



Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Justice & International Mission Cluster

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

A Paradigm of the work of Social Justice within the Synod

In any conversation about the Uniting Church in Australia, the word Justice is likely to feature strongly. 'Justice' is in our Vision and Mission Statements, and in the DNA of a church birthed at a time when the mission conversation of the WCC was sharpening its understanding of the place of the church in the world in areas of Just participation and challenge.

The UCA draws its biblical mandate from the consistent messages of the prophets of the First Testament, and Jesus' words and actions of love and hope for the world which God seeks to transform. Micah 6:6-8 ("What does the Lord require of you") and the bookends of Matthew 5:1-11 (The Beatitudes) and 25:31-46 ("The Judgement of the Nations") set consistent messages of God's expectations of God's people: To be a community of love and reconciliation who are "facing" the poor, attending to power, and acting for the disadvantaged.

This exemplifies the Justice work of the UCA. Within UCA structures, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has a long and vital legacy of Justice ministry through the Justice and International Mission (JIM) cluster of eLM (previously the JIM Unit). Over 20 years the Synod and JIM have developed relationships, refined postures, created room for advocacy, and made significant change possible in the lives of many people through advocacy, research, parliamentary submissions, relationships and collaboration with like-minded organisations.

JIM works with others to create social change and improve people's lives in Australia and overseas through faith-based social justice campaigns and programs.

To create a just society, we need to challenge corporate greed and the policies that justify the pursuit of wealth at the expense of the wellbeing of God's people and creation. Our faith calls us to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. This means ensuring the laws which govern our society are also just and compassionate.

For over the 20 years the UCA in VicTas has found JIM is best supported when it is able to work closely with, and is guided by, those within the church with regard to focus and intent. JIM has worked in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and with other Synods and Presbyteries, congregations and supporter groups, and has developed a support base of active volunteers.

JIM has developed active partnerships with Uniting VicTas, U Ethical, the Assembly resource team, Uniting World, other Synods, politicians across the political spectrum, not-for-profit sector groups, other denominations, unions, congregations presbyteries, businesses and international partnerships with churches in the Philippines and the Pacific (in coordination with the UCA nationally).

JIM draws its priorities and work direction from a number of sources:

- A biblical vision for reconciliation and justice,
- The Synod Vision and Mission principles,
- Specific work requested at the meeting of Synod, or where Assembly has given / indicated support,
- JIM supporters requesting resourcing on their own social justice actions.

JIM also takes into account factors such as:

- Where we are likely to have the highest impact in making change in people's lives and the well-being of the planet;
- Where we have the greatest likelihood of success;
- What other sector groups, Synods or the Assembly are working on.





VISION AND MISSION FOUNDATIONS

Following Christ, walking together as First and Second Peoples, seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation.

God in Christ is at mission in the world and sends the Church in the Spirit to :

