

SURF COAST LINKED CONGREGATIONS
QUARTERLY NEWS BULLETIN
WINTER/SPRING EDITION 2013

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MINISTER'S REPORT FOR SPRING QUARTERLY BULLETIN

On Sunday 18th August I attended a seminar arranged by the Jewish, Christian, Muslim Association. They celebrated their 10th anniversary that day. It was very enlivening to be amongst so many people (nearly 80) of the different faiths who all wanted to engage in respectful dialogue with one another. There were 37 Muslim people there, and many of the women wore beautiful material as their hijab. All in all, we had a good mix of people of each faith.

There were 3 sessions, and for each panel there were representatives of each faith, and each was facilitated in turn by a person from each faith. We went into the history of our people, and this brought pain to the surface for us all. No wonder the seminar was entitled “Sorry is the Hardest Word”. We have each done wrong to one another, but I think we would have to concede that the Jewish people have suffered the most throughout history, especially during the 20th Century.

In all of this, there was a strong sense that we were putting our feelings and perspectives “out there” so that others could comprehend how we saw things, and how that affected us. To have this happen in a setting in which everybody was committed to listening respectfully to one another was, I really believe, one step along the pathway to drawing us closer together.

The chatter over afternoon tea and the evening meal was lively and easy amongst us all, and the Muslim people also went off for a short time to observe their prayer time. The 2nd session was on forgiveness, and how each of the faiths engages this vital aspect. The Rabbi who had established this association spoke of how his immediate family had fled Germany just before WW2, with one set of grandparents taking the very last boat available. Tragically, his other grandmother was taken prisoner and died in Auschwitz. This same Rabbi commented on a recent visit he made to Berlin, saying that it is a city which remembers its past, with many plaques which commemorate the families which were taken forcibly from houses in that city. It was some comfort to him that these victims of the holocaust were remembered in this way.

The Muslim Imam speaking on that panel spoke with deep feeling about a long-standing break in relationships in his family which was healed as they gathered together because his brother was dying of cancer. Forgiveness was offered to the one who had cut himself off from the family, and reconciliation was achieved, with tears.

The third session was taken up with questions to a panel, the members of the panel changing between sessions. I was somewhat surprised- although I should not have been- that the subject of our treatment of aborigines, past and present, was mentioned very often. I was very taken with the compassion and concern expressed for the original inhabitants of our land, who seem to remain the most disadvantaged to this very day. I intend to become a member of the JCMA, and to pursue this connection and our hopes to take steps towards peace and understanding into the future.

From your Minister, Helen.

PARISH NEWS

The Preaching Plan for our four congregations for the remainder of 2013 is a “work in progress” When completed, it will appear on the church website and copies will be in each congregation. Rev Helen now compiles the Plan.

Rev Helen Robinson will be on Annual Leave from 30 September to 13 October, 2013.

Parish Events:

As this edition goes to print the “**Feed the World**” event at the Aireys Inlet Community Centre is about to take place - 10.30 am, Sunday 25 August, hosted by the Aireys congregation. This is a huge undertaking by a small and very faithful and hard-working congregation. Thank you to all involved!

Coming up in October will be a **Concert at Torquay to support Africa Clean Stoves**. Details will appear in the weekly news sheet, or contact Val Clarke.

The Christmas Tree Festival will be at Aireys Inlet from 30 November to 1 December – further details are in the Aireys report in this Bulletin.

Support to Northern Territory:

Thank you to everyone from across the Parish who made donations of beautiful rugs, clothing, toys etc for this year's **Old Timers' Fete in Alice Springs**. Ten boxes were sent from our Surf Coast churches. Currently we are supporting the **Ampilatwartja Aboriginal Health Centre in outback NT**, so if you would like to donate new or nearly new baby and toddlers' clothing, or cash to pay for postage, please give them to Jean Murray or Rev Helen. Our contact began with the Torquay Knitting Group sending lots of beautiful beanies a short while ago. These were greatly appreciated for the freezing Inland winter nights! And so our support continues!

