.

## Start a Conversation

- Use the document as a guide to begin a discussion within your church or community.
- Ask people to respond to the vision statement. What stands out? What challenges you?
- Reflect on the bible references. What other passages might you include?
- Select one or two issues to discuss in more detail – choose what you care about.
- You might like to choose one particular topic and research it more deeply. Some links and references have been provided that can assist in this.
- Consider a broader conversation about how this resource is helpful in engaging with our political leaders and elected representatives. What influences our political views? How does our faith call us into action and engagement with the decisions made by our government?

## Host a Forum

- Host or take part in a public forum. Consider inviting Members of Parliament or community leaders to share their views.
- Decide the topics or key issues that you want to discuss.
- Prepare some of the important questions you might like to ask. Examples are contained in the document.

## Pray

- Consider how the document might be useful for gathered worship.
- Offer a reflection on one of the foundations, including relevant bible passages, what the Uniting Church has said and some of the key issues.
- Delve more deeply into the bible passages.
- Use the State of the Nation sections as prayer points.

# Introduction from the President

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to acting justly and compassionately in the world. We believe that our participation in God's mission calls us toward the transformation that God desires for us all, marked by reconciliation, love, justice, peace, abundance and flourishing for all people and the whole earth.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

(Luke 4: 18-19)

In the Statement to the Nation made at our inaugural Assembly in 1977 we acknowledged that our Christian responsibility to society is fundamental to the mission of Christ's Church.

In that statement, we committed to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occurred, to uphold the importance of every human being, to affirm the rights of all people to equal opportunities and to protect our environment for future generations.

Across the Church, we continue to work towards shaping a nation that is inclusive, compassionate and just.

This vision statement is a collaboration of those engaged in working for justice through the mission and ministry of the Uniting Church, in our Synods, our Agencies and the Assembly.

Inspired by the work of the Australia Remade project, we have articulated our hopes and vision for a just Australia lived out in seven different foundations.

We have named our hopes in these foundational areas and identified why these are important to us as followers of Christ and members of the Uniting Church.

We have taken a snapshot of the current situation in Australia across the seven foundations and named key actions that are needed to move us towards this vision.

Articulating our vision for Australia at this time is critical. Many of the issues identified in this document are prominent in public debate as Australians consider the future they want for our country.

For each foundation, you will find helpful questions for personal reflection, that might prompt discussion in small groups. There are also questions you may find helpful in engaging with MPs or community leaders.

I commend this resource to congregations and Uniting Church members. It is offered as a way of resourcing us as a Church, as we seek to live out our Christian discipleship in every aspect of our lives. As followers of Christ, each one of us is called to be a voice for justice and hope in our communities, in Australia and in the world.

We embody the Spirit of Christ when the values that shape us are ones of justice for all and our identity is centred in the compassion and hospitality of the God we see in Jesus.

Grace and Peace,



**Dr Deidre Palmer**

President, Uniting Church in Australia

## Our Vision for a Just Australia:

We see a nation where each person and all creation can flourish and enjoy abundant life.

The Uniting Church in Australia believes the whole world is God's good creation. Each person is made in God's image and is deeply loved by God. In Jesus, God is completing the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.



**Our vision, grounded in the life and mission of Jesus, is for a nation which:**

- is characterised by love for one another, of peace with justice, of healing and reconciliation, of welcome and inclusion.
- recognises the equality and dignity of each person.
- recognises sovereignty of First Peoples, has enshrined a First Peoples voice and is committed to truth telling about our history.
- takes seriously our responsibility to care for the whole of creation.
- is outward looking, a generous and compassionate contributor to a just world.

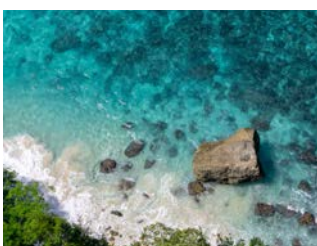
## Foundations

This is our vision and hope for a just Australia expressed in seven foundational areas.



### A First Peoples Heart

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before colonisation, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. First People's sovereignty is affirmed, First Peoples have a voice in the decision making of our country and are living out their right to self-determination. As First and Second Peoples, we walk together, creating socially just and culturally safe relationships, listening and learning from one another.



### Renewal of the Whole of Creation

We seek the flourishing of the whole of God's Creation and all its creatures. We act to renew the earth from the damage done and stand in solidarity with people most impacted by human-induced climate change. Government, churches, businesses and the wider community work together for a sustainable future.





## A Welcoming, Compassionate and Diverse Nation

We are a nation of diverse cultures, languages, faiths, ethnic groups and experiences. We celebrate and value the strength of this diversity. We see this diversity reflected in our leaders, key decision makers, institutions, industry, sports and media.

We are a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe – regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival.



## An Economy for Life

Our government makes economic decisions that put people first: decisions that are good for creation, that lift people out of poverty and fairly share our country's wealth. The economy serves the well-being and flourishing of all people.



## An Inclusive and Equal Society

We live together in a society where all are equal and free to exercise our rights equally, regardless of faith, cultural background, race, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. We defend those rights for all.



## Flourishing Communities, Regional, Remote and Urban

We live in communities where we are connected and we care for one another. In communities all over Australia, from our big cities to remote regions, we seek the well-being of each Australian and uplift those who are on the margins.



## Contributing to a Just and Peaceful World

Australia acts with courage and conviction to build a just and peaceful world. We are a nation that works in partnership with other nations to dismantle the structural and historical causes of violence, injustice and inequality. Our government upholds human rights everywhere, acting in the best interests of all people and the planet.

**For each Foundation we have further articulated our hopes, why this is important to the Uniting Church and what we see in the current context in Australia.**

**We have included some key questions for reflection. You might like to put these questions to your local Members of Parliament or community leaders.**

A photograph of three young Indigenous children laughing joyfully outdoors. The child on the left is a girl with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, laughing with her mouth open. The child in the middle is a boy with dark hair, also laughing. The child on the right is a girl with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, laughing. They are all looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred green, suggesting foliage. A semi-transparent yellow rectangle is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

# A First Peoples Heart

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## **Our Vision:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before colonisation, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. First Peoples' sovereignty is affirmed, First Peoples have a voice in the decision making of our country and are living out their right to self-determination. As First and Second Peoples, we walk together, creating socially just and culturally safe relationships, listening and learning from one another.

## Our hopes:

- A constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to the Federal Government.
- A Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of:
  - » Agreement-making or treaty-making between governments and First Peoples
  - » Truth-telling about Australia's history, seeking justice, healing and reconciliation
- Self-determination that gives First Peoples full control over decisions impacting their lives and communities.
- Meaningful and effective, culturally-appropriate and research-based policies and programs to significantly reduce Indigenous incarceration.
- Significant and consistent resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community health and wellbeing services, designed to achieve a closing of the gap in health, mental health and social outcomes.
- Adequate resourcing of remote communities.
- High rates of early childhood education, school attendance and completion among Indigenous students supported by sufficient professional resourcing and educational opportunities, no matter where a person lives.
- Indigenous languages to be preserved, taught and incorporated into civic functions. True bilingual education to become a reality for Indigenous communities where English is not a first language.
- Indigenous cultures to be understood and celebrated by all Australians.
- Support for Indigenous business and increased local employment opportunities in remote communities.

