

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

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WHAT THE “PUBLIC GOOD” MEANS TO UNITING CHURCH MEMBERS

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The JIM Cluster has been an active member of a broad civil society network Australia reMADE (<https://www.australiaremade.org/>). The participating organisations in Australia reMADE came up with a common vision for what an ideal Australia would look like.

Dr Millie Rooney, the National Coordinator of Australia reMADE, interviewed several Uniting Church people in leadership positions, ministers and active members on what the “public good” meant to them. What follows is what she gleaned from the conversations.

“Salt. It adds flavour. It doesn’t dominate, but it does enhance.”

This is what members of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania say when I ask them about the role of faith groups in providing the public good. They explain that like the value of salt in cooking, faith communities can enhance and enrich our quality of life.

We’d gathered virtually: ministers, people working as dis-

ability inclusion advocates, youth support workers, nature education providers as well as community and pastoral carers. There was a mix of ages, with some people talking about young children, others about their grandchildren. They were mostly men. Half the group were in Tasmania, living what seemed like a fairytale life to the other half stuck in COVID lockdown in Victoria (this conversation was recorded in the middle of the strict Melbourne lockdown).

As I always do in conversations around the public good, I asked the group what had supported them through the last six months, and as always, the answers varied. This time I heard about Zoom calls that were initially new ways of broadcasting information but have since become fantastic lifelines of community connection. I heard about dog walking, local wetlands and the essential JobKeeper payments. I heard about chocolate, walks, bushland and the Yarra River. And I heard about the joy of reduced workload, more music, more campfires and more time with nature.

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When asked what public goods they thought should be available to communities, I heard the usual list quickly reeled off: housing, education, employment and health services. I've come to think of these things as the 'public good greatest hits', they're raised so often in conversation.

But after listing these fairly standard public goods, talk quickly turned to the idea that public good is particularly about how the community works and the importance of the way that we connect and trust each other as a society. There was also the need for "better understanding of politics and ideas".

As one participant reflected:

"The whole conversation about public good is about one of power: who has power, and how it's exercised and how it's distributed. So for me, this really goes to the core of how a society that wants to aim for the public good balances, [and] actually leans towards those who are more vulnerable in society. So how do the good public sector and a good public society hold those who are most vulnerable and who are at the receiving end of abuses of power? How [do] we best structure ourselves to enable optimal quality of life for everybody?"

From there, our conversation turned to the public good as a shared sense of what we value, the underlying assumptions we share about what is important and how these enable universal access to a good life.

This was particularly important to the disability advocate on the call who noted:

"We need communities that have a spirit of generosity and care. This is complex to unpack and create, but it's about all people having what they need at a basic



Photo: Dr Millie Rooney

level. The ultimate aim is equality and equity, and that we have a capacity and willingness to recognise and attune to special needs."

This ability to 'attune to special needs' was something many in the group had been thinking more about in the context of COVID. Lockdown and changes in how local faith communities were able to connect meant that people were asking questions about what to prioritise and why. While many pastoral carers were shutting down face-to-face meetings, some of the older members of the community pushed back -- asking for greater face-to-face connection and basically saying, 'hang the risk'. For those responsible for care it provided a challenge, as no one wanted to be responsible for passing COVID to the congregation!

"Local leadership needs to recognise that keeping people safe is also about social and spiritual care and that sometimes, particularly in COVID times, these things are in tension with each other," said one of the

group with a key pastoral care role. And while this tension remains, it does provide an opening for an interesting reflection on just how important community connection is as a public good in and of itself. As I'm learning through so many of these conversations, we gather for the purpose of being with each other as much as we gather for prayer, or sport, or craft.

So there was broad agreement in the room about the physical public goods that need providing (housing, education, healthcare) and also about the importance of engagement and participation in the community as its own form of public good. Of course, I always ask the groups I'm listening to, 'and who should be responsible for providing or leading on these public goods that we seek more of?'

The group had mixed opinions on this. Some people had given up on the role of government, with lit-

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FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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the expectation of the government's willingness or capacity to create solutions. They focus instead on the need for communities themselves to lead the way.

