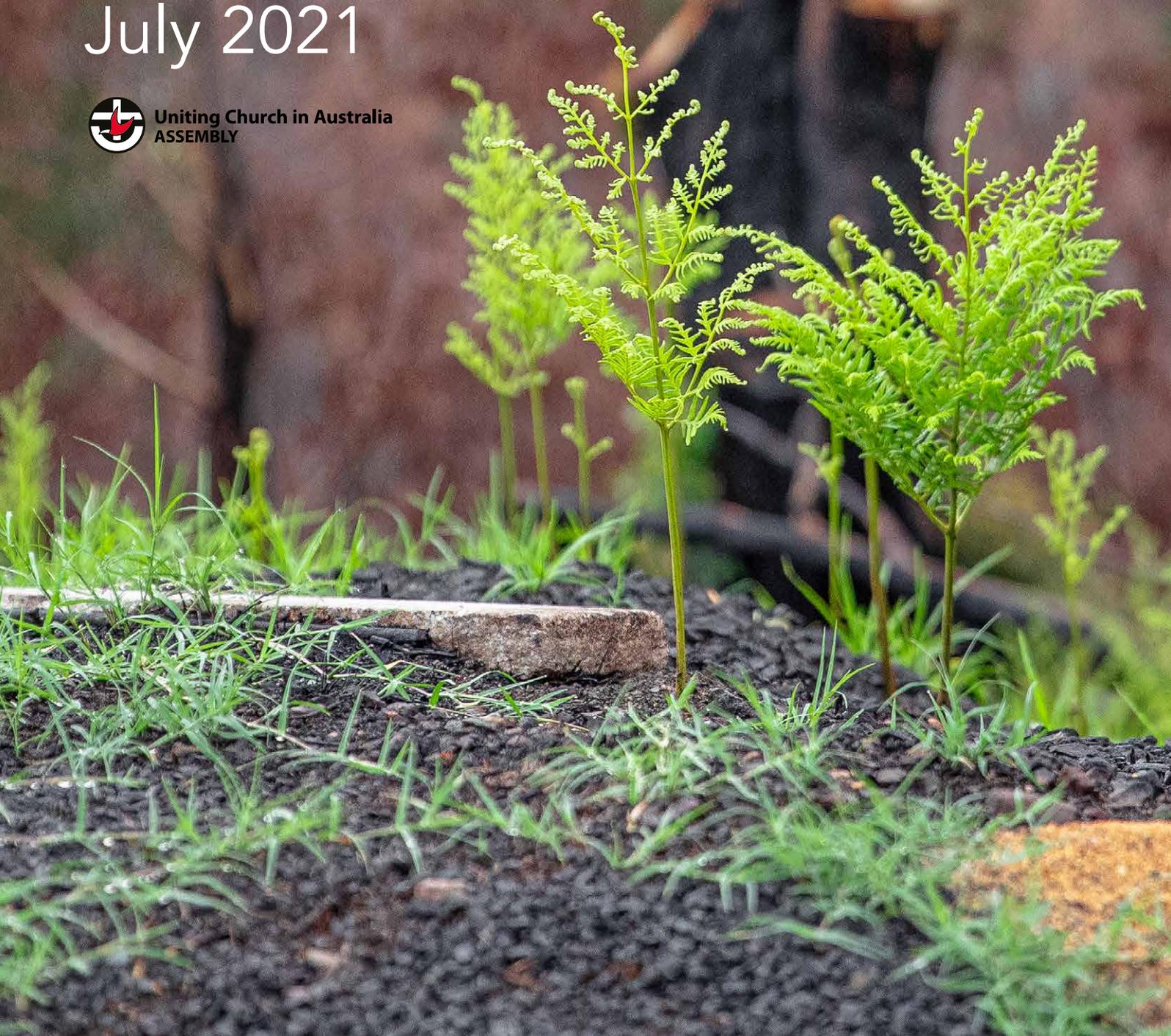


Our Vision for a Just Australia

July 2021



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY



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 citizenship.

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.
- The whole document or one foundation may be useful in a discussion forum with groups of older students, either schools, congregations or other groups.
- 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 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.

What we ask

We believe the following are key to building a just and compassionate Australia.

1. Constitutional change to enshrine a First Nations Voice to Federal Parliament.
2. Recognise the sovereignty of First Nations and establish a commission for treaty making, truth telling, justice and reconciliation.
3. A national climate policy and plan for a just, equitable and rapid transition to a low-carbon economy, that drives down greenhouse gas pollution.
4. Policies which support people, nations and ecosystems that are most vulnerable to climate change.
5. An end to the policy of indefinite, mandatory detention for people seeking asylum.
6. A system that supports people seeking asylum to live in the Australian community with access to essential services while their refugee status is processed in a timely manner.
7. A fairer tax system including the introduction of laws which target tax evasion and avoidance.
8. Access to decent and affordable housing.
9. Raising, and appropriately indexing, the single rate of Jobseeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payments, and related payments including rental assistance.
10. Universal access to quality early learning for all children aged three and four, prior to their commencing school.
11. Older people have access to appropriate, quality, well-funded services that meet their needs in the location they choose.
12. A comprehensive approach to preventing gender-based violence and domestic and family violence with targeted strategies for those most at risk.
13. Adequate funding of appropriate services for people living with mental illness.
14. An NDIS that is fully funded and properly rolled-out where no one is left behind in the process.
15. A scaled up Australian aid program.
16. Australian Government in partnership with global institutions, Australian NGOs and our regional neighbours, address the worst impacts of COVID-19 on the world's most vulnerable nations and communities.