## Witness from the Bible

- We begin from the starting point that all humans are made in the image of God and are thus to be equally respected, included and supported in society (**Genesis 1: 26-27**).
- The teaching of the prophets consistently links faithfulness to God with a willingness to care for those members of society who are on the margins or have been treated unjustly. See for example **Isaiah 58: 1 – 11; Amos 2: 6 – 7; 4: 1 – 5; 5: 10 – 15, 21 – 24**.

- Jesus' example of ministry and his teaching point us to a focus on showing kindness and compassion to those marginalised by society (**Luke 10: 25-37**). Jesus described his call to ministry as one which was bound up with proclaiming good news for the poor and oppressed (**Luke 4: 16 – 19**), and he taught that our response to those in need represents a response to Christ himself (**Matthew 25: 31 – 46**).
- The New Testament Epistles describe a community without distinctions (**Galatians 3: 28**) and give Christians the "ministry of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5: 18**) and of pursuing peace with everyone (**Hebrews 12: 14**).
- In the light of these biblical principles, the Uniting Church sees that the single area within Australian society where there is the keenest need for reconciliation and peace-making, where people have been dispossessed and continue to be marginalised, where there is a need for respect and the recognition of the presence of God, is in our relationship and heart for the First Peoples of this country.

## What the UCA has said

### The Basis of Union (1971, 1992 Edition)

"God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation..."

### Bicentennial Statement to the Nation (1988)

"Those of us who have migrated to Australia in the last two centuries or are the descendants of migrants, confess that all of us are beneficiaries of the injustices that have been inflicted on those of us who were Aboriginal people. In varying degrees, we all contribute to, and perpetuate those injustices. We recognise the violence which has been done to the Aboriginal people in the colonisation of this continent and the injustice by which Aborigines have been deprived of the land. We recognise the continuing Aboriginal experience of violence and injustice."



“The integrity of our nation requires truth; the history of Australia, as it is taught in educational institutions or popularised in the media, must cease to conceal the reality and nature of Aboriginal society before invasion, what was done to them in colonisation, and what has been the fate and status of Aborigines within the Australian nation.”

“The integrity of our nation will be measured by action; by legislative action which honours the Aboriginal plea for justice, and by popular action by which the Australian people express their willingness to support Aboriginal Australians in the quest for justice and their struggle to reconstruct their society.

“As for the Uniting Church in Australia, in obedience to God, in concern for the integrity of our nation, and in co-operation with all citizens of goodwill, we Aboriginal and newer Australians have determined to stand together.”

### **The Covenant (1994)**

At its 7th Assembly, the Uniting Church formally entered into a Covenant relationship with its Indigenous members, recognising and repenting for the Church’s complicity in the injustices perpetrated on Australia’s Indigenous community, and pledging to move forward with a shared future. Congress’ generous response to this statement, among other messages, called upon the broader Church to take up the mission of reconciliation.

### **Preamble to the Constitution (2009)**

The 12th Assembly 2009 affirmed a new preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution which recognised the tragic history of dispossession and the decimation of the First Peoples together with our part as Church in this. Importantly, it recognised that God was in this land from the very beginning, in creation, and this Creator God was known by the First Peoples long before any invaders arrived, the Word was in Creation and is revealed in human form as Jesus Christ.

### **Recognising First Peoples as Sovereign, the 15th Assembly (2018)**

The Assembly resolved “to affirm the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, are sovereign peoples in this land”. In recognising this fundamental truth, the UCA offered moral leadership to the nation. It affirmed sovereignty as described in the Statement from the Heart, as a “spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land...and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”. Likewise it acknowledged that this sovereignty “has never been ceded or

extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.”

### **Statement from the Heart (2017)**

In August 2017, responding to the Statement from the Heart,<sup>1</sup> the National Executive of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) affirmed the work that supports the Statement from the Heart, in which Indigenous leaders asked for a voice to advise Parliament, and the creation of a commission to oversee Makarrata or treaty making.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent to this, the UAICC National Conference resolved to invite the Assembly “to support work to progress the Uluru statement” and “endorse and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),<sup>3</sup> including principles of self-determination”.

## **The State of the Nation**

- Indigenous communities, both remote and urban, experience heightened levels of disadvantage. Indigenous Australians have a lower life expectancy and worse health, education and employment outcomes across the board than other Australians.<sup>4</sup>
- Proportionally, Australia’s Indigenous people are the most incarcerated people on the planet.<sup>5</sup>
- More Indigenous peoples have experienced racial prejudice than the general community, with 43% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander respondents having suffered at least one form of such racism.<sup>6</sup>
- Australians widely agree Indigenous people hold a unique and important place in the national identity.<sup>7</sup>

### **Key Actions:**

1. Provide First Peoples with a Voice into Federal Government enshrined in the Australian constitution.
2. Recognise the sovereignty of First Peoples and establish a commission for treaty making, truth telling, justice and reconciliation.