Others on the call agreed on the need for the community to lead, but were more positive about our existing democratic infrastructure. They thought the basics of Australian democracy were good, but that the Murdoch media needed to get out of the way.

Of course, on this call I was particularly interested in the role of the church in providing the public good. There was so much potential here for a bigger conversation, and I'd love to be able to bring the group back together to delve more deeply into the role that the Uniting Church, and indeed other faith groups, have in creating the public good. But even just skimming the surface of this conversation was yielded worthwhile insights.

It was clear that the group felt the church had a significantly different place in society compared to fifty years ago (a sentiment echoed in conversations I've had with other Christian faith groups) and has less power now than it once did to implement public good. However, there was a sense that while there was less practical capacity, the role of the church was still necessary and relevant. The churches have a role in telling stories and providing different institutional frameworks, with specific values, for providing the public good. Participants gave examples of how the church's particular infrastructure and values-base enables different ways of connecting with the community. There was the recent Hobart-based live-in supported suburban-style community for



young people with disabilities. While faith-based organisations are also to some extent held hostage by market-driven approaches to care,

and mission principles as stated on their website are, "Following Christ, walking together as First and Second Peoples, seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation".

As I understood it from our conversation, the particular role faith groups like the Uniting Church in providing the public good includes their ability to help create meaning, connection and values-led community. In essence, to contribute to what we've called people's

capacities for participating in and maintaining the public good. They do this by gathering together around shared values, meaning, ritual and teaching; and also through having the capacity to experiment with new ways of providing for people's tangible needs (such as homes, education, or care) that is driven by beliefs, values and relationships; rather than profit motive or government's official duties of care to provide certain services to everyone.

And as we ended the call, one final comment summed up much of what I'm hearing in conversations about the public good: "While government of all levels is important for facilitating action, it is the local communities themselves who need to choose their own salt." For those on the call, the Uniting Church is a favourite flavour enhancer. •

“**PUBLIC GOOD INCLUDES OUR ABILITY TO CREATE MEANING, CONNECTION AND VALUES-LED COMMUNITY**”

they are often more able to explicitly explore locally based and community-led services.

I had a similar conversation with someone senior in policy in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. She too talked about the importance of the local parish as being an important community unit for providing support. It provided administrative infrastructure and traditionally parish care has been about give and take. Parishioners can expect help, but they can also expect to be given the opportunity to contribute, actively participate and reaffirm a deeper belonging.

The members of the Uniting Church on the call also saw the role of faith groups as holding onto stories that show who we are and who we could become from a particular values perspective. Vision



CLIMATE JUSTICE PROGRESS

Many of you continue to campaign for climate justice, as we seek to limit the harms that climate change will cause. Many of you have used the resources we have provided to act. Thank you to all of you who have taken such action.

In September 2020, the Commonwealth Government announced it would provide \$1.62 billion to the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) over ten years. However, it also stated it would change the laws governing ARENA and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation so they can support soil-carbon sequestration, carbon capture and storage, production of steel with lower emissions in the process and industrial processes that will reduce energy consumption. Such changes divert these bodies' mission to

support the update of renewable energy sources and improvements in energy efficiency measures.

Soil-carbon sequestration is where carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere and becomes locked into matter contained within the soil.

Carbon capture and storage is where carbon dioxide emissions produced by industrial processes or electricity generation are pumped into underground storage facilities to prevent their release into the atmosphere.

The Government also announced:

- \$95.4 million for a Technology Co-Investment Fund to support businesses in the agriculture, manufacturing, industrial and transport sectors to adopt technologies that increase productivity and reduce emissions;
- \$50 million for a Carbon Capture Use and Storage Development Fund to pilot carbon capture

projects;

- \$74.5 million for a Future Fuels Fund to help businesses and regional communities take advantage of opportunities offered by hydrogen, electric and bio-fuelled vehicles; and
- \$70.2 million to set up a hydrogen gas export hub.

The Commonwealth Government announced in September 2020 that it planned to invest more than \$18 billion in low emissions technologies over the decade to 2030. However, at the same time, the Commonwealth Government has stated it is committed to supporting expanded natural gas production over using those resources to support an increase in renewable energy generation.