Parish Service in June:

A highlight of the Parish Service held at Trinity Uniting Church, Anglesea on Sunday, 23 June, was the commissioning of Jean Murray as a Lay Preacher.

The large congregation included many friends and family who had affirmed and supported Jean throughout her training. Our Minister Helen led the service, and Rev Ann Key, Presbytery Minister preached the sermon and led the act of commissioning. Peter Heath, Chairperson of the Parish Council presented Jean with a beautiful lay preacher's stole, a gift from the Parish. Jean responded with gracious words of thanks to all whose interest and encouragement in her leading worship over many years had led to a period of study and qualification for the role of Lay Preacher within the U C A.

Bellbrae Bric a Brac and Book Room (a Parish project)

Please continue to support the Bellbrae team and others. Opening hours are Thursdays and Fridays from 10 am to 4 pm, and Saturdays from 10 am to 1 pm. Sorting takes place on Tuesday afternoons from 1 to 4 pm. Further details are in the Bellbrae report in this Bulletin.

Thank you to all who contributed to this Winter/Spring issue of the Quarterly Bulletin. We hope you enjoy reading it!

The deadline for the Summer 2013/2014 issue will be Monday 25 November unless advised otherwise through the weekly news sheet.

AIREYS INLET NEWS

The Aireys Inlet congregation has felt like singing “Ten Green Bottles” lately, as a succession of our members have been struck down with serious illnesses. We continue to pray for Gary and Noni Johnson, Jim and Edie Barton and Lachie and Joan Richardson for healing, recovery and continued good health.

On the brighter side, we have enjoyed fantastic services throughout the winter. All services have been combined with the Aireys’ Anglican congregation, with each church taking turn-about to host the service. This has meant that we have had good numbers each Sunday and on several occasions the church has been almost full. The load has been lightened for worship leaders and it has been a very enriching experience for both congregations as we have become familiar with the traditions and culture of the other denomination. Both churches have their regular Swallows, further broadening our fellowship. Such was the success of this co-operation, we agreed, at the request of the Anglicans, to extend it for an additional month until the end of September.

Leave has been granted to some of our regulars to travel abroad, with Mary and Keith Bremner enjoying a trip to South America, Phyllis and Ray Mill heading to the US and Canada and Lachie and Joan Richardson leaving shortly for Scotland. These journeys are followed with great interest as we share photos, travel blogs and stories of our adventures with those at home.

By the time this Bulletin goes to print, Feed the World, one of our major outreach events for the year, will be past history. In searching for a topic for a community event we hit on the idea of using the United Nations International Year of Quinoa as a theme. The aim has been to broaden understanding of the issue of world food security and poverty in the third world. We have also endeavoured to attract a wider audience than would normally attend our worship services on a Sunday morning. We were delighted to secure the services of World Vision’s Dr Paul Woods as guest speaker - Dr Woods has extensive experience in food security projects around the world and speaks from a Christian perspective. The South American band, Inka Marka, has also provided a wonderful draw card. We have appreciated the wonderful support of our fellow Surf Coast Congregations and the Presbytery of Port Phillip West’s Simpson Bequest, in staging this event.

In December last year, Joan and Lachie Richardson paid a visit to Willunga in South Australia, where, as well as catching up with our former Minister – the Rev Nicholas Randall– they were very impressed with the UCA church’s Christmas Tree Festival. This is an event held in many different forms throughout the world. “We thought perhaps we could hold one in Aireys Inlet”, said Joan and Lachie. “What a good idea. Let’s do it!”, we all replied. So the date was set for the weekend of November 30 and December 1 and the Aireys hotel booked as the venue. All community organisations and local businesses, along with interested individuals, have been invited to submit a small Christmas tree to make up the exhibition. Entry forms are available on our church website and some entries are already in - entries close on the 1st of November. We would love to have as much support from our Surf Coast UCA groups as possible – a beanie tree springs straight to mind! The main purpose of the activity is to bring the community together on a theme related to the Christmas season.