Introduction from the President

This 2021 update of “Our Vision for a Just Australia” has been developed at a time when the world is still gripped by the profound effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many continue to struggle with its deadly impact and national governments are seeking to rebuild their economies.

In this context, we feel it is important for us to articulate our hopes for Australia to be a nation that is just, compassionate, inclusive and courageous.

The pandemic has shown us what can be achieved when we have the courage to take measures that are designed to protect all people.

It has demonstrated that we are stronger as a nation and a community when we care for those most vulnerable and at the margins of society.

In the Uniting Church, and as followers of Jesus, we believe we are called to participate in God’s life-giving mission in the world.

This calls us to be communities of justice and mercy, embodying God’s love, peace and reconciliation so that all people and all creation might share abundant life.

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

(John 10: 10)

This document 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.

It reflects our learnings and calls to action in the “Build Back Better” vision for a post-COVID world.

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 outlined key actions that should be taken by governments and the wider community to bring about communities of justice and flourishing in Australia and beyond.

Many of the issues identified in this document will be important for people in Australia as they consider the future they want for our country as we move slowly out of the COVID-19 crisis.

At the end of 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 your local Member of Parliament 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, being a voice for justice and hope in our communities, in Australia and in the world.

Grace and Peace,



Rev Sharon Hollis
President, Uniting Church in Australia

Good things about Australia – how we can build on them

In casting our vision for a just and compassionate Australia we acknowledge there are many good things about Australia that we can build upon. For example:



Medicare and the public health system



Largely free primary and secondary education



Compulsory voting with almost all Australian adults having the right to vote in free elections



Governments at all levels operate largely free of corruption



High levels of paid employment



A social security system that provides some level of income for most people in hardship



Almost all people have access to clean water and electricity



The Australian Government often seeks to promote human rights in global forums and in its dealings with most countries



Law enforcement agencies operate largely free from political interference

In 2020, Australia ranked 8th in the world on the United Nations Human Development Index¹. Some of the positive indicators noted by the UN Development Program included:

- Average life expectancy is 83.4 years;
- There is largely equality in the number of years of education that women and men in Australia complete; and
- 78.9% of the labour force are skilled workers.

We also recognise growing inequalities in our society that reduce the quality of life for too many people. Most of us who experience the positives of Australian

society may struggle to understand the experience of people living in hardship.

Not everyone can afford to buy better health care and education and public-funded services are often under-resourced and stretched to the limit. Large political donations unfairly influence government decisions.

Our social security system has many holes that leave too many Australians in financial poverty and hardship.

We hope this vision statement highlights how we can improve Australia for people in hardship and people who are vulnerable and identifies the reforms needed to make Australia fairer and just for all people.

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 calling us to be co-workers in 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 coexistent sovereignty of First Peoples, has enshrined a First Nations 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 invasion, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. First Nation'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, ability, 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 First Peoples Heart

“ Our Vision:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before invasion, 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

- Constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Federal Parliament.
- A Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of:
 - » Agreement-making or treaty-making between governments and First Nations
 - » Truth-telling about Australia's history, seeking justice, healing and reconciliation
- Self-determination that gives First Nations full control over decisions impacting their lives, communities, Country and cultural sites.
- Meaningful, effective, culturally-appropriate and research-based policies and programs to significantly reduce incarceration of First Peoples.
- 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 First Nations students supported by sufficient professional resourcing and educational opportunities, no matter where a person lives.
- First Nations languages to be preserved, taught and incorporated into civic functions. True bilingual education to become a reality for First Peoples where English is not a first language.
- First Nations cultures to be understood and celebrated by all people in Australia.
- Support for First Peoples business and increased local employment opportunities in remote communities.
- National policy is measured against the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- Recognition of stolen generations and the ongoing impacts of trauma on First Nations, families and 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 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 **John 10:10** Jesus spoke of his coming to bring abundant life for all.

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 (sic). In varying degrees, we all contribute to, and perpetuate those injustices. We recognise the violence which has been done to the Aboriginal people (sic) in the colonisation of this continent and the injustice by which Aborigines (sic) have been deprived of the land. We recognise the continuing Aboriginal (sic) 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 (sic) society before invasion, what was done to them in colonisation, and what has been the fate and status of Aborigines (sic) within the Australian nation."

"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 (sic) and newer Australians have determined to stand together."

The Covenant (1994)

At its 7th Assembly, the Uniting Church formally entered into a binding Covenant relationship with its Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) members, recognising and repenting for the Church's complicity in the injustices perpetrated on Australia's

First Peoples, and pledging to move forward with a shared future. UAICC's 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 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 First Peoples long before any invaders arrived. The Word was in Creation and is revealed in human form as Jesus Christ.

Statement from the Heart (2017)

In August 2017, responding to the Statement from the Heart², the National Executive of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) affirmed the work that supports the Statement from the Heart, in which First Nations leaders asked for a voice to advise Parliament, and the creation of a commission to oversee Makarrata or treaty making³. Subsequent to this, the UAICC National Conference resolved to invite the Assembly "to support work to progress the Uluru statement (sic)" and "endorse and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)⁴, including principles of self-determination".

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."