In their November 2020 budget, the Victorian Government announced an extra \$191 million to assist homes that wish to install solar panels. •

MORE ACTION BY SUPER FUNDS IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In May 2020, we requested that you write to four superannuation funds, AustralianSuper, Unisuper, HESTA and Hostplus, to ask that they stop investing in companies that are expanding fossil fuel operations or are on a business path that

is incompatible with the greenhouse gas emission reductions that would be required to achieve the Paris Agreement goals.

We have previously reported that Unisuper and HESTA have taken committed to taking actions to reduce their investment in fossil fuel corporations.

In further good news, in mid-November 2020 AustralianSuper divested from Whitehaven Coal. It announced that it would achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in its portfolio of investments by 2050.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to the superannuation funds asking them to divest from fossil fuel corporations. •

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT HELPS PEOPLE WITH THEIR POWER BILLS

In May 2016 and again in September 2017, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government about addressing vulnerable Victorians' power costs.

We were especially concerned about the price gouging of the private electricity and gas corporations, which inflated their excessive profits in Victoria.

There was good news in the 2020 Victorian Government budget released in November. The Victorian Government announced it would provide \$797 million to help Victorians reduce their power bills and make homes more energy efficient.

The funds include \$335 million to replace old wood, electric and gas-fired heaters with new energy-efficient systems that are safer and cheaper to run. The change will also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The program will be open to low-income people and is expected to save 250,000 households between \$300 and \$900 a year.

A further \$112 million will be used to eliminate drafts around windows and doors, upgrade heating, cooling and hot water systems in 35,000 social housing properties.



Rental properties will be required to meet minimum energy efficiency standards, expected to benefit around 320,000 people currently living in low-quality rental accommodation. [w](#)

Thank you to everyone who wrote to the Victorian Government asking that they take action to reduce the energy costs for vulnerable Victorians. •

WEALTHY AUSTRALIANS HIGH EMITTERS OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

The JIM Cluster has been concerned about those that seek to blame climate change on people in developing countries.

While everyone across the globe will have some role to play in addressing climate change, the JIM Cluster believes those that have contributed most to the problem should make greater contributions.

Oxfam released a report in De-

cember 2020 that found 5% of Australians, around 1.2 million people, are responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all 11 million people living in Pacific Island countries.

The UN Environment Program released a report on 9 December 2020 that found the world's wealthiest people will need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a factor of 30 to meet the necessary lev-

el of global action. The report found the wealthiest 1% of the global population account for more than double the greenhouse gas emissions of the poorest 50% of the world's population. Shifting the balance will require wealthy people to change their lifestyles, decrease air travel, and embrace renewable energy and electric vehicles. They will also need to use public transport, walk and ride bicycles more. •

UPDATE IN THE SAFEGUARDS TO PROTECT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

We have invited you to be part of a campaign to ensure that people with disabilities on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are treated decently.

We have issued letter-writing actions targeting the Commonwealth Government in November 2018, April 2019 and October 2020.

In good news, on 12 November 2020, the Parliament passed legislation to give the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission greater power to ban unsuitable providers and workers from working with people on the NDIS.

The Minister for the NDIS, Stuart Roberts, said the law “ensures that workers who have left the NDIS, including where they have been fired due to unsuitable behaviour, can be banned from re-entering the field. The amendments also mean the NDIS Commissioner can use information concerning a person’s conduct outside the NDIS, such as a person’s conduct in aged care or child care work, to ban an unsuitable person from entering the NDIS in the first place.”

In other news, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission banned



Rosemary Maione from working under the NDIS for five years in December 2020. Ms Maione was the carer of Ann Marie Smith who died from severe neglect in South Australia. Ms Maione has been charged with manslaughter by the police. The Commission stated that it would further review the ban once the criminal proceedings have been completed.

Since January 2019, more than 30 people have received banning orders from the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Six of those bans have been lifetime bans.

The Commission had received more than 8,000 complaints against carers and service providers on the NDIS in the two years to 30 June 2020. More than 1,000 of the complaints alleged cases of abuse or neglect. No action was taken on 47% of cases.