Mary Bremner



Aireys Inlet Christmas Tree Festival

I guess by now you will have decided on what sort of tree you plan to enter in the Christmas Tree Festival and how you will decorate it.

Many people (from the community as well as from our church) have told me what they have planned and how they have worked out a name for their special tree. Others have selected a word ending in 'tree' or 'try' and then matched the word with a tree design. Some have already completed their trees!!

If you have not yet started, this is just a reminder that the exhibition is on Advent weekend, 30th November - 1st December, and there are only seventy five 'sleeps' until entries close.

Entry forms are available at all our churches. (Entry is free) So put on your creative thinking caps and fill my mail box (245, Aireys Inlet) with heaps of entries.
Joan

Richardson

ANGLESEA NEWS

Here's what has been happening at Anglesea over the last few months. We have had a request from Scripture Union for support over the Christmas Holidays. Accommodation seems out of the question but we were open to assistance with meals.

The Games Day fund raiser was a great success (raising \$475.00) and we thank Beryl McCasker and Margo Davy for organising the event.

We gave a donation of \$500.00 to the Las Lomas project in Peru, to assist with expenses and a donation to Uniting World of \$1000.00 to support a Child Education Project in Amristsar in Northern India all of which came from the profit of our January fete.

We are grateful to our Treasurer Thelma Western, our Pastoral Care team lead by Barbara Fraser and our Property Officer Stan Stott for their great work. A tender for the painting of external windows and doors of the church has been accepted (\$7480.00) and work will begin shortly. The cost will be shared equally from Parish Reserves and by the Anglesea Congregation. Groups using the church complex for conferences and retreats have expressed appreciation of the facilities.

We thank the numerous people who do special things so that everything runs smoothly, we thank Helen for her leadership and teaching and also Bernie Long for his monthly visits which we enjoy greatly.

At a special meeting to discuss "Uniting our future" \$2000.00 from congregational funds was approved as well as members being invited to make individual financial contributions.

We sadly said goodbye to Dorothy Millard who served as an elder for more than 15 years caring for people with gentleness and compassion. She has moved to Winchelsea to be with her family and will be attending the Winchelsea Uniting Church. She did not want any formal goodbye, so at a meeting with Joe and Barbara Fraser over coffee she was given a letter of thanks and a nice potted plant as thanks for her service to the people of the Anglesea church and she was

assured her of a warm welcome when she is able to worship with us again.

Ticking all the Boxes

If you were deciding on where the ultimate place to live would be, what would you be looking for? I have never taken the time to go through the process so it's a strange thing to be writing about.

I guess everyone would like to live in a nice house in a friendly community that provided all the services which may be needed. That's about all you could really ask for, so everything else would be a bonus.

Let's imagine you were able to continue with your wish list, what other advantages would you wish for? A friendly and welcoming community would be nice, good neighbours, a nice coffee shop, a good shopping centre, close to a major city would be ideal.

Now let your head go, what if there were a half dozen good coffee shops, great sporting facilities, beautiful beaches, the magnificent Australian bush, beautiful birds and native animals. Wishful thinking you say, I tend to agree.

What if the other people who lived in this place cared for each other, if they were concerned about those who were struggling in their community, if they wanted to help those less fortunate than themselves. What if they cared about the less fortunate in other places in Australia and they banded together to provide a school for very poor people in another country.

Faye and I, by courtesy of her parents purchasing a holiday house in Anglesea many years ago, live in such a place, how lucky are we? I think you will agree that Anglesea ticks all the boxes.

Peter Heath

BELLBRAE NEWS – AUGUST 2013

This has been a very busy three months for the Bellbrae church, despite the fact that many of our congregation have been away escaping the winter chills. We have enjoyed services with Helen, with visiting worship leaders and with our own worship team leading. We have missed the presence of Joyce Preston who is not well enough to worship with us at the moment but are keeping in touch with her through regular visits.