The State of the Nation

- First Peoples have given us the Statement from the Heart as the basis for reconciliation, but governments have not followed their lead.
- First Peoples communities, whether remote, regional or urban, experience heightened levels of disadvantage. First Peoples in Australia have a lower life expectancy and worse health, education and employment outcomes across the board than other people in Australia⁵.
- Proportionally, Australia's First Peoples are the most incarcerated people on the planet⁶. First Peoples comprise 30 per cent of the adult prison population⁷. Even more distressingly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth constitute 6 per cent of the total youth population but represent just under half of those in youth detention across the country⁸.
- People in Australia were shocked at the recent desecration and destruction of the ancient First Nation historical site, Juukan Gorge, in WA. There is a lack of adequate legislative protection of such sites.
- Stolen Generations survivors and their families continue to carry trauma and were over-represented as victims in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

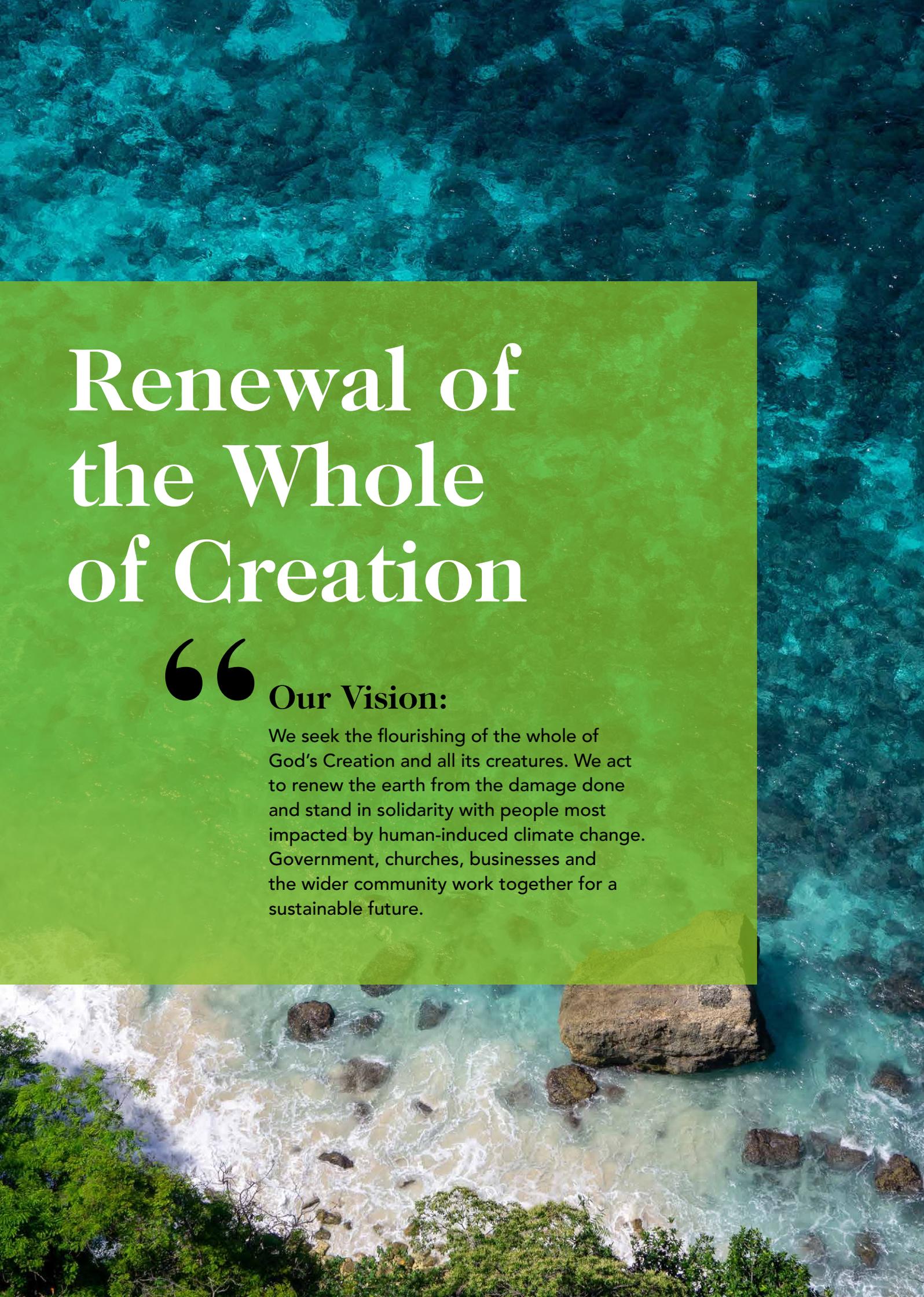
Key actions:

1. Constitutional change to enshrine a First Nations Voice into Federal Parliament.
2. Recognise the sovereignty of First Nations and establish a commission for treaty making, truth telling, justice and reconciliation.
3. Provide sufficient funding to achieve the Closing the Gap targets, prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations to deliver services wherever possible.
4. Encourage and model trauma informed practice across the community.