In September 2020, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission released a report that revealed people on the NDIS had been subject to the unauthorised use of medication to sedate or control them on the NDIS 177,611 times. The use of straps and restrictive clothing to limit the movement of people with disabilities was used 10,472 times. Solitary confinement of people with disabili-

ties was used 423 times.

The chief of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, Graeme Head, said, “The volume of these practices is deeply disturbing and unacceptable.”

The Commonwealth and State Governments have agreed to work together to eliminate the use of restraints on people with disabilities.

A Senate Committee is conducting an inquiry into the functioning of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. It has been hearing of cases regarding abuse and neglect of people with disabilities on the NDIS. Tim Chate, a solicitor with the Intellectual Disability Rights Service, gave evidence that a staff member grabbed the hair of a wheelchair-bound, non-verbal person and banged their head against the wheelchair after allegedly being hit by the person in the wheelchair. It was believed the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission had not taken any disciplinary action against the staff member.

Thank you to everyone who has written letters supporting providing more significant safeguards for people with disabilities. •



VICTORIA MOVES FORWARD WITH REFORM TO REDUCE DEATHS IN CUSTODY

In October 2019 we requested that you write to the Victorian Government asking them to abolish the offence of public drunkenness following the death in police custody of Yorta Yorta woman Tanya Day in Castlemaine.

Abolishing the offence of public drunkenness was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, almost 30 years ago. Victoria and Queensland are the only two states that have not implemented the reform.

The Victorian Government has promised to implement this measure. They set up an Expert Reference Group to guide the government on how to implement the

measure while still dealing with people who become intoxicated in public places. In late November 2020, the Victorian Government released the report of the Expert Reference Group.

The Group found:

What the data tells us is that the criminalisation of public drunkenness discriminates against vulnerable people and in particular Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, Sudanese and South Sudanese communities, people experiencing homelessness, substance abuse and people experiencing mental health [issues].

The Group recommended the Government proceed with the measure, but put in place alternative support services to deal with people who are intoxicated and strategies to prevent people from becoming intoxicated. The Group recom-

mended a two-year implementation period to develop the new public health model. The implementation period would include establishing trial sites to inform how the model is rolled out across the state.

The Group recommended that the “safe places” for people who are intoxicated to be taken to would include medical staff and equipment, culturally appropriate processes, sobering services for long-term recovery and transport options that only involve the police when there is no other option available.

In their November 2020 budget, the Victorian Government committed \$16 million to fund the alternative system to placing people who are intoxicated into police cells.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to the Victorian Government in support of this reform. •



The JIM Cluster has been working with congregations in rural areas to support people from the Pacific Islands that come to work on farms in Australia on the Seasonal Worker Program.

The Program was requested by the Pacific Island Governments, enabling the Australian Government to provide people from the Pacific the chance to get ahead by making more money than working in the Pacific. The wages the workers earn on the Program help lift their families and communities out of poverty.

What follows is the perspective of an employer and one of our Uniting Church members who plays a significant role in supporting workers on the Program.

AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

Our farm worker supervisor is a Tongan man who came to Australia on the Seasonal Worker Program years ago. He is married to a local lady, and they have a beautiful little family. He is also a leader in the local Tongan community and has a role in their church. He selects all of our workers for us based on effort and fairness.

We have a lot of returning workers

– some have worked for us every year for six years. The most recent placements of workers were meant to go home in September, but could not do so as the Pacific Island Governments had closed their borders [due to the Corona virus]. We have kept them all in work, and they are all still here with us now.

In January 2020, Paul and I and our two teenagers went to Tonga as a goodwill visit to get to know where and how the families of our Tongan workers lived. They arranged a detailed program for us while we were there. There was a busload of workers and their families, they welcomed us into their homes and their church, and it was a wonderful experience for all of us. Drinking water is a problem for them at certain times of the year, so we purchased a water tank and cement while we were there for their village. It was a small gesture, but it meant a lot to them.

One lady who worked in our packing shed showed us with great pride - a brick home she built for her parents. They lived in a little shack with a tin roof beforehand.