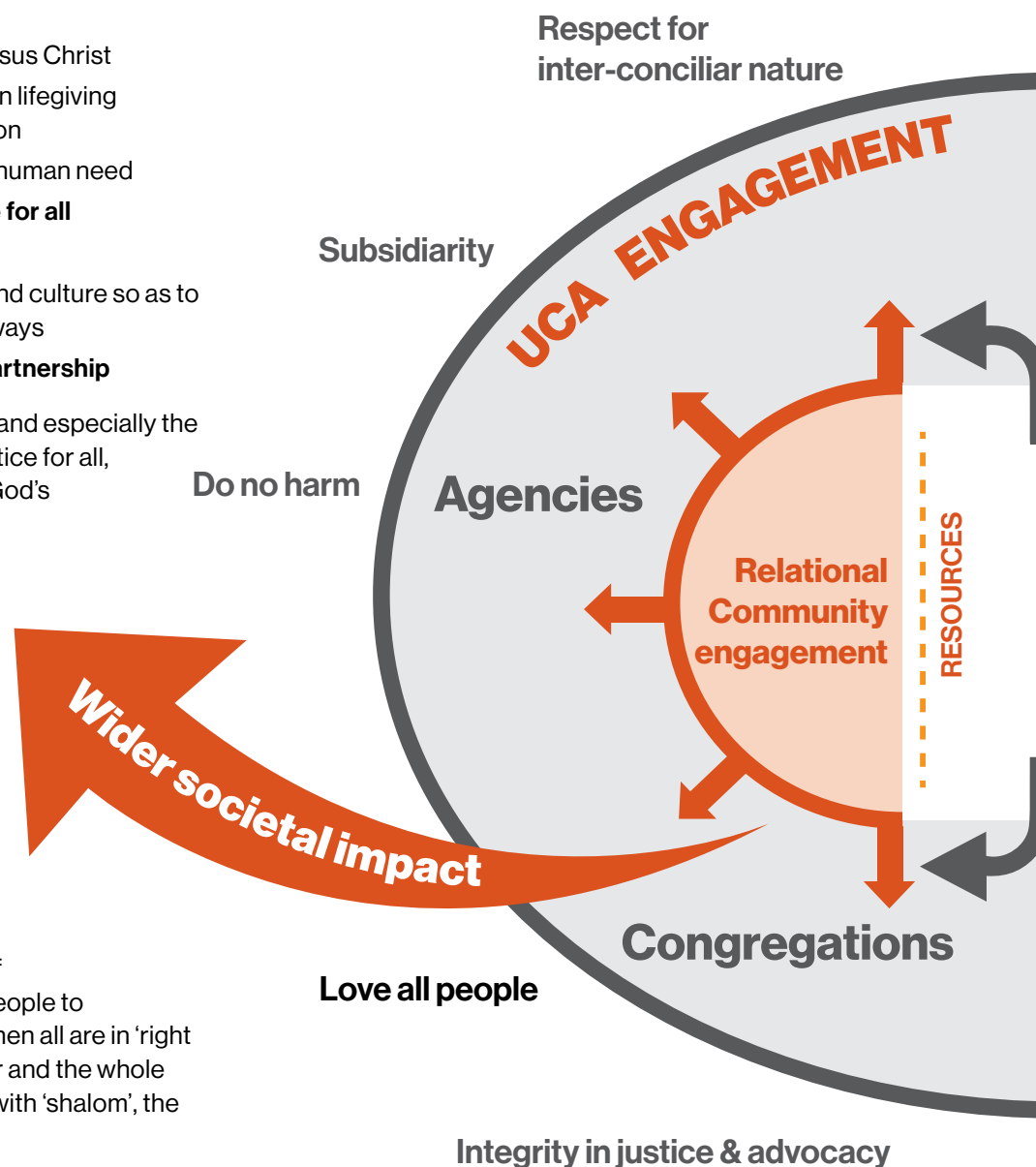
- Share the Good News of Jesus Christ
- Nurture followers of Christ in lifegiving communities of reconciliation
- Respond in compassion to human need
- **Live justly and seek justice for all**
- **Care for creation**
- Listen to each generation and culture so as to live out the gospel in fresh ways
- **Pursue God's mission in partnership**