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 Nations a formal voice into Federal Parliament?
3. What is your position regarding understanding First Nations as sovereign in this land and the implications of that?
4. What do you think should be done to address First Nations disadvantage in terms of life expectancy, health and education?
5. What do you think should be done to address First Nations incarceration rates in Australia? What is your position on raising the age of criminal responsibility in all jurisdictions to 14 years?
6. What are you doing, or what might you do to further justice for First Peoples in your own community?
7. How are we recognising trauma and implementing trauma informed practice in our 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

- People in Australia 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 are a net exporter of renewable energy.
- We have acted quickly to achieve a decarbonisation of our economy and supported other nations to act similarly.
- We live sustainable lifestyles and aim to reverse the legacy of 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.
- 'Waste' products are seen as resources, and products are built to last. We recognise that we are responsible for all the items we use.
- We live within and are part of an abundant natural world with a rich plant and animal life and protect the rights of nature – animate and 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 damage 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 reef⁹.
- Our neighbours in the Pacific and elsewhere are suffering with the impacts of climate change.
- Most of Australia’s energy relies on traditional sources—non-renewable fossil fuels. Coal and gas account for about 79% of electricity generation¹⁰.
However, the chair of the government’s Energy Security Board has pointed out that coal-fired

power stations will close, as they can no longer compete with renewable energy generation¹¹.

- Unless the Commonwealth Government adopts more ambitious and rapid transition policies, Australia will not meet our international commitments and will undermine collective efforts to prevent a rapid and dangerous escalation of climate change. Our 2030 emissions reduction 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 Celsius¹².
- Commonwealth Government policies are failing to support the necessary transition to renewables, especially for communities who are currently reliant on coal and other carbon intensive industries and sources of employment.
- There is a growing fossil fuel divestment movement¹³ and significant private investment in solar panels¹⁴ and renewable energy.
- There is a strong public appetite for, and uptake of renewables. Over 2 million Australian households have now installed solar panels¹⁵ but there is a need for more equitable access for all people in Australia¹⁶.
- Climate change, and policy responses to it, often affect low-income and vulnerable people more than others, exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. People experiencing poverty and other vulnerabilities often live in areas more susceptible to climate change and in housing that is less resistant; lose more when affected by climate disasters; have fewer resources to mitigate the effects; and have less assets and financial resources to rebuild and recover from the impacts¹⁷.
- The Australian Energy Market Operator has outlined a 20-year transition plan towards renewable energy generation. They have assessed that the lowest cost and least regret future is a transition to renewable energy and the closure of coal-fired power stations¹⁸. While there will be both costs and benefits as we transition to a clean economy, the burden on low-income and vulnerable households will be greatest without a carefully planned and managed approach.
- The Federal Government has committed to a “gas-fired recovery” from the economic impacts of COVID-19. Yet, according to the International

Energy Agency, if the world is to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, it requires immediate and massive deployment of all available clean and efficient energy technologies¹⁹.

- At least 90 species have become extinct in Australia over the past two centuries. Australia now has the most mammalian extinctions in the world, including the first mammal declared extinct from climate change — the Bramble Cay melomys²⁰.

Key actions:

1. A national climate policy and plan for a just, equitable and rapid transition to a low-carbon economy, 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 carbon intensive industries for employment, towards more environmentally sustainable sources of income.
3. Equitable access to renewables and energy efficient upgrades for all people in Australia.
4. Policies which support people, nations and ecosystems that are most vulnerable to climate change, including measures to strengthen the resilience of communities and support people and the services they rely on to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Our natural environment is in a state of decline

- Australia is a land of amazing biodiversity however we are failing to protect it.
- According to the last State of the Environment Report, the main pressures facing the Australian environment were: climate change, land-use change, habitat fragmentation and degradation, invasive species and multiple overlapping pressures on the same ecosystems²¹.
- Additional pressures on species and habitats, biodiversity, and pollution in our coastal and marine environments²².

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 of both protections and rehabilitation requirements.

We are a throw-away society

- People in Australia are overconsuming and creating more waste²³.
- There is a move towards greener and 'eco' products.

Key actions:

1. Creating a culture where the desire to protect, sustain and restore 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.
3. All levels of government to implement laws, regulations and system-level approaches to minimise environmental waste, improve waste management systems, and promote sustainability across production and consumption processes.

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 people in Australia 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

“ Our Vision:

We are a nation of diverse cultures, languages, faiths, ethnic groups, abilities 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, ability 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 for those that do not pose a serious risk to public health or safety.
- People found to be refugees are granted permanent visas with access to Government support and family reunion.
- Our humanitarian intake is generous and responsive to global needs.
- Our leaders set an example by showing fairness and compassion and enacting policy that is humane.
- Migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum are given access to basic government services and supports like Medicare, Centrelink and other public services without restriction or waiting periods.
- Disability is not used as the basis for excluding people from resettlement.

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 people in need 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 over 200 refugees that were transferred offshore to PNG and Nauru²⁴.

Key actions:

1. An end to the policy of indefinite, mandatory detention for people seeking asylum, starting with an end to offshore processing.
2. Introduction of a revised Refugee Sponsorship Program that would enable individuals and community groups to more easily sponsor refugees to settle in Australia, in addition to the existing humanitarian intake.

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

- The current 'fast-track' process for assessing people's claims for protection has created a complex system that is difficult for people in the community to navigate²⁵.
- 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, potentially for the rest of their lives²⁶.
- 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 Visa²⁷.

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.
3. Legislative safeguards are enacted to protect against arbitrary and indefinite detention in Australia, including for refugees whose visas are cancelled but cannot return to their country of origin due to the risk of persecution or refusal of states to readmit them.