I get upset about all the stories in the news that make us farmers out to be evil, uncaring, greedy people. Most of us do care and value our workers, and this incorrect percep-

tion needs to change.

Mary Berthelsen
Director
Boyne View Citrus

WORKER AND CHURCH MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

Peter is a 28yr old man from a small village on the island of Ambae in Vanuatu. In 2018, the troublesome island volcano erupted unexpectedly, wiping out homes and gardens across the island. Peter and his extended family were evacuated and given access to land on the large nearby island of Santo where they began to build a new home and establish their family gardens. But the going was difficult for them. In January 2019 Peter heard about the Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Program. The Program allowed workers from Pacific Island nations to get employment in Australia for up to nine months at a time, earning a good income harvesting farm crops. Although he had never been away from his village environment before, Peter jumped at the chance to go. After going through the lengthy processes of approval, Peter arrived on a Banana plantation in Queensland in January 2020. He was promised of a wage of \$20/hr and a minimum of 30 hours of work per week.

When I spoke to Peter in September of 2020, as part of a formal survey of Pacific Island workers in Australia, and using his own language of Bislama, he was eager to share his story. ‘How many out of 10 would you rate your experience of working in Australia?’ I asked him. ‘9!’, he replied with little hesitation. I documented the number on the survey form, thinking to myself, ‘That is a very high rating. He has had a very successful experience here’. I proceeded to ask him two further questions: ‘Why have you given a rating of 9?’, followed by ‘Is there anything about your experience which you have found difficult or have not enjoyed?’

The details of Peter’s experience were unfolded before me. The overwhelming factor for his high rating was contained in this affirmation: ‘I have sent back \$250 per week to support my family. In Vanuatu, with the effect of Covid, there is no employment so I wouldn’t be earning anything.’ I learned from further conversation that he has been supporting up to 15 members of his family - his own wife and child, parents, siblings, and children. I discovered they rebuilding home and gardens after their evacuation from the island of Ambae. Their possessions had also devastated a second time(!) when the Category 5 Cyclone Harold hit the island of Santo in April 2020. On top of that, Covid-19 had added its own further burdens. Although Vanuatu had recorded none of its own cases of Covid, the nation was severely impacted because of the decimation of the tourist industry. Peter’s two brothers, one in the construction business and one in transport, had lost their jobs as a result. Putting all this together, the contribution being made by Peter had become utterly crucial to the

family’s survival. The money he was earning paid for the materials to rebuild their home, money to put food on the table, and payment of fees to keep the children at school.

Little wonder then that Peter’s ability to send \$250 back to his family each week was so highly valued, and the source of his satisfaction rating of 9/10.

‘But why not 10/10? What have you found difficult or have not enjoyed?’, I then posed.

Another story unfolded, a story that told me two things: first, just

way to manage his money, the way his bosses communicate with the workers, the reasons why his work hours seem to change each week. He doesn’t know if he is being exploited or if he is being treated justly. He is reluctant to speak up about any of these things for fear of losing his contract or not being permitted to return to work for the next season.

Currently, there are around 5,000 seasonal workers who come from Vanuatu each year to work on farms across Australia, and approximately 20,000 altogether from the 13 Pacific Island nations who participate in the Australian Government Scheme. Not all of these workers share the same story as Peter. But Peter’s story is illustrative of the ambiguities of their situation – the huge benefits brought to their families and village communities,

but, alongside the benefits, the challenges and vulnerabilities they face.

In 2017, a group of Australian ‘friends of Vanuatu’ set up a ‘Seasonal Workers Support Group’ with a commitment to offering support and advocacy. Beginning with Vanuatu workers, the support group is now extending its reach to embrace other Pacific workers. One of its primary aims is to encourage church communities to link up with workers within their local areas to give these ‘strangers’ a sense of belonging to a family and being cared for. The support group works in close partnership with Mark Zirnsak in the Social Justice network of the JIM Cluster.