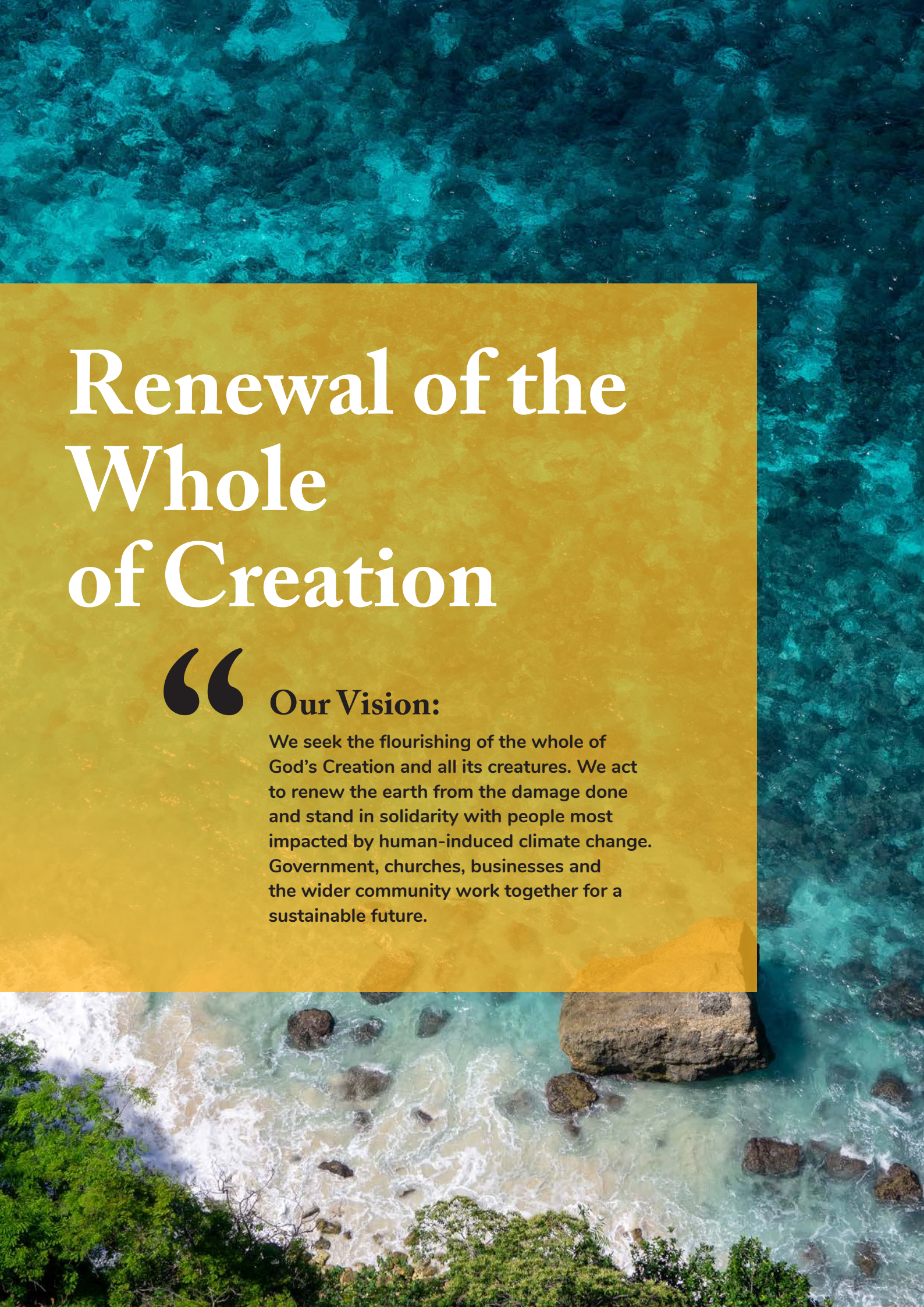


## Discussion Starters

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. Does your party or organisation have a Reconciliation Action Plan, and what are the key points?
2. Have you read the Statement from the Heart? How do you feel about giving First Peoples a formal voice into government?
3. What is your position regarding understanding First Peoples as sovereign in this land and the implications for that?
4. What do you think should be done to address Indigenous disadvantage in terms of life expectancy, health and education for First Peoples?
5. What do you think should be done to address Indigenous incarceration rates in Australia?
6. What are you doing, or what might you do to further reconciliation in your own community?





# Renewal of the Whole of Creation

“ **Our Vision:**

We seek the flourishing of the whole of God's Creation and all its creatures. We act to renew the earth from the damage done and stand in solidarity with people most impacted by human-induced climate change. Government, churches, businesses and the wider community work together for a sustainable future.



## Our hopes:

- Australians feel deeply connected to our natural environment. We recognise the gift of living amongst all this unique diversity and seek to protect it.
- We affirm and seek the guiding wisdom of First Peoples and cultures who have lived as part of this place for countless generations.
- First Peoples have regular direct involvement in the management of land and waters, and in environmental practices.
- We have thought deeply about our place in the world and our responsibilities to the web of life. We value nature for its own sake, not only for its material benefits to humans.
- We have a carbon neutral economy and fully renewable energy, including equitable access and a just transition process for communities currently dependent on fossil fuel activities.
- We live sustainable lifestyles with minimal further human impacts on our ecosystems.
- The abundance of the earth's resources, food and water, are managed in a just, participatory and sustainable manner for the benefit of current and future generations.
- We protect the rights of future generations to healthy air, an intact ozone layer and sufficient thermal exchange between the earth and space.
- 'Waste' products are seen as resources, and products are built to last. We recognise that there is no 'away' and that we are responsible for all the items we use.
- We live within and a part of an abundant natural world with a rich plant and animal life and protect the rights of nature – animate or inanimate – to preservation and appropriate development.

## Witness from the Bible

- The earth is God's (**Psalm 24: 1 – 2; 89: 11**) and while humanity has been entrusted with care of God's creation (**Genesis 1: 26 – 31**), we are only stewards not owners (see for example **Leviticus 25: 1 – 28**, especially **vs 23**).
- The earth itself suffers "in bondage to decay" and "groans in labour pains", awaiting the freedom promised by the first fruits of the Spirit (**Romans 8: 19 – 23**).

- This suffering of the creation is regularly linked with human sin and culpability (e.g. **Jeremiah 2: 7; Hosea 4: 1 – 3**).
- The exploitation of the earth, which often sees the poorest disproportionately suffering the results of despoliation and climate change is a manifestation of the sin of greed against which the biblical witnesses strongly warn (see for example **Job 20: 12 – 29; Proverbs 1: 10 – 19; Matthew 23: 25 – 26; Luke 12: 15 – 21**).
- The earth itself is a witness to the glory of God (**Psalm 19: 1 – 4**) and the Lordship of Christ (**Luke 19: 38 – 40**) and it is important for Christians to ensure that this witness is enhanced and not undercut by our actions and approaches.

## What the UCA has said

### Basis of Union (1992 edition, Paragraph 3)

"God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end."

### Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment."

### The Rights of Nature and the Rights of Future Generations (1991)

"We express the conviction that those who live today share responsibility for the ability of future generations to live in dignity, we support the attribution of rights not only to humans but also to nature, God's creation, and we reject the view that animate and inanimate nature are mere objects which stand at the arbitrary disposal of the human."

### For the Sake of the Planet and All its People (2006)

"We renew our commitment to move towards sustainable non-exploitative living, believing that God's creation—the earth itself and all the life that it supports—is precious and the earth's resources exist for the good of all now as well as future generations."



The Uniting Church regards climate change as a serious threat to the future and integrity of life on earth... therefore challenges the way we live in a fundamental way.”

### For the whole creation (2018)

Among a list of resolutions, the Assembly resolved:

- d) To work with First Peoples in Australia and our church partners in the Pacific, Africa and Asia and other faiths to together understand the impacts of climate change on traditional, spiritual and contemporary ways of life;
- e) To encourage Uniting Church members, synods, presbyteries, congregations, agencies and schools to:
  - i. Continue to inform themselves and their communities about the causes and consequences of climate change and appropriate responses;
  - ii. Advocate for government policies and political action to address climate change;
  - iii. Listen to and learn from the voices of vulnerable people across the world who are experiencing firsthand the impact of climate change;
  - iv. Consider ways we can reduce our contribution to climate change, individually and in our communities, set meaningful targets and be transparent with our efforts and outcomes; and
  - v. Tell stories of best practice across remote, rural and urban areas.

## The State of the Nation

Global temperatures are rising as human activity pollutes the atmosphere with greenhouse gases

- Australia faces significant climate change impacts: rising sea levels, extreme heat and storms, longer droughts and bushfire seasons and the loss of coral reef.<sup>8</sup>
- Our neighbours in the Pacific and elsewhere are suffering with the impacts of climate change.
- Despite this, most of Australia’s energy relies on traditional sources—non-renewable fossil fuels. Coal and gas account for about 85% of electricity generation.<sup>9</sup>

- Australia’s emissions levels are rising.<sup>10</sup> We are not on track to meet our emissions reduction target (26-28% by 2030 on 2005 levels). The target should be much higher (45-60% is recommended) to do our fair share toward the Paris target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.<sup>11</sup>
- Government policies are failing to support the necessary transition to renewables, especially for communities who are currently reliant on coal and other fossil fuels as their main industry and source of employment.
- There is a growing fossil fuel divestment movement<sup>12</sup> and significant private investment in solar panels<sup>13</sup> and renewable energy.
- There is a strong public appetite for, and uptake of renewables. Over 2 million Australian households have now installed solar panels<sup>14</sup> but there is a need for more equitable access for all Australians.<sup>15</sup>

### Key Actions:

1. A national climate policy that drives down greenhouse gas pollution, including no new coal or gas mining in Australia and investment in renewable energy.
2. Just and sustainable transition for communities currently dependent on fossil fuel industries for employment, towards more environmentally sustainable sources of income.
3. Equitable access to renewables for all Australians.
4. Policies which support people and nations that are most vulnerable to climate change.