The Op Shop has continued to be a hive of activity and a place of welcome for the community, with many visits from regular customers who enjoy shopping with us and from many others who are just passing by and are delighted to find us there. We also enjoyed "drop-ins" during the Arts Trail weekend of the 10th and 11th of August who thought we were part of the trail. Two people from this enjoyed morning tea with us after church on the Sunday before they continued on their way. We have been told by several people that the shops are the most well presented Op Shops they have been in. Our attention to clean items only and well wrapped and displayed goods are certainly worth the effort.

We have been grateful for many wonderful donations and have been particularly pleased with the quality of most of the books donated to our beautiful book room. As always we are required to deal with a lot of bags that are left that have not been thoughtfully donated and we are grateful to the people who have been prepared to take loads to the tip. We are also grateful to the shire for the free tipping passes they have given us.

We have been able to donate goods to Life Line, Outreach and Street People and have also donated baby clothes to Jan Hale for her Refugee support work. The sorting time has changed from Monday mornings to Tuesday afternoons (1 – 4) and we are always grateful for any support. We are also very appreciative of all those who take on shifts in the shop and hope that they enjoy the positive feedback from customers.

The base boards have been replaced around the church after the restumping and a clearance of rubbish from under the church has made the place look much better.

Carleen Thoernberg

TORQUAY NEWS

Worship has faithfully continued during the cold winter months, with smaller numbers attending (understandably). Rev Helen leads our worship on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month, with Lay Worship Teams on the 2nd Sunday, using Helen's liturgy, and other clergy and lay preachers on the 4th Sunday. Coming up on Sunday 29 September (5th Sun) the work of Frontier Services and Missionary Aviation Fellowship will be featured, with a retiring offering towards these organizations, split 50/50.

Worship at Elouera Aged Care Facility continues on a monthly basis led by Rev Helen and Jean Murray, with other members assisting with the singing and pastoral care. This ministry is always greatly appreciated by the residents and staff. Thank you to all who support this work.

The Baptism of Bella May Guthrie took place on 4 August, and recently we have welcomed newcomers Beth from Ballarat, and Neda, Mehdi and Asal from Iran (asylum seekers settled in the community). Much has been done by the congregation to assist these new friends, and they have truly appreciated the warm welcome and support.

Property News: The two vacant blocks behind the manse and Torquay church have now been sold. The Development Committee has worked hard on this project, and has received valuable guidance and advice from Rev Robert Renton, Presbytery Minister Administration. Members of the Property Committee and others worked extremely hard to clean out the hall and the storage space underneath, and to relocate Jack's Shed to immediately behind the church. The Church Council extends grateful thanks to all those involved in these huge projects! By the way, the time capsule, buried back when Rev Jim and Mrs Margot Foley conducted a very lively KUCA Club, was located, but as the tin container had rusted through, most of the contents had seriously deteriorated!

"Bugs": The gastro and flu bugs have been causing havoc in the community, but in our Torquay congregation a much more pleasant bug, a "Travel Bug" has been very prevalent! Over the last few months no less than 17 of our members have ventured overseas, with some visiting family members, and others enjoying wonderful tours and cruises. Some of the more unusual travelling has included – Rosemary going to Malta to attend a Sovereign Council Meeting of the Order of St John of Jerusalem Knights Hospitaller (see article in this Bulletin); Val returning to Tanzania to continue her work with the Africa Clean Stoves project (her article is also included); Peter and Marianne were part of a group who cycled all the way from one end of UK to the other - from Land's End to John o' Groats (I'm glad to hear there was a support vehicle); Roma enjoyed her 4 weeks touring Italy from the very south (Sicily) to the very north – by bus, very sensibly!; Jean E. loved Switzerland, having travelled with her son, Murray, who was lecturing and presenting papers at an international gathering of mathematicians at a Swiss university; and very soon Isla will be heading to Serbia with her grand daughter, Emily, and other members of the Sports Aerobics Team, representing Australia at the World Championships. Good luck, Emily! Judith and Don, and John and June, in their travels of Greek Islands and Turkey respectively, will soon be visiting Ephesus. So, what a busy few months that travel bug has been having, and what marvellous adventures have been enjoyed! (Apologies to others whose trips weren't mentioned.)