Rev Randall Prior

(Randall chairs the Seasonal Workers Support Group. For further information, he can be contacted on 0417363739 or email priority49@optushome.com.au). •

PETER HAS BEEN SUPPORTING UP TO 15 MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY

how challenging it is for someone like Peter to make the move from a village culture in the Pacific to Australia, and secondly, just how vulnerable is someone like Peter to exploitation. The challenge is that Peter comes from a culture which is communally supportive into a culture of individuality. From an agricultural subsistence culture into an economically-driven culture. From an oral-based culture where reading and writing are of secondary importance, into a literacy-based culture where everything seems to be communicated in complicated written documents. From a culture where English is the 4th language into a culture where no-one speaks anything but English. He feels alone in a large crowd.

The vulnerability is that Peter feels powerless; he doesn’t understand the complexities of his contract, the deductions that are made each week to his income, the best

GOVERNMENT COMMITS TO REDUCING REOFFENDING BY YOUNG PEOPLE

In November 2015, and again in February 2017, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government urging that they focus on rehabilitating young people who have broken the law, to reduce reoffending and make the community safer.

There was good news in the lead up to the Victorian Government No-

vember 2020 budget. The Victorian Government announced \$350,000 for a pilot program using restorative justice principles. The program will teach young people how to manage conflict and build interpersonal relationship skills while they are in youth detention. Restorative justice principles focus on creating positive, respectful relationships and encourage people to take responsibility for their actions. Restorative justice seeks for the offender to address any harm they have caused others. The pilot program will be run

by Jesuit Social Services.

In the budget, the Victorian Government also announced \$11.8 million in funding over four years to reduce the over-representation of First People children and young people in the youth justice system.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters asking the Victorian Government to focus on those measures that will make the community safer by rehabilitating people and allowing them to make a contribution to society. •

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT MOVES ON GIVING PEOPLE A SECOND CHANCE AFTER A CRIMINAL CONVICTION

In October 2019, we requested that you write to the Victorian Government asking that they introduce a law to allow past convictions to be concealed from an employer where they are not relevant to the employment.

As First People disproportionately come into contact with the criminal justice system, past criminal records have created further barriers for many First People seeking to participate fully in our communities. A past criminal record can make it hard for a person to get a job and get their life back on track. In Late October 2020, the Victorian Government introduced such a Bill to the Parliament.

The Bill will ensure that a range

of minor historical offences will no longer stop people getting a job, securing housing or fully contributing to society. The Spent Convictions Bill 2020 will mean that convictions for eligible minor offences will become “spent” and no longer show up in a police check after ten years, or five years where the person was a juvenile at the time of the offence. The removal of the offences from showing up in a police check is subject to the person not committing any additional criminal offence in that time.

Under the Bill, discrimination based on a spent conviction will be outlawed.

Police and courts will continue to have full access to criminal history information. Complete criminal conviction records will still be released when required by certain employers to make necessary risk assess-

ments, such as checks for working with children.

“A minor offence in the past should not be a life sentence – this scheme will break the cycle of disadvantage faced by too many Victorians as they seek to turn their lives around”, said Attorney-General Jill Hennessy. “People who have proved they are willing and able to change and make a positive contribution to society should be given every chance to do so.”

The Bill was developed in consultation with First Peoples organisations, law enforcement agencies, lawyers and victims of crime organisations.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in support of introducing a spent convictions law. •

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO MURDERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

In October 2020, we requested that you write letters to the Philippines and Australia governments in response to the on-going murder and harassment of church people, human rights defenders, and environmental activists in the Philippines.

The Australian Government has responded to the letters stating that it regularly raises concerns about human rights abuses with the Philippines Government. The Australian Government is spending \$5.1 million on human rights initiatives in the Philippines during 2018 – 2021. The funds are being used to increase access to human rights protection

services in the Philippines, monitor human rights violations, assist with anti-corruption cases and support the work of the UN Resident Coordinator's Senior Human Rights Advisor in the Philippines.

On 14 December 2020, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court issued a report on a number of investigations they were undertaking, including the allegations of mass murder in the Philippines. The Office investigated alleged crimes committed by Philippines law enforcement agencies as part of the so-called "war on drugs" between 1 July 2016 and 16 March 2019. The Philippines Government withdrew from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court on 17 March 2019. However, the Court is still able to investigate severe

human rights abuses up until that date.