### **Our natural environmental is in a state of decline**

- Australia is a land of amazing biodiversity however we are failing to protect it.
- According to the State of the Environment Report, the main pressures facing the Australian environment in 2016 are: climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and degradation, invasive species and multiple overlapping pressures on the same ecosystems.<sup>16</sup>
- Additional pressures include altered fire regimes, overuse of species and habitats, ocean acidification, pollution in our coastal and marine environments, energy production, mining and agriculture.”<sup>17</sup>
- Our marine environments have been degraded by overfishing, bycatch, acidification and coral bleaching, for example in the Great Barrier Reef.

#### **Key Actions**

1. More natural and marine protected areas, better land care and water management and improved environmental laws.
2. Policies which support farmers who have already or want to transition to more sustainable agricultural techniques.
3. Strong environmental laws with independent assessment processes and strict enforcement.

### **We are a throw-away society**

- Australians are overconsuming and throwing away more. Despite higher incomes, better living standards and significantly more household goods, people appear less happy.<sup>18</sup>
- Despite this, there is a move towards greener and 'eco' products, though not all products are as green as they claim to be.
- Strong public interest and action has come out of the ABC 'War on Waste' TV Series.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Key Actions:**

1. Creating a culture where the desire to protect and sustain our environment overrides the desire to consume.
2. A new approach to design and waste management where products are built to last and to re-enter the environment (cradle-to-cradle).

#### **Discussion Starters**

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What emissions targets should Australia have in place?
2. How will you support and invest in the transition to renewable energy?
3. How will you support just transitions and retraining for people moving into more environmentally sustainable industries?
4. How will you help Australia contribute to international efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change?
5. What provision should Australia make for people displaced by climate change?
6. What policies do you have to protect Australia's natural environment, water bodies and plant and animal life?
7. How will you help Australians move away from a throw-away culture?
8. What household and local community approaches are being/could be considered in your church and wider community?
9. Climate change is a complex area for people to engage in. How can you help inform and motivate your community for action?





# A Welcoming, Compassionate and Diverse Nation

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## **Our Vision:**

We are a nation of diverse cultures, languages, faiths, ethnic groups and experiences. We celebrate and value the strength of this diversity. We see this diversity reflected in our leaders, key decision makers, institutions, industry, sports and media.

We are a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe – regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival.



## Our hopes:

- All people experience the same rights and can play the role they wish, free from preconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination.
- A person's race, religion or cultural background is no barrier to them living, working and participating as an equal member of society.
- Our society's diversity is celebrated. Racial discrimination and fear are no longer used to win political favour.
- People who come to Australia – either as migrants, refugees or people seeking asylum – are treated equally and fairly.
- Safe resettlement pathways exist in our region for people who seek asylum.
- People who come to Australia seeking asylum are given the opportunity to apply for protection in a safe and timely manner and are provided with appropriate support. Detention is a last resort and length of detention is capped to not more than 90 days.
- Our humanitarian intake is generous and responsive to global needs.
- Our fair and compassionate treatment of people who seek safety on our shores reflects a compassionate and caring nation.
- Our leaders set an example by showing fairness and compassion and enacting policy that is humane.

## Witness from the Bible

- The laws of the covenant regularly require Israel to make room for those who come from outside Israel, to provide for their welfare, and to enable them to join the community and be subject to the same covenant—see for example **Exodus 12: 48 – 49; Leviticus 18: 26; 19: 9 – 10, 33 – 34**.
- The prophets pointed toward a future where those of other nations came to Israel, joining in harmony and worship of God (**Isaiah 14:1; Micah 4: 1 – 3**).
- They also taught the vital importance of acting with mercy and compassion toward those within Israel who were in need (**Isaiah 1: 16 – 17; 3: 13 – 15; 58: 6 – 7**), and that God answers the cries of the poor (**Isaiah 41: 17; Ezekiel 22: 29 – 31**; see also **Luke 1: 46 – 55**).

- This call to compassion is echoed and indeed strengthened in Jesus' life and teaching (**Matthew 25: 31 – 46; Luke 6: 20 – 25**).
- The early church and the writers of the New Testament strongly picked up this theme of care for the needy in the lives of their community and in their own teaching (**Acts 2: 44 – 45; 4: 32 – 35; Hebrews 13: 1 – 3; James 1: 27; 1 John 4: 19 – 21**).

## What the UCA has said

### Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race."

### Asylum seeker and refugee policy (2002)

"We approach the issue of asylum seekers and refugees in the context of the words of Jesus. He spoke of a new community established on righteousness and love, and based on a fellowship of reconciliation — a community in which all members work together for the good of the whole. In essence, working for this kind of society is our contribution to civil society. When we work for freedom, human rights and the common good of the community we are expressing our faith. It is an outworking of the community of God."

### Dignity in Humanity (2006)

"In Jesus Christ we discern that which is truly human. As we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and care for the thirsty, the sick and the imprisoned, there is the mysterious possibility that we will discover the life of Christ among us (**Matthew 25: 31-46**), and share the love of God."

## Shelter from the Storm (2015)

Principles for Good Policy for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees:

- All people should be treated with respect and accorded the dignity they deserve as human beings.
- As one of the wealthiest, safest and most secure countries in the world, Australia should do its fair share to ease people's sufferings in the context of what is a global problem. We must not shift our responsibilities to poor and developing countries.
- Australia's policies relating to asylum seekers should be driven by bipartisan commitments to a humanitarian response focussed on protection needs and to upholding our obligations under international law.
- The Australian Government must be transparent in the implementation of its policies, open to scrutiny by the courts and the media and to critique and advocacy from civil society.
- The media should not demonise or inflame prejudice against asylum seekers and refugees by deliberately promoting misunderstanding.

## The State of the Nation

### People seeking asylum are detained indefinitely in offshore detention

- Despite the release of children from detention, there remains a large number of refugees held in offshore facilities.
- There have been numerous cases of deteriorating mental and physical health, self-harm and suicide among adults and children detained on Manus Island and Nauru. From February to November 2015, 239 detainees were assessed as being at 'high imminent' risk of suicide or self-harm.<sup>20</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. An end to the policy of indefinite, mandatory detention for people seeking asylum, starting with an end to offshore processing.
2. Adults and children seeking asylum can live in the Australian community with access to essential services, while their refugee status is processed in a timely manner.