In addition to these overseas journeys, others of our church family have headed to NSW and Queensland, also visiting family, or chasing a warmer climate, and some venturing to remote regions. eg Birdsville Track, where Rod was grateful to the two "good Samaritans" who helped when he had a tyre blow out, and Tom returning to his beloved

Farina, where he and his team of caravanning friends and others continued their restoration work on that historic, abandoned town in outback SA.

Jean Murray

Three Children's Programs at Torquay

Occasional Child Care

The delivery of Occasional Child Care in the Torquay Church has settled into a happy and sustainable activity under the management of UnitingCare Ballarat Children's Services, and a TUC liaison group comprising Rev Helen, Heather Jackman and Heather Dennis.

We are offering two 4 hour sessions on Wednesdays and Fridays from 8.45am-12.45pm, with a capacity for 15 children in each session. This term the Wednesday session has been full and there are only two or three spaces in the Friday session.

Thanks to a grant from Share in the 2012 round, we have been able to offer fee support to three children identified by the Surfcoast Shire Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Nurse as being in particular need of a program such as ours. The Shire staff really appreciate this opportunity for families who would otherwise not be able to access childcare.

Our professional childcare staff are Team Leader, Emma Hede and Assistant, Nila Mumme. We do need to identify a small number of qualified relief staff to call on from time to time. If you know of anyone with a childcare or teaching qualification who might be prepared to be employed on occasion, please ask them to contact Heather Dennis on 52647381 in the first instance.

Torquay Uniting Church is pleased to be able to offer our Occasional Care service to young families. It is another way in which we can reach out to the wider community. We continue to be indebted to Robin Dennis and John Angus and their small team of helpers who set up and pack up our church for our children's activities.

Enquiries regarding the Occasional Care service can be directed to Emma Hede on Tel: 0457633868 or Email: TorquayUnitingChurchOccasionalCare@hotmail.com.

Heather Dennis

Coffee and Kids

Well we are nearly at the end of the 3rd term for the year, and things at C & K are still buzzing along happily. Once again a huge thank you goes to all our helpers on the Thursday mornings, and to our team of men who set up the pews etc and pack away at the end of the week.

At this time last year our weekly attendance numbers were averaging around 35 per session, but fortunately for all involved we are averaging around 16 per session at the moment. The smaller groups are much more manageable but it is difficult to turn any mums and children away on any one day.

C&K works in well with our 2 newly established Limited Hours Occasional Care groups (Wed & Fri am). We share the same space, facilities and equipment and are able to leave things set up for one another, real co operation in action. Many of our C&K's children are the ones attending the Occasional Care and feel right at home in the familiar space. We began C&K in July 2009, so we are now

heading into our 5th year of operation. So much for retirement!!!! But we just love it.

Heather Jackman, Co ordinator

Road To Reading

This Literacy Program introduces children to phonics and pre-reading skills and is held in the Foyer of the Torquay Uniting Church every Monday of the school term. Small group sessions are led by Primary Educator Kate Keogh (Bachelor of Teaching - Primary and Secondary). Kate provides both morning and afternoon sessions for 2 - 3 year olds, 3 - 4 year olds, and 4 - 6 year olds. Kate also runs an intensive 10 day summer program in January for those children heading off to Prep in February. I have even seen some of the children arrive in their new school uniforms - they are so keen to learn.