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

- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that in 2020 there were over 4 million refugees in the Asia-Pacific region, which does not include people internally displaced in their own country. Including both refugees and people seeking asylum the two largest sources in our region were 2.6 million people from Afghanistan and 1.1 million from Myanmar²⁸.
- Australia's annual refugee intake has been reduced since the pandemic, with the reduction in numbers locked in until 2024²⁹.

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 of refugees.

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

- 19 per cent of people in Australia say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion³⁰.
- Around one in three (35 percent of) recent migrants said they faced hurdles in finding their first job³¹.
- Australian Muslim women who ventured out on their own were almost three times more likely to face harassment of an Islamophobic nature³².

Key action:

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

Waiting periods for migrants to access services

- There is an increasing trend toward excluding migrants (including expanded and extended waiting periods for new permanent residents) from social security and basic social protections afforded to other residents and citizens. This includes access to social security and family payments, childcare subsidies, paid parental leave, subsidised education, etc³³. This risks creating a two-tier society, in which one class of residents are denied the basic supports and protections that citizens and other residents take for granted.

Key action:

New permanent residents should be eligible for social security and other basic protections immediately upon having their permanency granted.

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 the Asia-Pacific region 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?
6. What is your policy regarding extended waiting periods for new permanent residents from social security and basic social protections afforded to other residents and citizens?



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 living in poverty are not belittled, diminished or demonised. We support each other through our relationships and our economic system.
- All people who are willing and able to participate in economic activity have the opportunity to do so (full employment), and those in paid work receive remuneration and conditions of employment which allow them and their families to thrive.
- We have a fair distribution of wealth supported by a fair tax system. Everyone contributes taxes on an equitable basis so we can have the country we want.
- We have a social security system and universal services that support people to live well. Those people who need income assistance or supports to achieve equal access to a fair quality of life receive them.
- Those that have more wealth contribute more and there are no loopholes in the tax system. 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 have some free access to quality early childhood education and can receive a quality education from their local primary and high schools.
 - » Universities and TAFEs are there for all students, not just the fortunate.
 - » Health, transport, disability and mental health services, aged care and other essential services are well funded and meet the needs of their communities.
 - » Those who are unable to earn an income or who engage in unpaid care are supported by a robust social security safety net.

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 28.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in tax in 2018, compared to the average of wealthy (OECD) countries of 33.9%. Amongst OECD countries, only the governments of the USA, Korea, Turkey, Ireland, Chile and Mexico collect less tax as a proportion of GDP³⁴.
- The distribution of wealth in Australia is deeply unequal. The highest 10% of people have almost half of all household wealth while the bottom 60% have only 16% of the wealth³⁵.
- 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%.
- These tax arrangements encourage speculative investment in assets such as housing, leading to growing wealth inequalities and undermining economic resilience. Capital Gains Tax concessions and negative gearing benefits people who can afford to invest, increasing wealth inequalities, driving up house prices and household debt, and leaving people living on low incomes languishing in an expensive rental market. Removing these unfair tax breaks will not only help grow the revenue base to fund services but will redirect money away from tax sheltered locations into

productive areas that support a stronger economy and more equitable wealth distribution.

- Current tax and superannuation arrangements compound gender-based inequalities in income and wealth, and this contributes to the wealth inequalities that women experience over their lifetime³⁶. Future cuts to personal income tax will further deepen these gender-based inequalities
- Personal income tax cuts legislated to commence in 2024 will only compound inequalities and future budgetary pressures³⁷. They will increase the gap between rich and poor and doing little to support economic growth, while at the same time leaving a massive hole in government revenues.
- Billions in tax credits and subsidies support fossil fuel industries each year, including the fuel tax credit scheme and direct subsidies to specific industries³⁸.

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.
3. Addressing growing inequality in access to decent and affordable housing.
4. Phase out fossil fuel subsidies and ensure tax arrangements support the transition to a clean economy.

Poverty and inequality continue to grow in Australia

- There are just over 3.24 million people (13.6%) living below the poverty line of 50% of median income – including 774,000 children (17.7%). In dollar figures, this poverty line works out to \$457 a week for a single adult living alone; or \$960 a week for a couple with two children³⁹.
- Many of those affected are living in deep poverty – on average, this is a staggering \$282 per week below the poverty line⁴⁰.
- The group of people experiencing poverty the most are those relying on Government allowance payments⁴¹.
- Age Pensioners who rent are also at greater risk of poverty⁴².

- In the 2016 Census, over 116,000 people were homeless in Australia⁴³.
- Renters are almost twice as likely to live in poverty as home-owners, with public housing tenants at greatest risk. Among low-income households in the private rental market, 50% are facing rental stress and are therefore at risk of homelessness⁴⁴.
- The rate of poverty for First Peoples remains higher than the broader community⁴⁵.
- In 2021 the Federal Government increased JobSeeker and related payments by \$50 a fortnight, lifting the base rate to \$44 a day, still leaving people in poverty⁴⁶.