## No fair process and permanent protection for people seeking safety in Australia

- The current 'fast-track' process for assessing people's claims for protection deliberately discriminates against people who came to Australia by boat. It's created a complex system that's incredibly difficult for people in the community to navigate.<sup>21</sup>
- Since 2014, people who arrive by boat and do not have a valid visa have no right to meaningful, independent review of their case.<sup>22</sup> As a result of this process, many more people seeking asylum are being denied protection and face a greater risk of being sent back to danger.
- Around 15,000 people, including children, are currently in the community waiting for their claims to be processed under 'fast track' or are having the outcome for their claim reviewed.
- Those found to be refugees are currently placed on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for three years or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) for five years. They must reapply for their visas every three or five years for the rest of their lives.
- Those on a TPV or SHEV live in a state of limbo – they do not have the same access to family reunion, services, support, education and employment as those with a Permanent Protection Visa.

#### Key Actions:

1. A fair, robust and timely process for assessing the protection claims of people seeking asylum.
2. Those found to be refugees are granted permanent protection so they can begin to rebuild their lives and contribute to Australian society.

**People seeking asylum in the Asia-Pacific region are not provided with adequate pathways to protection**

- There were some 9.5 million persons of concern to UNHCR in Asia and the Pacific, including 3.7 million refugees, 2.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.6 million stateless persons – according to the UNHCR 2017 Regional Update.<sup>23</sup>
- Current policies of the Australian Government undermine a sustainable global approach to managing the global crisis of displacement of people.

**Key Actions:**

1. Australia should work proactively with nations in Asia-Pacific and with agencies working on the ground to ensure that refugees and people seeking asylum moving through the region are safe, have access to services, have their claims assessed and can begin to rebuild their lives.
2. Increase Australia's humanitarian intake.

**People are vilified, abused and discriminated against for being different.**

- 18 per cent of Australians say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.<sup>24</sup>
- Around one in three (35 per cent of) recent migrants said they faced hurdles in finding their first job.<sup>25</sup>
- The Federation of Community Legal Centres reported a 50% increase in racist attacks in Victoria in areas with high migrant populations.<sup>26</sup>
- Australian muslim women who ventured out on their own were almost three times more likely to face harassment of an Islamophobic nature.<sup>27</sup>

**Key Actions:**

Explore and implement strategies which address racial and religious discrimination in Australia and build harmony among diverse communities.

**Discussion Starters**

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What are your policies to support the fair treatment and processing of people seeking asylum?
2. What will you do to create a more responsive humanitarian intake program?
3. What leadership can Australia take in Asia-Pacific to respond to the unprecedented movement of people in our region and globally?
4. What will your party or organisation do to combat racial and religious discrimination and promote social cohesion and harmony in the community?
5. What initiatives are currently in place or could be used within your local community to make it a place of welcome and support for refugees?



# An Economy for Life

“

## Our Vision:

Our government makes economic decisions that put people first: decisions that are good for creation, that lift people out of poverty and fairly share our country's wealth.

The economy serves the well-being and flourishing of all people.



## Our hopes:

- Everyone has a roof over their heads and food on the table.
- People and families struggling to make ends meet are not degraded, diminished, demonised or driven into poverty. We support each other through our relationships and our economic system.
- We have a fair distribution of wealth supported by a fair tax system. Everyone contributes taxes so we can have the country we want.
- We have a social security system that supports people who have retired, those with disabilities, those raising children and those locked out of the paid employment market.
- Those that have more wealth contribute more and there are no loopholes. Corporations give back to our common wealth too. We all play by the same set of rules, contributing according to our means.
- Taxes collected by governments deliver the things ordinary people care most about, including
  - » All children can receive a quality education from their local school
  - » Universities and TAFEs are there for all students, not just the fortunate
  - » Health, transport and other essential services are well funded and meet the needs of their communities.

## Witness from the Bible

- Israel's Covenant law clearly enshrines principles which ensure that all members of society are able to benefit from the economy and the means of production. This includes such provisions as the remission of debts after 7 years (**Deuteronomy 15: 1 – 2**), the return of property in the Jubilee year (**Leviticus 25: 13 – 17**), or rules prohibiting taking a millstone (the means of food production) as a surety (**Deuteronomy 24: 6**). There are also numerous provisions for those in need, such as leaving a proportion of crops in the field (**Leviticus 19: 9 – 10, Deuteronomy 24: 19 – 22**), or laws against withholding the wages of the poor or taking their clothes as surety (**Deuteronomy 24: 14 – 15, 17**).
- Similarly Jesus regularly taught that financial

gain was by far secondary to the obedience to God (**Luke 12: 13 – 31**), one significant part of which was the obligation to care for those in need (**Matthew 25: 31 – 46; Mark 10: 17 – 22; Luke 6: 30; 12: 33 – 34; 14: 12 – 14**).

- The early followers of Jesus made a clear priority of sharing their resources so that none should be in need (**Acts 2: 44 – 45; 4: 32 – 35**).
- Paul and other writers of the New Testament epistles regularly highlight the importance of sharing wealth and the blessing that this creates. See for example **2 Corinthians 9: 6 – 12; 1 Timothy 6: 17 – 19; James 2: 14 – 17**. Even Paul's injunctions regarding the Lord's Supper are informed by his concern that differing levels of resource are creating divisions in the Corinthian church (**1 Corinthians 11: 20 – 34**).

## What the UCA has said

### The Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond...

We will challenge values which emphasise acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of the needs of others and which encourage a higher standard of living for the privileged in the face of the daily widening gap between the rich and poor."

### An Economy of Life: Re-Imagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World

"An economy of life is marked by regard for the common good. Individualism, competition and greed deny human flourishing because the fullness of our humanity is not found in wealth but in relationship with each other and the world around us...

In God's household people are safe, secure, cared for and valued. The household shares all it has with concern for those most in need...

As we seek to address the failings of the current global economic system, the values of an economy of life would find their expression in an economic system which places the needs of people and the planet before profit."



## The State of the Nation

### Our Tax System favours the wealthy

- Australia is a low taxing country by comparison to other wealthy countries. Australian Governments collected 27.8% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in tax in 2016, compared to the average of wealthy (OECD) countries of 34.2%. Amongst OECD countries, only the governments of the USA, Korea, Turkey, Ireland, Chile and Mexico collect less tax as a proportion of GDP.
- Many features of our tax system favour people who are already wealthy and add to growing inequality. These include negative gearing on rental properties, the Capital Gains Tax discount that taxes profits on investments at half the rate of income generated by work and the superannuation system with its flat tax rate of 15%.

#### Key Actions:

1. A fairer tax and superannuation system including the introduction of laws which target tax evasion and avoidance.
2. Greater transparency on corporate tax.

### Poverty and inequality continue to grow in Australia

- There are just over 3 million people (13.2%) living below the poverty line of 50% of median income – including 739,000 children (17.3%). In dollar figures, this poverty line works out to \$433 a week for a single adult living alone; or \$909 a week for a couple with two children.<sup>28</sup>
- Many of those affected are living in deep poverty – on average, this is a staggering \$135 per week below the poverty line.
- The group of people experiencing poverty the most are those relying on Government allowance payments such as Youth Allowance and Newstart.
- Newstart has not increased in real terms for 24 years and is now worth \$278 a week. The cost of basic essentials like housing, groceries, energy, transport, and clothing have risen, and is a minimum of \$433 per week for a single unemployed person. Over half of people receiving Newstart live below the poverty line.<sup>29</sup>
- In the 2016 Census, over 116,000 people were

homeless in Australia. Nearly 16,000 were under the age of 12.<sup>30</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. Better support for people locked out of work, particularly for vulnerable groups exposed to compounding pressures.
2. Raising the single rate of Newstart, Youth Allowance and related payments.
3. Provide universal access to quality early learning to all children aged three and four.