This program is proving most popular with the young families that we see at Coffee and Kids, Occasional Care and the wider community. If you, your family or friends want to know any more about Road to Reading, contact Kate on 0402284224, or www.roadtoreading.com.au

Heather Jackman

“I'M ON A COMMITTEE”

Oh, give me your pity, I'm on a committee,
Which means that from morning to night
We attend, and amend, and contend, and defend
Without a conclusion in sight.

We confer and concur, we defer and demur
And reiterate all of our thoughts.
We revise the agenda with frequent addenda
And consider a load of reports.

We compose and propose, we support and oppose,
And the points of procedure are fun.
Though various notions are brought up as motions,
There's terribly little gets done.

We resolve and absolve, but never dissolve,
Since it's out of the question for us.
What a shattering pity to end our committee,
Where else could we make such a fuss!

(Dedicated to all those who serve on committees)

“We may not have been born with it -
but OPTIMISM is something we can all acquire,
if we take the right attitude to life's ups and downs.

Winston Churchill once said

“We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give.”

Rosemary's journey to Malta

In April this year I had the privilege of going to Malta to attend the Sovereign Council Meeting of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller. As a member of the Geelong Commandery of the order, I attended with others from Geelong, Melbourne and South Australia. The Sovereign Council Meeting is held in Malta every two years, and members are welcome to attend. The Russian Priory, to which the Australasian Priory belongs, is made up of priories in Europe, Scandinavia, America and Australia and there were approximately 60 members in attendance. The business part of the meeting centred around administrative issues on Saturday, with an ecumenical service on Sunday. This service was led by our own Anglican Prelate with clergy participating from Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Scandinavian Orthodox churches of various countries. There was also a program of sightseeing tours and social functions, which served to remind us of our common bond.

The Knights of St John have a long history in Malta, occupying and ruling from the middle of the 16th Century until Napoleon took over in the late 18th century. The French ruled for a short period of time followed by the English, who established the current legal and parliamentary systems, schools and a culture that has many English aspects to this day. Malta gained independence from UK in 1964 and today is a republic of just under 450,000 people spread over the two islands of Malta and Gozo. Tourism is a major activity, as well as agriculture and international education.

The influence of the knights is everywhere to be seen in present day Malta, with the Maltese Cross proudly displayed in all sorts of contexts. The city of Valetta was established by the knights with fortifications, a massive hospital and St Johns Cathedral and remains the administrative capital of Malta today. It has a very characteristic, well preserved, architecture, with tall sandstone buildings, steep, narrow streets and second storey "social" balconies overlooking the streets, to enable the inhabitants of the houses to look out onto the activities of their neighbours. The city sits on a peninsular with the sea and harbours on three sides. The older city of Mdina is inland on a rise enabling a view of the majority of the island. It is a World Heritage listed mediaeval walled city of beautifully preserved buildings, where the knights also had a base. There is also the old city of Rabat on the smaller island of Gozo, which was also a stronghold of the knights.

For those with an interest in history, Malta has much to offer. There are Arabic, Roman, Phoenician, Greek, Norman and Spanish influences. There are pre-Christian ruins of temples dating back to 4000BC and Christian history notes that St Paul was ship wrecked on the island. The occupation and rule by the Knights of St John has many colourful stories relating to it, starting with the famous Siege of Malta in 1565 when the Ottomans were eventually repelled after several months of war. Military history figures again when Malta was involved in both the First and Second World Wars. Following the bravery of the people of the island, which was heavily bombed during the Second World War, HM King George VI awarded the George Cross to the People of Malta for their bravery.

The Order of St John today has a strong commitment of service to those less fortunate in a Christian framework. Activities of the various priories are focussed on fundraising and support for others. We celebrate our history and the Maltese Cross serves to remind us of the vows we made and our motto "For faith; for service to humanity".

