



## THE VILLAGE CHURCH MT.ELIZA

FAITH JUSTICE COMMUNITY

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Dr Mark Zirnsak  
Justice and International Mission Cluster  
Centre for Theology and Ministry  
29 College Crescent  
Parkville VIC 3052

Dear Mark,

On behalf of The Village Church, Mt Eliza, we thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback and a response to the consultation paper "Living in harmony with creation – what is the role of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania in addressing climate change?"

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge the considerable work and academic scholarship which has gone into drawing up the consultation paper. We also recognise the thought that has gone into drafting the proposed resolution to be put before the Synod at its next meeting.

The following response is offered in a spirit of generosity and constructive commentary.

### *Do we need a resolution?*

We support a resolution regarding climate change being put before the Synod for the following reasons:

- The church has a role to play as a prophetic voice in our society on this issue (as with many others). To not say something would be to deny that unique calling from God.
- While Earth's climate has ebbed and flowed over geological ages, the science shows there has never been a period of such massive and destructive human-induced impacts as over only the last 200 years.
- It has been 12 years since Synod has addressed this issue and much has changed (read: worsened) since that time. In that time, the frequency and severity of a series of catastrophic climate related events and impacts on our Earth and community has galvanised young people and all ages to recognise and strongly advocate the need for urgent action. The most recent scientific evidence indicates that the 1.5°C horse has bolted and the 2°C horse is already halfway out the gate.
- There is an important symbolism in joining the voice of the Synod with that of other church denominations and faiths, community groups, businesses, environmental organisations, peak bodies (industry and environment) and various levels of government, all both locally and globally, in calling for meaningful action on climate change.
- In meeting the challenges of climate change, along with the many other justice issues facing society (COVID pandemic, asylum seekers, domestic violence) the church, in God's strength and provision, should be able to act on all and not "pick and choose".
- Burning of fossil fuels is a very major element in the complex inter-related causes of climate change. Our wider social and economic behaviours are also key contributors. The church in Christ has an essential role to play in continuing to challenge greed, consumption, indiscriminate environmental destruction, and encourage loving all our neighbours including "treading lightly on the Earth", cooperation, sustainable living and mutual respect.
- The church also has a pastoral role to play in society. Climate change is a cause of much stress, anxiety, grief and despair for many – we cannot shirk this responsibility to be "the fragrance of Christ" in providing support and hope to those around us.



The Uniting Church in Australia



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- That there are at least 3 theological frameworks which can be applied to climate change makes it abundantly clear that there is an imperative for the church to act. This imperative is based on our view that the Earth is part of God's good creation and is to be loved by us as our neighbour.

### *What should the resolution say?*

We make the following observations and suggestions in relation to the wording of a resolution addressing climate change:

- It should call a "climate emergency". The situation is extremely serious and requires urgent action. Much like compound interest, any and every little contribution (positive or negative) now, has a much bigger impact in the future. The longer we delay and the less we do now, the greater the cost and effort required later.
- In calling a "climate emergency", the resolution should also set out what actions the Synod will take to address the situation. To call an emergency but not take action will, quite rightly, leave the church open to being labelled hypocrites. The Australian Conservation Foundation communique on climate emergency declarations makes it clear that such statements are only as good as the goals, targets and policies that deliver them.
- Further to the previous point, we would like to see the resolution set a "net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest" target (possibly with intermediate targets) for the church. It should call on and invite all congregations and all Synod-affiliated agencies and bodies to join in setting, adopting and implementing climate action with clear targets and regular review. The Village Church, Mt Eliza is commencing work to define its commitment to this target.
- The proposed phrase "commit to sufficient actions for Australia to contribute its fair share [to climate action]" is vague and inadequate (the federal government already considers the nation is doing "its fair share", despite what independent experts are saying). We would like the resolution to call on Australia to be recognised internationally as leading the way in climate action efforts, not lagging behind others. There are positive economic opportunities to be had in taking actions to address climate change.
- Further to the previous point, the resolution should also call for actions to support reducing emissions in other areas (eg. transport and agriculture) and to increase effective absorption of carbon (reduce land clearance and de-forestation).
- Natural gas is a fossil fuel, which along with coal, is contributing to increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the environment. Along with calling for no new coal mines or mine expansions and no new coal-fuelled power stations, the resolution should call for Australia to minimise its reliance on all fossil fuels, including natural gas.
- We support the recommendation for a deliberate engagement, partnership and support by governments with communities currently dependent on fossil fuel production, to create "meaningful occupation and living incomes for all".
- The resolution should call on the Australian federal government to forego use of any carbon credits from the Kyoto arrangement (such use is akin to a Year 12 student having their preferentially-scored achievements in Year 6 recognised in their final mark).
- The resolution should reiterate previous resolutions of Synod and the Assembly that address climate change. This not only endorses previous statements but points to a long history of engagement in this space.
- We would like to see the resolution set out what other actions Synod and the church will take in relation to climate change, namely in terms of values, advocacy and pastoral care. There is much that the church in Christ can do that is distinctive and unique, especially in the pastoral space.





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- Finally, as part of the church's distinctive voice, the resolution should call for the government and the nation to implement social and economic behaviours that align with positive sustainable living, restore the Earth to a better state of health and respect all of creation. Appropriate economic and social metrics that support these outcomes will be required.

*What is a way forward?*

The consultation paper, while comprehensive and well researched, is dense and dry in content, especially for a general reader. We consider that a (revised) proposed resolution to Synod would be best served by a much shorter, more passionate document with easily accessible language. This would enable a broader population of the church membership to engage in an informed and meaningful way with the issue. The main body of current Consultation paper (sections 5-14) would serve as a supporting, more detailed reference to a simpler, shorter position briefing document.

We thank you again for the efforts that have gone into the consultation paper and draft resolution and the opportunity to provide comment. We trust that our feedback is received in the generous and constructive spirit with which it is intended. We look forward to further discussions on this topic with you, JIM and the broader Uniting Church community.

Blessings,

Mr Cam Opie, Dr David Arnott, Dr Chris Dalton, Ms Claire Dawson, Mrs Sonia Hartley, Rev Cam McAdam & Dr Andrew Stork

Climate change working party, on behalf of the Church Council and members of The Village Church, Mt Eliza