## Discussion Starters

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What should be done to ensure that multinational corporations pay the taxes they should?
2. What priorities will your party or organisation focus on to direct tax income back into the community?
3. What can and should be done to address homelessness in Australia?
4. How can we increase support to people locked out of paid work?
5. How can we better ensure there is adequate support for people in Australia with disabilities and mental health issues?
6. What reforms should be introduced to the tax and superannuation systems to make them fairer?
7. What local initiatives are there, or could there be to assist people in your community who are experiencing financial hardship or homelessness?





# An Inclusive and Equal Society

“ **Our Vision:**

We live together in a society where all are equal and free to exercise our rights equally, regardless of faith, cultural background, race, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. We defend those rights for all.

## Our hopes:

- All people are free to exercise their right to be treated equally, regardless of gender, age, race, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Every person can play the role they wish, free from preconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination.
- Older people are treated with respect and dignity and able to live their life to the full. Where they need to be cared for by others, they have voice and choice in that care.
- Every child can live their best life.
- A person's sexual orientation and gender identity does not impact on their ability to live, work and contribute to society.
- Women and children are safe in their own home and community.
- Disability is no barrier to participating as an equal member of society.

## Witness from the Bible

- All people have been made in the image of God (**Gen 1: 26 – 27**).
- The prophet Isaiah's vision of a servant of God, which Jesus later claimed for himself, was of someone who lightens the burden of workers, breaks chains and brings freedom to the oppressed, brings good news to the poor and comforts the broken hearted (**Isaiah 58: 6; 61: 1 cf. Luke 4: 18**).
- Jesus is described as coming to enable a rich and full life (**John 10:10**). During his ministry he regularly crossed social boundaries including within his ministry many who were otherwise dismissed or avoided by his society including "sinners and tax collectors" (**Matthew 9: 10 – 11; 11: 19**), Samaritans and other non-Israelites (**Luke 17: 11 – 19; John 4: 7 – 30**), lepers (**Matthew 8: 1 – 4; 11: 4 – 6**) and women, including those seen as unclean or undesirable (**Matthew 9: 18 – 26; Luke 7 36 – 50; 8: 1 – 3**). Jesus even taught that enemies should be treated with love and care (**Matthew 5: 43 – 48**).
- The New Testament epistles look toward a community from all with no distinctions or favouritism (**Galatians 3: 28, James 2: 1 – 9**) and a final gathering in of all nations and peoples (**Revelation 7: 9 – 10; 22: 22 – 26**).

## What the UCA has said

### **The Basis of Union (1971, 1992 Edition)**

"God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation..."

### **The Statement to the Nation (1977)**

"We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, ... rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.

We affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate healthcare, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms."

### **Australian Bicentennial Year Statement (1988)**

"We give thanks for those times when the Australian society has established justice, equality, and mutual respect among people; has placed care for the people who have least above sectional interests; has welcomed new migrants and refugees; has exercised solidarity and friendship in times of crisis in Australia across divisions of race and culture..."

We deplore the divisions of humanity along racial, cultural, political, economic, sexual and religious lines. In obedience to God, we struggle against all systems and attitudes which set person against person, group against group, or nation against nation."

### **Reconciliation People: A Statement from the National Young Adult Leaders' Conference (2010)**

"We believe that we were all created equal and are one people in the eyes of God. We encourage our country to embrace and celebrate our diversity. We challenge our government to welcome, with empathy, those who seek refuge in our land. There is no supremacy of any culture or gender; rather, when we work together as a united people, in recognition of, but regardless of difference, we will bring about change."

## The State of the Nation

### Disadvantage is cemented early in life

- 17.2% or 1 in 6 Australian children aged 0-14 years live in poverty.
- Many Australian children are experiencing disadvantage on multiple fronts, lacking the opportunities and family resources to be socially connected and to be able to participate fully in their local communities.<sup>31</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. Provide universal access to quality early learning for all children aged three and four, prior to their commencing school.
2. Work is done to ensure disadvantaged children are able to access early education and care.
3. Significantly increase investment in prevention and early intervention programs to support vulnerable families.
4. Provide families with child protection concerns priority access to services such as social housing, early childhood education and health services.

### Older people are vulnerable

- Elderly Australians are among the most physically, financially and emotionally vulnerable.
- A Royal Commission was established in 2018 in response to concerns about the quality and safety of aged care services in Australia.
- Almost 15,000 older Australians experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness and one in twelve older Australians experience significant financial or social disadvantage.
- People with high care needs, people living in rural and remote areas, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, can face even greater difficulties accessing appropriate services and support.

#### Key Actions:

1. A sustainable and adequately funded aged care system where people can access care which meets their needs in the location they choose.
2. Safeguards which protect against neglect and abuse of elderly Australians.

### People face exclusion and discrimination on basis of gender, age, race, sexual orientation or gender identity, or disability.

- 18 per cent of Australians say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.<sup>32</sup>
- Only 53% of Australians with disability are employed, compared to 83% of all working-age people,<sup>33</sup> with lower employment rates leading to high rates of poverty.<sup>34</sup>
- LGBTIQ young people report experiencing verbal homophobic abuse (61 per cent), physical homophobic abuse (18 per cent) and other types of homophobia (9 per cent), including cyberbullying, graffiti, social exclusion and humiliation.<sup>35</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. Ensuring our legal system protects all people from discrimination.
2. Policies in our workplaces that promote the inclusion of all people.



## High levels of family violence

- 72,000 women, 34,000 children and 9,000 men sought homelessness services in 2016-17 due to family/domestic violence.<sup>36</sup>
- Approximately one in four women (23%) has experienced violence by an intimate partner,<sup>37</sup> and it is the leading cause of illness, disability and premature death among women aged 25 to 44.<sup>38</sup>
- Domestic or family violence against women is the single largest driver of homelessness for women.<sup>39</sup>
- At 30 June 2018, 56,412 children aged 0–17 years were on care and protection orders nationally, 20,484 of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.<sup>40</sup>
- Heavy episodic drinking doubles the risk of family and domestic violence and doubles the proportion of drug-related partner violence incidents resulting in a physical injury.<sup>41</sup>

### Key Actions:

1. A comprehensive approach to preventing gender-based violence. This includes challenging the social norms and practices that underpin it.
2. Sustainable funding for services which support victims of domestic and family violence.

## Discussion Starters

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What policies will ensure all children receive the best start in life?
2. How can we ensure older Australians are treated with dignity, and where care is needed, that they receive high quality care?
3. What is your commitment to the equality of women across our community and what actions will you take to promote this?
4. How will you tackle the high rates of domestic and family violence, both in terms of prevention and supporting people who are affected?
5. What is your response to discrimination based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability?
6. What initiatives are already happening or could happen in your local community that could:
  - a) Offer care and support for older people?
  - b) Promote awareness of domestic and family violence and offer support for people impacted by this violence?
  - c) Offer care and support for people suffering from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability?