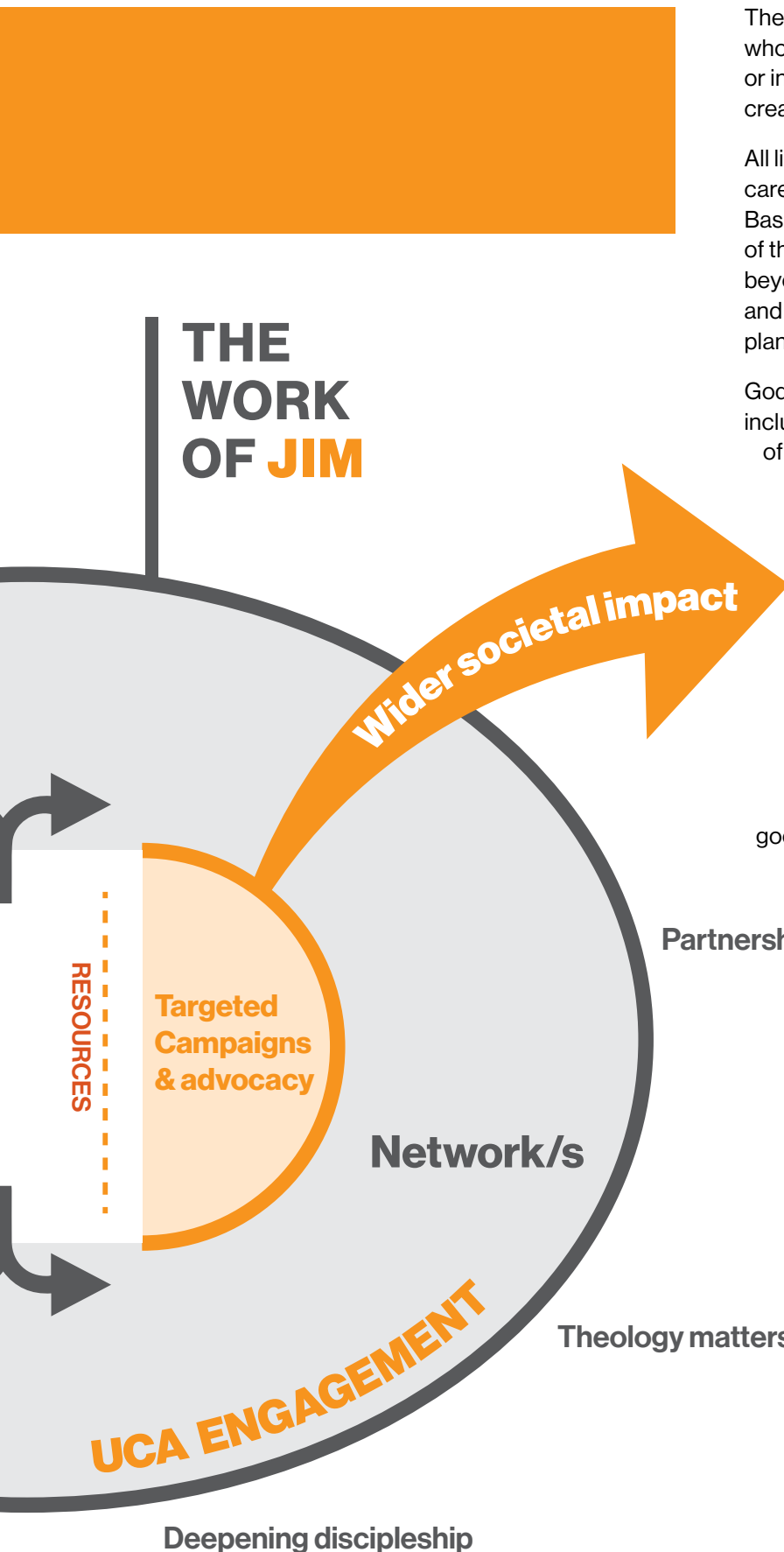
JIM seeks to live into all of these, and especially the challenges to Live justly, seek justice for all, Care for creation and to Pursue God's mission in partnership.

Expanding the understanding

At the heart of the First Testament and the teaching of Jesus (for example, Matthew 12:18-21, Luke 18:1-8, John 5:27 and 2 Corinthians 5:10) is the idea of justice. The concept is more than 'righting wrongs'; it is a statement about the nature of the community that God wants people to long for and work towards. It is when all are in 'right relationship' with God, each other and the whole creation. It is closely associated with 'shalom', the peace of God.

Justice takes its place in the Synod Vision Statement empowered and seen through the lens of the terms before and after it; seeking; community; compassion; all creation; First and Second peoples.





The community of compassion and justice is for the whole of creation, not just for one part of humanity, or indeed, just for humanity, but for the whole created order.

All life, all environments are included. We, therefore, care for those beyond our shores (for example, the Basis of Union paragraph 2) and for the environment of this planet. This is a commitment to a connection beyond our local community, beyond our shores and a statement to the world that the state of the planet matters.

God's care is for the whole of creation, which includes human beings. In following the witness of the First Peoples, we recognise that love for people must not be isolated from love for the rest of God's creation that sustains all life.

The Uniting Church, in the name of the God of reconciliation, seeks to be reconciled with the rest of Christ's Church and will work side by side in God's mission. Furthermore, there are many in the world who work for justice, compassion and care for the creation who do not own or proclaim the name of Christ. It is proper that Christ's Church works in partnership with all people of goodwill to fulfil God's purposes.

