



Assembly Resourcing Unit

15 Appreciation: Elenie Poulos

That the Assembly resolve:

To record its thanks to God and its deep appreciation for the ministry of Elenie Poulos, and to acknowledge the support and love of her partner Nicole. We pray that God will guide Elenie in her doctoral studies at Macquarie University and in discerning her future ministry paths.

Rev. Elenie Poulos has been contributing to the justice mission of the Assembly since 2002 when she was appointed National Director, National Social Responsibility and Justice. She relaunched that ministry as UnitingJustice Australia in 2003, serving as National Director until her closure of ministry on 17 February 2017.

During this time, Elenie provided leadership and vision to the Church in matters of social and economic justice, peace and the environment, identified critical issues of national importance, developed resolutions, positions and programs on these issues, advocated and participated in public debate, and represented the Church in civil society.

In 2003, Elenie renamed, restructured and repositioned UnitingJustice Australia (UJA) within the UCA, raising confidence in the agency's capacity to lead the development of Church policy, lobby government and speak into the public space on behalf of the Church.

She positioned UJA as a key national UCA agency for collaboration and co-operation within Australian national NGO and civil society networks, especially representing the UCA and the NCCA in collaborative programs and campaigns with various networks and agencies including Refugee Council of Australia, Amnesty International Australia, Human Rights Law Centre, UNHCR Regional Office (Canberra), Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS), ACF, ACOSS, ACTU, Centre for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales, GetUp!, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Greenpeace, Climate Action Network Australia and the ANDI project.

Elenie's work enabling bringing faith and NGO collaboration extended internationally, through her Elenie's participation in UNHCR-NGO consultations in Geneva, lobbying at UNHCR Executive Committee meetings, 'stereo-advocacy' with WCC on climate change and nuclear disarmament through UN processes and platforms, attendance at three WCC International Advocacy Weeks at the UN in New York, and attendance at the 2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection which resulted in the development and publication of UNHCR Partnership Note on Faith-based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders.

Elenie directed consultation and drafting processes (across national and state and agency boundaries) to develop key national policy positions for the Church on refugees and asylum seekers, human rights, economic justice and sustainability, climate change and peacemaking.

Elenie also directed the preparation of written submissions to Commonwealth parliamentary and public inquiries across a broad range of public policy areas including Indigenous issues (working with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress), human rights, climate change, welfare reform, taxation reform, work justice, immigration especially asylum seekers and refugees, anti-discrimination law, same-sex entitlements and anti-terrorism legislation; also presenting evidence at parliamentary and other public inquiries when required.

Elenie provided outstanding national ecumenical leadership, contributing to the work of the NCCA through various committees, commissions and networks. She was the Chair of Act for Peace from 2009-13, the Founding Chair of the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce from 2012-3.

As with her work across the NGO sectors, Elenie's ecumenical leadership also extended internationally. After being a delegate to the Ninth WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre in Brazil in February 2006, Elenie was elected to her first seven-year term as a member of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs in 2007. She was elected to second term in 2014.

Elenie's work also saw her:

- a. engage in lobbying of federal parliamentarians on issues of importance for the Uniting Church in Australia, particularly on issues of social justice, human rights and the environment;
- b. initiate and support Assembly media statements on issues of social and economic justice, peace and environment and support the President and other Church leaders in their public statements;
- c. appear on television and radio and in newspaper and magazine articles to explain the justice work of the Assembly and the wider Uniting Church;
- d. produce resources for UCA members to coincide with events in the liturgical and secular calendar such as World Environment Day, Social Justice Sunday, Human Rights Day, to inform them of the Church's national policy positions and activities, and encourage them to engage in local advocacy and action on issues of justice, peace and environment;
- e. manage the production (including the writing and editing) of the last five Uniting Church election resources which are distributed to every congregation prior to a federal election;
- f. preach in UCA (and other) congregations around the country and offer church-based workshops and seminars on issues of Christian faith and justice, peace, political engagement and advocacy;
- g. deliver lectures and seminars as a guest lecturer at United Theological College.

The UnitingJustice Australia Reference Committee has expressed profound regret at Elenie's retirement as National Director. During the last 15 years the Committee said that Elenie's dedicated work led the Church to make a major contribution to the national debate about justice issues; and led and strengthened campaigns for evolution of strategy in many areas of public policy. Because of Elenie's leadership, the Reference Committee said that the UCA had led advocacy for humane welcoming of refugees seeking asylum in Australia from brutality, discrimination and threats to their lives in their countries of origin. The Committee noted Elenie's contribution to many other areas of the constant struggle for equity and justice, and observed that she had led this struggle with strong commitment, with grace and with great effectiveness.

UnitingJustice Australia Reference Committee Chair Professor John Langmore also presented Elenie with a modern icon of the prophet Isaiah giving a blessing of peace painted by the Russian artist Olga Shalamova, passing on the Reference Committee's hope that this icon will contribute to sustaining her knowledge of the great admiration for

her work, and assist her in receiving the blessing of peace which Isaiah is shown as giving.

Proposer: Rob Floyd

Seconded: Colleen Geyer