# Flourishing Communities, Regional, Remote and Urban

“ Our vision:

We live in communities where we are connected and we care for one another. In communities all over Australia, from our big cities to remote regions, we seek the well-being of each Australian and uplift those who are on the margins.



## Our hopes:

- We are connected. There is a high level of social participation. People feel a strong sense of identity and of belonging.
- We create safe spaces in our homes, in the wider community, online and in our places of faith.
- Rural and remote communities thrive. They have access to basic services, including health, education and technology.
- There is wide representation in our decision-making from different ages, cultures, abilities, religion, gender and geography. People are free to express their own ideas.
- People with disability in Australia fully participate in society. They can choose the services and support they need to live a full life.
- Our lifestyle and culture promote good mental health and our Government, workplaces and communities have policies and practices which support this.
- All people can access the essential services they need, including younger and older generations, people at the end of life, people with disabilities, First Peoples and people vulnerable to violence.
- Vulnerable people receive the support they need, whether that is protection from violence, quality care, medical services or harm reduction services.

## Witness from the Bible

- The witness of the Old Testament speaks to God's desire for communities of "shalom", a peace which encompasses fruitfulness, justice, wholeness and blessing for all people. See for example **Genesis 1: 27 – 28; 12: 1 – 3; Psalms 72, 128; Isaiah 11: 1 – 9; Zechariah 8: 4 – 12**.
- Likewise, Jesus spoke of bringing safety, life in abundance and peace (**John 10: 7 – 10; 14: 27**) and taught the importance of meeting the needs of those who were suffering (**Matthew 25: 31 – 46**). He identified love of God and of others as the primary obligations for shaping life (**Matthew 22: 34 – 40**).

- The New Testament epistles give a vision of a community of inclusion and peace (**Romans 10: 12; Galatians 3: 28; Ephesians 4: 1 – 3**) and highlight the importance of love for all in enabling this vision (**Romans 12: 9 – 13; 13: 8 – 10; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5: 13 – 14; 1 John 4: 16 – 21**).

## What the UCA has said

### The Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate healthcare, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms."

### Dignity in Humanity: A Uniting Church Statement on Human Rights (2006)

"The image of God that is reflected in human life, the form of life that corresponds to God, is the human community – all people – finding its life and sustenance in relationship.

Thus, the Uniting Church believes that every person is precious and entitled to live with dignity because they are God's children, and that each person's life and rights need to be protected or the human community (and its reflection of God) and all people are diminished."

### An Economy of Life: Reimagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World (2009)

"The Christian faith understands that God's goal for life is wholeness. The Biblical stories, sacred witnesses to the history of our relationship with God, articulate a vision for human wholeness and wellbeing grounded in the values of the reign of God: love (of God and each other, even our enemy and especially those most vulnerable), justice, peace, grace, mercy and forgiveness, hospitality, inclusion, connectedness and compassion."

## The State of the Nation

### High rates of mental illness

- 1 in 5 Australians experience a mental health condition in a given year and almost 1 in 2 will experience a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime.<sup>42</sup>
- Of these, anxiety disorders were the most prevalent, afflicting 1 in 7 (14.4%), followed by affective disorders (such as depression) (6.2%), and substance use disorders (such as alcohol dependence) (5.1%).
- People who experience depression and anxiety, and their families and friends, experience significant levels of stigma and discrimination.
- 9 per cent of Australians report loneliness at any one time.<sup>43</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. Adequate funding of appropriate services for people facing mental illness, including new initiatives such as digital health services in rural and remote areas.
2. A whole-of-community approach to overcome stigma and discrimination for people who experience mental illness.

### Lack of Safe Spaces

- One in 33 children received child protection services in 2015-16, with 73 per cent being repeat clients.<sup>44</sup> Emotional abuse and neglect were the most common primary and co-occurring types of substantiated abuse and neglect.
- It is likely that up to 14% of older Australians experience elder abuse in any given year, with the prevalence of neglect possibly higher.
- Workplace bullying is on the rise and is associated with poor psychological health.<sup>45</sup>
- Almost 25% of school students in Australia, or an estimated 910,000 children, experience bullying at some stage during their time in school.<sup>46</sup>
- 10% of young people (aged 16-24 years) experience cyberbullying.<sup>47</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. Community approaches to building resilience, teaching respectful relationships, and identifying abuse and neglect.
2. Creating Child Safe Communities to prevent child sexual abuse, in line with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

### Rural and remote communities are suffering

- Large parts of Australia have experienced severe drought in the past 2 years due to record low rainfall and above average temperatures over successive seasons, depleting livestock numbers and destroying crops.
- This decline in agricultural production impacts the economy and employment in rural and remote Australia. In turn, farmers experience significant stress about the effects of drought on themselves, their families, and their communities.<sup>48</sup>
- In rural areas there are higher levels of civic participation, social cohesion, social capital, volunteering and informal support networks between neighbours, friends and the community.<sup>49</sup> However, Australians living in rural and remote areas tend to have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, including mental health care, compared to people living in metropolitan areas.<sup>50</sup>
- Rates of self-harm and suicide increase with remoteness. The suicide rate is almost double among men 15-29 years who live outside major cities.<sup>51</sup>

#### Key Actions:

1. Improved mental health support for people in rural and remote Australia, that is adequately funded, flexibly used and well managed locally.
2. Investment in rural infrastructure to help prepare for drought conditions.



## **People with disabilities need better control and choice**

- An estimated 1.5 million people with disability needed formal assistance from a service provider for at least one everyday living activity in 2012. Around half of these had an unmet need for formal assistance - either they got less assistance than they needed or no assistance at all.
- The roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) requires adequate resourcing by the Commonwealth, states and territories.
- The transition to the NDIS is having a significant impact on the support workforce, with some providers struggling to recruit and maintain a suitably skilled workforce.

### **Key Action:**

An NDIS that is fully funded and properly rolled-out where no one is left behind in the process.

## **People with drug-related issues are stigmatised**

- Current approaches to drug use which focus on policing and imprisoning increase stigma for people who use illicit drugs and create barriers for people seeking treatment.
- There is a shortage of detoxification and rehabilitation services, particularly in rural and regional areas.

### **Key Action:**

Refocusing policy and responses to drug use on helping people to access drug treatment and harm reduction services.

## **Discussion Starters**

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. How will you support drought-affected communities?
2. What policies will you put in place to address mental health, including in rural and remote Australia?
3. How will you support the roll-out of the NDIS?
4. What is your policy or approach to illicit drug use and treatment?
5. How will you address bullying in our workplaces and schools?
6. How does or how can your community assist drought-affected communities?
7. What local initiatives are possible to address important social issues including mental health, illicit drug use and bullying?

# Contributing to a Just and Peaceful World

“

## **Our Vision:**

Australia acts with courage and conviction to build a just and peaceful world. We are a nation that works in partnership with other nations to dismantle the structural and historical causes of violence, injustice and inequality. Our government upholds human rights everywhere, acting in the best interests of all people and the planet.