Key actions:

1. Better support for people to re-enter the workforce, particularly for vulnerable groups exposed to compounding risks for long term unemployment.
2. Raising, and appropriately indexing, the single rate of Jobseeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payments, and related payments including rental assistance.
3. Remove taxation and other subsidies that add to inflationary pressures in the housing market and commit to a significant boost in funding to build and maintain more social housing.
4. Continue to review and address inequities in superannuation arrangements so that every worker benefits from an increase in financial security on retirement

Stagnant wages and more insecure and precarious work are contributing to in-work poverty

- The number of people in Australia with insecure and precarious work is growing⁴⁷.
- Women are more likely to be underemployed or in insecure employment, with ramifications for the gender pay gap and superannuation inequity. Women are also concentrated in industries with lower overall rates of pay, such as the care workforce⁴⁸.

- Care work – both paid and unpaid – is overwhelmingly undertaken by women. The undervaluing of caregiving and underinvestment in our social care infrastructure has implications for women’s workforce participation and economic security. While our social security system fails to adequately support those who engage in unpaid care, including single parents, the underfunding of the care sector has meant that paid carers, such as personal support workers in aged and disability care, tend to be low paid and often insecurely employed⁴⁹.

Key actions:

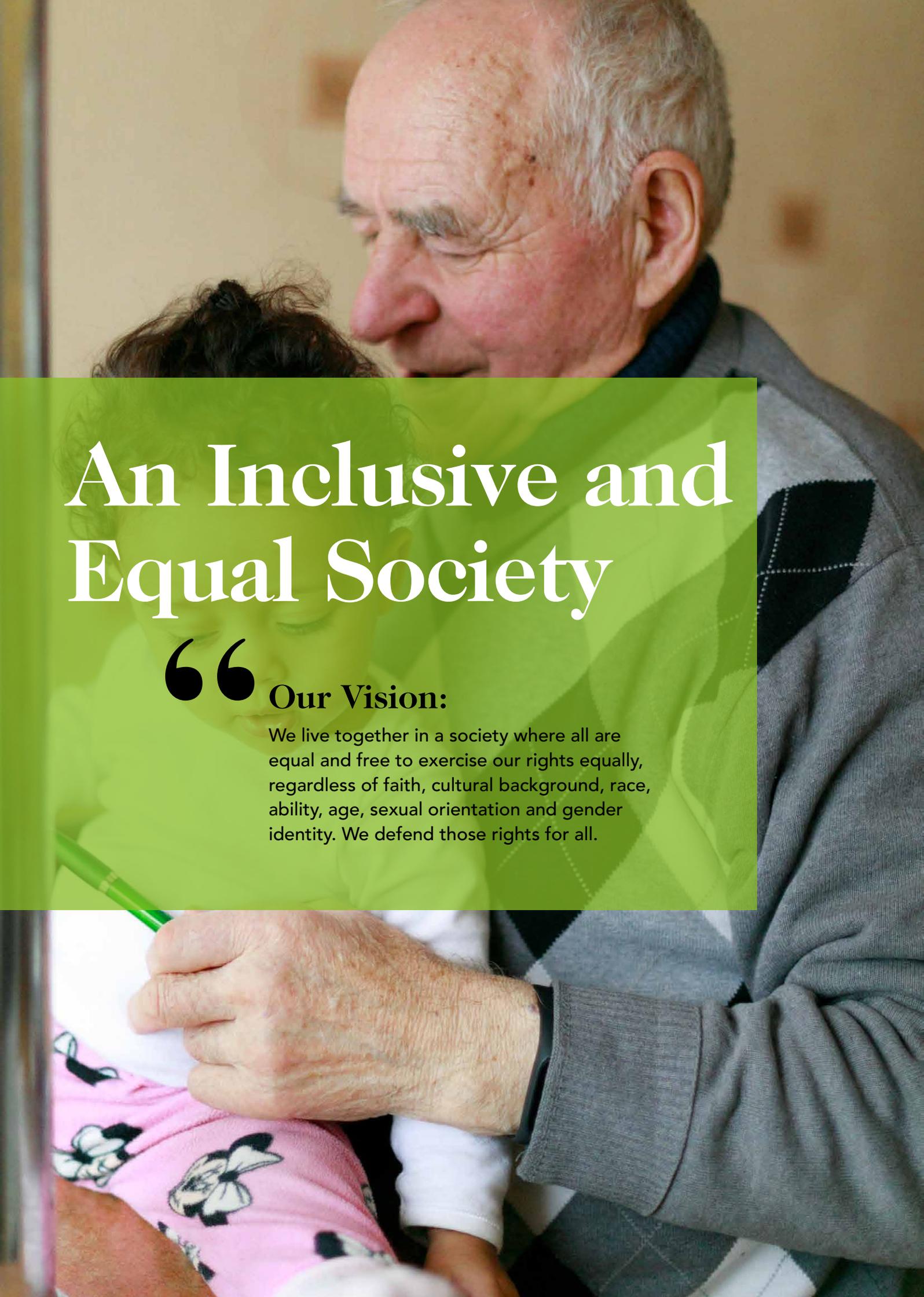
1. Government policy must aim to not only reduce unemployment and underemployment, but also to improve the quality and stability of new jobs.
2. Labour standards should be maintained, or strengthened where necessary, to ensure the quality of work: ensuring employment is safe, sustainable and fair. Workers should have jobs they and their families can rely on, with fair and predictable pay and hours of work, and access to important protections and conditions.
3. Investment in the care workforce should not only increase employment opportunities but should be sufficient to increase pay and improve conditions.

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 government revenue back into the community?
3. What can and should be done to address homelessness and housing affordability in Australia?
4. How can we increase support for people who experience barriers to gaining paid work?