The Office of the Prosecutor's assessment was that there is sufficient evidence available to believe that the crimes against humanity of murder, torture and infliction of serious physical injury were committed in the Philippines between 1 July 2016 and 16 March 2019 in connection with the "war on drugs". They will make a decision to further continue the investigation in the first half of 2021.

The JIM Cluster will continue to provide resources for you to take action to seek an end to the murders of church people, environmental activists and human rights defenders in the Philippines.

Thank you for everyone who wrote letters on this issue. •

FURTHER PROGRESS ON GLOBAL TAX JUSTICE

For nearly a decade, we have invited you to be part of the global efforts to see governments take effective actions to end tax evasion and tax avoidance by multinational corporations.

Such activities significantly impact governments' ability in developing countries to provide things like hospitals and schools for their people.

In good news, the global initiative by the OECD and the UN Development Program, Tax Inspectors Without Borders, reported they had assisted developing countries in recovering \$691 million in taxes they were owed by multinational corporations. The developing countries have also been able to raise notices for an additional \$2.4 billion in taxes that should have been paid and are owed.

On average, for every dollar that has been provided to run Tax Inspectors Without Borders, developing countries have recovered \$70 in tax revenue.

Thank you to everyone that has supported the campaign for global tax justice. •



Photo: Shutterstock

FROM INDIFFERENCE TO ENTHUSIASM: SCHOOLS AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

THE EQUIPPING LEADERSHIP FOR MISSION PART OF THE SYNOD HAS WORKED WITH UNITING CHURCH SCHOOLS IN VICTORIA TO ENGAGE STUDENTS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES. THE FOLLOWING PIECE IS BY STUDENT SANDRA SUJITH.

The younger generation is the future of our world. Our values today will shape tomorrow. But a lot of young people simply don't care about the environment. They are apathetic. The only way to oppose this apathy is by explicitly making environmentalism a big part of school culture.

In young people, apathy is dangerous. Apathetic youth become apathetic adults. Such voters do not prioritise the environment. Indifferent voters create an indifferent government, which will certainly not be helpful in the fight for the environment. We cannot allow disinterest to infect the minds of our future generations.

So, how do we help young people value the environment? Through schools. As young people grow, they absorb the values of those around them. School culture directly influences youth because young people adopt and adapt to the culture that they see around them. If we want our youth to care for the environment, environmentalism must be an unmistakably clear part of school culture.

Engaging activities are key. Through practical activities, students form important connections to the

environment. Emotional connections are what generates passion and understanding (data and statistics, although very useful, are not enough to ignite a passion within people). Hands-on activities and initiatives are essential.

I once went to a school which did not have engaging environment initiatives. Apart from mentioning climate change off-hand once or twice in biannual assemblies, they did not have any programs in place to engage students. Sure, the school did donate and run big awareness events, but they were not engaging activities, so students didn't form a connection. Most people did not prioritise the environment beyond occasionally discussing it. They were simply indifferent to what was going on.

Another school I went to make environmentalism a huge part of their school identity. They had multiple student-run initiatives, such as Nude Food Wednesday, a compost bin and garden, a cross-curriculum environment focus, an annual tree-planting day, and eco-poetry competitions. Although tree-planting and poetry alone cannot stop climate change, these activities are very important because they engaged students. They showed students that the environment mattered. These activities told young people, "Hey, we care about the environment. This

is a part of who we are." Students at this school understood climate change. They were enthusiastic and genuinely cared about the environment.

I first began loving the environment when I was at the latter school. I began insisting that we stop buying individually packaged yogurt because I really wanted to win the Nude Food Challenge. Later, I started venturing into our garden, eager to try and grow something. I fondly remember my pink miniature gardening shovel which had been my tool of choice. I was never any good at sustaining a plant, but my enthusiasm could not have been curbed.

When I moved to the indifferent school, in the first few days, I picked up rubbish. Then I did not. I felt apathy grow within me, because if my school did not care, then why should I?

We, as students, staff, parents and community members, must engage our youth. Environmental activities in school are of the utmost importance. That cannot be stressed enough. We must make environmentalism a big part of our school culture. That is the only way to generate passion and understanding within our leaders of tomorrow. •