## Our Hopes:

- Australia is a good neighbour in our region and beyond, seeking the common good of people and planet alongside national interests.
- Australia upholds its international human rights obligations and uses United Nations mechanisms to strengthen human rights at home and abroad.
- Australia is a generous contributor to ending global poverty and inequality, with a timeline for increasing our international aid contribution to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) in line with international commitments.<sup>52</sup>
- Vulnerable people at risk of human trafficking are educated about their rights, have access to better opportunities and are protected and enforced by anti-trafficking laws.
- The rights of seasonal workers in Australia are protected and local communities assist in providing pastoral care.
- Nations armed with nuclear weapons agree to destroy their stockpiles in accordance with a legally-binding, time-bound plan.
- A peacefully negotiated resolution for Israel and Palestine affirming the right for both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine to live side by side in peace and security.

## Witness from the Bible

- God's call and God's blessing is focused toward the sharing of blessing with others (**Genesis 12: 1 – 3**).
- The prophet Isaiah's vision of a servant of God, which Jesus later claimed for himself, was of someone who lightens the burden of workers, breaks chains and brings freedom to the oppressed, brings good news to the poor and comforts the broken hearted (**Isaiah 58: 6, 61: 1 cf. Luke 4: 18**).
- Jesus teaching consistently calls for a love of all people, even enemies (**Matthew 5: 43 – 44**), and his disciples are called to be "peacemakers" (**Matthew 5: 9**), to the "ministry of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5: 18**) and to pursuing peace with everyone (**Hebrews 12: 14**).

- The New Testament teaches that when one suffers, all suffer together (**1 Corinthians 12:26**), and calls us to care for others not just ourselves (**Romans 12: 9 – 13; Philippians 2: 1 – 4; Galatians 6: 3**).

## What the UCA has said

### The Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond. We affirm the rights of all people to equal opportunities. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms."

### Overseas Aid (2015)

The Assembly resolved to:

- a) Affirm that Australian development aid, funded by the government, church and individuals, is an effective and powerful way of combating poverty and injustice throughout the world, thereby addressing the root causes of conflict, instability, people displacement and disease.
- b) Express profound concern regarding the recent cuts that will reduce Australian government aid to the lowest levels in our history.
- c) Call on the Federal Government to:
  - i. Restore overseas aid funding cut from the 2015-16 budget; and
  - ii. Announce a credible timetable to allocate 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income to Australia's overseas aid program, commensurate with Australian's international obligations.

### Palestine (2015)

The Assembly resolved to:

- a) Receive the requests from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, the Kairos Palestine movement and the World Council of Churches to act in response to the plight of people of Palestine.

The UCA has issued a number of statements in solidarity with our partner churches in response to communal and religious conflict, and political tension in the life of their societies.



## The State of the Nation

### **Australia has stepped back its contributions to foreign aid**

- Despite the proportion of undernourished people being almost halved since 1990 (now under 11%) there are still 821 million people—one in nine worldwide—going hungry each year.<sup>53</sup> Due to protracted conflicts and rising populations, undernourishment and severe food insecurity have been increasing.<sup>54</sup>
- Australians are the wealthiest people on the planet, when measured by median wealth, but Australia now ranks 19th among rich country aid donors.
- Australia spends \$4.0 billion dollars on overseas aid – 0.22% of our gross national income, or 22 cents in every \$100. This is set to drop even further to just 19c in every \$100 of GNI by 2021.
- Since 2013, in cumulative terms, the Australian aid budget has been cut by over 30 per cent.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Key Actions:**

1. Scale up Australia's aid program to approximately 0.3% GNI by 2021-22.
2. Recommit Australia to the internationally-agreed target of contributing 0.7 per cent of GNI to overseas aid by 2030.

### **People across our region are trapped in modern slavery and vulnerable to human trafficking**

- An estimated 40.3 million men, women, and children were victims of modern slavery on any given day in 2016. Of these, 25 million people were in forced labour and 15.4 million people were living in a forced marriage.<sup>56</sup>
- 62% of the 25 million people trapped in forced labour are in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>57</sup> and far too many are being exploited to produce goods and services that Australians enjoy.
- People are vulnerable to trafficking and modern slavery for a number of reasons, including lack of education and employment opportunities, discrimination and social isolation, and lack of protection by adults or social systems.
- Australia has introduced a Modern Slavery Act,

which can be a powerful tool in the fight against modern day slavery and human trafficking in the supply chains of businesses, however the Act lacks penalties for non-compliance as well as independent oversight.

#### **Key Actions:**

1. Greater awareness of modern slavery and human trafficking, support for people who have been trafficked in Australia and international collaboration to enforce laws against trafficking.
2. Commit to strengthening compliance with Australia's Modern Slavery Act through penalties for non-compliant businesses and the appointment of an independent anti-slavery commissioner.

## Go deeper

You may like to follow up other issues that the UCA has previously spoken about:

### **We are yet to achieve just peace in Palestine and Israel**

- Palestine has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. The prospects for a negotiated peace and a “two-state solution” are bleak.
- Israeli settlements and other Israeli land confiscations have taken over nearly half of the West Bank.

#### **Key Action**

**Support international efforts towards a just peace in Palestine and Israel.**

### **Australia has not signed on to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

- Nuclear weapons threaten the survival of humanity and our living planet. The effects transcend national boundaries and span generations.<sup>58</sup>
- Australia has long claimed to be a proud supporter of nuclear disarmament.
- A global majority of nations negotiated the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. It is the first treaty to comprehensively outlaw nuclear weapons, setting out a pathway for their total elimination.
- Australia has not signed on to the treaty.

#### **Key Action:**

Sign on and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

### **Conflict in West Papua and Papua (Indonesia) has not been resolved**

- The Papuan Provinces of Indonesia (Papua and West Papua) continue to be marked by violence, political repression and persecution of Papuan peoples by Indonesian police and military.<sup>59</sup>
- In 2014, the government resolved to address past human rights injustices, but none have been followed through and perpetrators continue to operate with impunity.
- Christian churches in the Papuan provinces have regularly called for peace dialogues that address the political causes of the ongoing conflict.<sup>60</sup>
- Due to Australia's proximity and trade ties with Indonesia, we have a responsibility to promote justice, dialogue and stronger human rights protections in our region.

#### **Key Actions:**

1. Support local and international efforts for peace and justice in the Papuan Provinces
2. Urge the Australian government to prioritise human rights in the Papuan Provinces in diplomatic relations with Indonesia
3. Continue to express to the Australian government our concerns for Papua, and call on them to support initiatives that involve peace, reconciliation and the development of an effective voice for all Papuans regarding their future.<sup>61</sup>

#### **Discussion Starters**

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to MPs or community leaders.

1. What is your party's or organisation's commitment to Australia's aid program?
2. What policies do you have to prevent human trafficking?
3. What can you do to support a just and peaceful resolution in Palestine and Israel?
4. Will you support Australia signing the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons?
5. How does or how can you local community contribute to the world beyond Australia in ways that lead to a more just, safe and peaceful world for all?

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## Thanks go to...

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### We thank the following contributors:

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See also

<https://nswact.uca.org.au/social-justice/the-social-justice-forum/>

<http://unitingearthweb.org.au/>

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Uniting Church members are encouraged to visit the websites of all the above groups to further explore the issues and questions that arise as we consider what it means to live and act justly.