5. What reforms should be introduced to the tax and superannuation systems to improve economic fairness in Australia?
6. 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, ability, 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, ability, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Every person can participate in society as they wish, free from preconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination.
- Older people and people with disability are treated with respect and dignity and able to live their life to the full. Where they require supports to live independently, they have voice and choice in those supports.
- 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.
- Every person is safe in their own home and community.
- Disability and age are not barriers to participating as an equal member of society.
- People in Australia of all backgrounds and beliefs feel safe and able to challenge destructive and demeaning language and behaviour.

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 for 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, Colossians 1:20).

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 determined early in life

- 17.7% or 1 in 6 Australian children aged 0-14 years live in poverty⁵⁰.
- Nearly half (44%) of all children in single parent households live below the poverty line – more than three times the rate for children in couple families. Families with children with a female main income earner are more than twice as likely to be in poverty as those with a male main income earner⁵¹.
- Children from areas of greatest socioeconomic disadvantage are more than 10 times more likely than those living in areas of least disadvantage to be in youth detention. One in five children in youth detention are aged 10-14 years of age⁵².
- Declining rates of home ownership among some groups including younger people, lower income people and older women, is increasingly become a determining and magnifying factor in wealth and wealth inequality in Australia⁵³.

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.
5. Provide national leadership to support raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 across all jurisdictions in Australia and increase investment in early intervention services and wrap-around support for

children who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

6. Ensure social security and family payments settings provide adequate support to low-income families, including single-parent families.

Many others face barriers to social and economic participation due to their faith, cultural background, race, ability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity

- Abuse is most prevalent among physically, financially or emotionally vulnerable people⁵⁴.
- A Royal Commission was established in 2018 in response to concerns about the quality and safety of aged care services in Australia and a Royal Commission was established in 2019 to examine violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability in Australia.
- Homelessness is a growing problem for older people in Australia and will likely continue to increase over time due to an ageing population and declining rates of home ownership among older people⁵⁵.
- One in twelve older people in Australia experience significant financial or social disadvantage⁵⁶.
- Gender-based inequalities and discrimination disproportionately affect women and girls with disability. They face greater risk of violence, especially sexual violence, abuse and harassment. The Disability Royal Commission's Research Report – Nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability in Australia highlights that the lifetime exposure of women with disability to sexual violence is twice that of non-disabled women⁵⁷.
- People with high support needs, people living in rural and remote areas, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and members of LGBTIQ communities can face even greater difficulties accessing appropriate services and support, particularly when they belong to more than one of these groupings.

- 18 per cent of people in Australia say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion⁵⁸.
- Only 53% of people in Australia with disability are employed, compared to 84% of all working-age people⁵⁹, with lower employment rates contributing to high rates of poverty⁶⁰.
- A disproportionate number of LGBTIQ Australians experience poorer mental health outcomes and have higher risk of suicidal behaviours than their peers. These health outcomes are directly related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse on the basis of being LGBTIQ⁶¹.

Key actions:

1. People with disability and older people have access to appropriate, quality, well-funded services that meets their needs in the location they choose.
2. Safeguards which protect against violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and people with disability.
3. Ensuring our legal system protects all people from discrimination.
4. Prioritise promoting inclusion and addressing all forms of discrimination in communities, including through awareness-raising, policies and action plans.

High levels of family violence

- 119,000 people sought homelessness services in 2019-2020 due to domestic/family violence; this included 37,000 children, with women making up the majority (90%) of adults seeking support⁶².
- Approximately one in four women (23%) has experienced violence by an intimate partner⁶³, and it is the leading cause of illness, disability and premature death among women aged 25 to 44⁶⁴.
- Domestic or family violence against women is a leading cause of homelessness for women⁶⁵.

Key actions:

1. A comprehensive approach to preventing gender-based violence and domestic and family violence with targeted strategies for those most at risk. This includes challenging the social norms and practices that underpin it.
2. Sustainable funding for services and housing which support survivors 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 people in Australia 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?
 - d) Increase accessibility for and inclusion of people with disability and older people in your community?

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, regional and remote communities thrive. They have access to critical services, including health, education and technology.
- There is wide representation in our decision making from different ages, cultures, abilities, religion, gender, sexuality and geography. People are free to express their own ideas.
- People with disability in Australia can fully participate in society. They can access, choose and control the services and support they need to live and be included in the community.
- Our lifestyle and culture promote good mental health and our governments, 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 disability, First Peoples and people at risk of experiencing violence.
- Vulnerable people receive the support they need, whether that is protection from violence and abuse, quality care, medical services or harm reduction services.
- Remote First Nations communities are supported to stay connected to Culture and Country through adequate long-term government funding for housing, maintenance, municipal and essential 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; Jeremiah 29:7, 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 people in Australia experiences a mental illness in a given year and almost 1 in 2 will experience a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime⁶⁶.

Key actions:

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

Lack of Safe Spaces

- One in 32 children received child protection services in 2019-20, with 67% being repeat clients⁶⁷.
- It is believed that up to 14% of older people in Australia experience elder abuse in any given year⁶⁸.
- Workplace bullying is on the rise⁶⁹ and is associated with poor psychological health⁷⁰.
- Many children experience bullying at some stage during their time in school⁷¹.
- 1 in 5 Australian young people reported being socially excluded, threatened or abused online⁷².

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.
3. Implementing recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care to protect older Australians from abuse and neglect.