Rosemary Thompson DSJ

Africa Clean Stoves Update

When I returned from Tanzania for Christmas in 2011, Africa Clean Stoves was a project that looked like a good idea. When I returned from Tanzania at the end of February this year, our first hub was established. Now, I can report that the hub is able to financially support itself. We have come a long way in a very short time.

In case you have not heard about Africa Clean Stoves, I'll explain a little about the project. The aim is to gradually transition Tanzanians from cooking on wood and charcoal stoves to cooking on smokeless stoves that burn pellets made from waste biomass, which is any organic material that the livestock will not eat (corn cobs, rice husks, sawdust). Villagers bring waste biomass to the hub where they receive payment – an important supplement to their meagre incomes. The biomass is put through a hammer mill that turns it into a substance the looks like saw dust. This substance is mixed with a binder (currently sunflower oil) to achieve a 20% moisture content, before it's put through the pelletiser to turn it into pellets. In the first hub, the hammer mill has about three times the capacity of the pelletiser. We are trying to raise money to purchase a second pelletiser (about \$4,500). We plan to purchase a diesel pelletiser to compare its efficiency and running costs with the existing electric pelletiser. Many of the villages do not have electricity, therefore it is imperative to assess the efficiency of using diesel. We are also planning to donate stoves (about \$20 each) to villagers who cannot afford to purchase them.

The long term goal is to set up four hubs, at which point the project should be able to grow organically, with the "profits" from existing hubs being used to finance additional hubs.

Val Clarke

For it is in serving that we shall reign

We are not called to be fearful; we are called to love.
We are not called to be perfect; we are called to be faithful.
We are not called to be fearless; we are called to be obedient.
We are not called to be all-knowing; we are called to believe.
We are not called to claim; we are called to give.
We are not called to be victorious; we are called to be courageous.
We are not called to lord it over others; we are called to serve.
For it is in serving that we shall reign,
 it is through courage that we shall find victory;
 it is in giving that we all shall gain all;
 it is in believing that we shall find certainty;
 it is in obedience that we shall overcome;
 it is in faithfulness that we shall find perfection;
 it is in loving that we shall dispel fear
 that we shall find freedom, now and forever,

for ourselves and for the world. Amen.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MODERATOR, DAN WOOTTON,
FOR ALL CONGREGATIONS

How long must we cry out, 'til justice flows down like a river?

Following the Federal Government's announcement on 19th July on the latest round of policy amendments for asylum seekers arriving by boat, Rev Elenie Poulos, National Director of UnitingJustice commented "*today is the day we can say for certain that we have lost our moral compass when it comes to compassion for asylum seekers and refugees*".

In the Bible, God is often identified as the God who cares for the exiled and the stranger; brings justice to the oppressed; and calls on the people of faith to care for the strangers in their midst.

It is in this tradition that we seek to advance a world where people in need of protection are offered care and safety, without discrimination and without having to risk their lives. This expression of God's love is the foundation of a just society.

This week marks one year since the release of the Houston Report on asylum seekers. Over the last year, we have made repeated calls for justice for those who seek refuge in our country, particularly those who are demonised based on their mode of arrival. These calls have gone unanswered.

The Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania laments the dispassionate direction the Australian government is taking on asylum seekers, and are appalled at the lack of compassion in current policy.

We acknowledge the suffering of people who arrive in Australia fleeing persecution, having made desperate decisions and undertaken dangerous journeys seeking safety and refuge. It is not a moral response to punish one group of people in order to send a message to another.

This is not a matter of 'left' versus 'right' politics. This is about how we best respond out of a humanitarian perspective, and how we find a compassionate way forward.

I feel impelled to act on this injustice and I'm writing to invite you to join me at one or both of the upcoming events.

Refugee Rally

Saturday 24 August, 1.00 pm at the State Library

(UCA Synod are endorsing the rally – would be good to mention that)

Service of Lament for asylum seekers

Wednesday 28 August, 7.30 pm at Williamstown Uniting Church

Kind regards,

Dan Wootton, Moderator, Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

