



# 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?

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## Thanks go to...

This document is a **UnitingJustice** project – a collaboration of those engaged in the justice work of the Uniting Church coordinated by the Assembly Resourcing Unit.

### We thank the following contributors:

**UnitingCare Australia**

**UnitingWorld**

**VIC/TAS Synod**

**Uniting (VIC/TAS)**

**Synod of WA**

**Presbytery and Synod of SA**

**Uniting Communities**

**Queensland Synod**

**UnitingCare Queensland**

**Uniting (NSW/ACT)**

See also

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

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

In developing this document, we drew on the excellent work already done in **Australia Remade** by the A24 Alliance, a collection of individuals and diverse organisation with a shared commitment to put people and planet first. We also considered some of the excellent work being done in the **Australian National Development Index (ANDI) Project**.

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.