Rural and remote communities are suffering

- Large parts of Australia have experienced the worst drought in recorded history, the most devastating bushfire seasons along with some of the most devastating natural disasters seen in generations.
- Severe environmental impacts have contributed to a decline in agricultural production that impacts the economy and employment in rural and remote Australia. In turn, farmers, their families and communities experience significant decline in mental and physical health due to the ongoing disasters they are experiencing⁷³.
- People in Australia 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 areas⁷⁴.
- Rates of self-harm and suicide increase with remoteness⁷⁵.

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 disasters.
3. All people have access to clean water, basic living standards, to be connected to services and have opportunities to connect with people both physically and through reliable technology.
4. Ensuring that isolated children have access to education.
5. All adults recognise their role in creating safety for children.

People with disability need better choice and control

- An estimated 1.4 million people with disability needed formal assistance from a service provider for at least one everyday living activity⁷⁶. Many people with disability face barriers in accessing services to support them or experience some form of discrimination⁷⁷.
- 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 workforce⁷⁸.

Key actions:

1. An NDIS that is fully funded and properly rolled-out where no one is left behind in the process.
2. Improve safeguards of the NDIS to ensure all people providing disability services are screened and only those assessed to be fit and proper are permitted to provide services.

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 treatment⁷⁹.
- There is a shortage of detoxification and rehabilitation services, particularly in rural and regional areas⁸⁰.

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 disaster-affected communities?
2. What policies will you put in place to address mental health, including in rural and remote Australia?
3. How will you ensure that the NDIS continues to provide individualised and personalised supports for people with disability into the future?
4. What actions will you take to protect older people, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect and exploitation?
5. What is your policy or approach to illicit drug use and treatment?
6. How will you address bullying in our workplaces and schools?
7. How does or how can your community assist communities affected by drought and other natural disasters?
8. 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.
- Vulnerable people at risk of human trafficking are educated about their rights, have access to better opportunities and are protected by enforced 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; Philipians 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 the 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

- Australia's public spending on Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a proportion of our Gross National Income in 2021-22 is expected to fall to 0.21%, down from an estimated 0.22% in 2020-21⁸¹.
- The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average for ODA/GNI in 2020 was 0.32%⁸².
- According to the Development Policy Centre, Australia was the 14th most generous DAC member in 2015. In 2020, its ranking has dropped to 21st⁸³.
- This is in the face of the first increase in extreme poverty in over 20 years across the globe, with the multiple impacts of COVID-19. Furthermore, our immediate region is poorer and more unstable, and the global vaccine roll-out is highly inequitable.
- People in Australia are among the wealthiest people on the planet, when measured by median wealth, but Australia now ranks 19th among rich country aid donors⁸⁴.

Key actions:

1. Scale up Australia's aid program to approximately 0.3% GNI by 2022–23.
2. Recommit Australia to the internationally agreed target of contributing 0.7 per cent of GNI to overseas aid by 2030.
3. Australian Government partner with global institutions, Australian NGOs and our regional neighbours, to address the worst impacts of COVID-19 on the world's most vulnerable nations and communities.
4. Support developing nations to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

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 marriage⁸⁵.

- 62% of the 25 million people trapped in forced labour are in the Asia-Pacific region⁸⁶ and far too many are being exploited to produce goods and services that people in Australia 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 systems⁸⁷.
- 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.

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 requiring businesses importing goods with high risk of modern slavery in their production to thoroughly investigate their suppliers to adequately address the risk.
3. Appointment of a national 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 1967⁸⁸. The prospects for a negotiated peace and a "two-state solution" are bleak.

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 are unique in their destructive power and the threat they pose to the environment and human survival⁸⁹.
- The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has been signed by 86 nations and ratified by 54. It entered into force in January 2021⁹⁰. 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

- Indigenous Papuans (from the Indonesian Provinces of Papua and West Papua) are facing violence from Indonesian security forces, racial discrimination, exploitation of natural resources and environment by national and multi-national companies as well as the military⁹¹.
- Christian churches in the Papuan provinces have regularly called for peace dialogues that address the political causes of the ongoing conflict⁹².
- 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 Indonesian 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.

Stop the killings and promote human rights in the Philippines

- Extrajudicial killings, including the killing of thousands of people under a so-called 'war on drugs', is reprehensible⁹³.
- Church people in the Philippines involved in supporting those in poverty, defending human rights, and supporting Indigenous people are often targeted with false charges by police. They are also subjected to death threats and other serious intimidation and harassment⁹⁴.
- A climate of impunity has been normalised by the Philippine president's regular incitements to violence to punish legitimate dissent⁹⁵.

Key action:

Urge the Australian government to use its ties with the Philippines to promote and prioritise human rights there.

Restore democracy and justice in Myanmar

- In February 2021, Myanmar's military launched a coup to remove the National League for Democracy party that was elected by popular vote⁹⁶.
- The military has since killed more than 700 people⁹⁷ and forcibly disappeared hundreds more during widespread protests⁹⁸.
- There are now fears that a civil war and widespread humanitarian crisis will engulf the country.

Key action:

Call on Australia to use all diplomatic and multilateral means available to end the trade of arms to Myanmar and pressure the military to restore democracy.

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 can we work together to promote democracy and support local civil society groups, including churches, who are resisting authoritarian governments around the world?
6. How does or how can your 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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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.