JIM's expression of the Synod's Vision & Mission

JIM works with others to create social change and improve people's lives in Australia and overseas through faith-based social justice campaigns and programs. JIM also seeks through engagement and capacity-building to encourage and deepen a Christ centred capacity to embrace justice-seeking as core to discipleship.

JIM engages young people, CALD leaders and communities in growing life-long discipleship with an understanding of hope and Justice, while also seeking to learn about new ways of acting justly.

JIM focuses on issues and outcomes that have the greatest benefit for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people facing the greatest situations of harm. In addition, outcomes will be pursued to have an impact on addressing unsustainable destruction of our natural environment.

PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MISSION

Specific principles underpin the work of JIM and influence its activity and presence within the Church.

Respect for the inter-conciliar nature of the Uniting Church.

JIM has worked from the position of respecting the resolutions of the Synod meetings, Synod Standing Committee, National Assembly meetings and National Assembly Standing Committee. The implication of this means that where members of the church or a congregation wish JIM to assist them in an activity or cause that would run counter to the resolutions of the Councils of the church, JIM declines to do so and informs the members or congregation of the existing position.

Theology matters.

The church needs to apply its theological understanding to the world around it, and its theology has a valuable contribution to make in the world. The positions that JIM advises the Synod to adopt need to be informed by theological considerations. The implications of this principle mean that the Synod does not accept the positions of other organisations as its own without consideration as to whether those positions are in keeping with the broad theology of the Uniting Church. It also means at times the Synod will decide to be out of step with organisations with which it would otherwise normally align.

Do no harm.

John and Charles Wesley have been ascribed as setting out three principles for the Christian life, *'Do no harm, do good and attending upon all the ordinances of God.'*¹ Flowing from this Mary Anderson published *'Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—or War'* in 1999. This principle has been adopted by World Vision International as a guiding principle.²

JIM also embeds it within its work. The implication is that JIM seeks to ensure that the solutions to social justice problems it seeks do not create harm. Where it is not possible to avoid the risk of harm to some people as a result of solutions advocated for, it means identifying the risks of harms and trying to minimise those risks.

The risk assessment requires that time is allocated to fully understanding a situation and having conversations with all relevant stakeholders. It means recognising and identifying groups that may be impacted, but currently have no voice on the situation that will impact on them. Criteria for assessing the risk factors for this principle to be breached is found in Appendix One.



The time and effort church members provide to the social justice mission of the Synod should be valued and respected.

The implication of this principle is that actions church members are invited to participate in are likely to be meaningful in achieving the outcome the participating church members are seeking. It means providing feedback to members about the impact their actions have had towards achieving a solution. It means informing church members of which actions are likely to be more effective to achieve the outcome they seek. Church members are still free to choose the actions with which they wish to be involved. The implication of this principle means developing a deeper understanding of a situation and what is likely to be more influential with a decision-maker.

Love of all people – neighbours and ‘enemies’.

The implication of this principle is that JIM seeks the well-being of all people. It aims to understand all people on their own terms, even if it ends up disagreeing with them.

JIM avoids vilifying and misrepresenting those it disagrees with. It avoids tactics, where possible, that are about power over other people. It seeks to obtain the best possible just outcome rather than ‘winning’ through imposing our will on others. It is open to reconsider a solution being pursued based on new information.

Subsidiarity.

JIM seeks to focus on where it can add value to the body of the Synod from a Synod sphere. It aims to avoid undertaking work that would be better conducted by congregations or presbyteries in their local context.

This has also meant JIM has sought to avoid engaging in community service work. This is on the basis that Uniting Victoria and Tasmania and Uniting AgeWell have significant staffing and budgets to conduct this work on behalf of the Church. While a significant part of this funding is provided by governments, these activities to “respond in compassion to human need” are significantly larger than any other activity undertaken by the Synod.

Human suffering and environmental destruction should not be used as tools for the pursuit of other organisational goals.

JIM maintains integrity in its justice and advocacy work, which has a primary focus on creating a more just society and world.

The suffering of people, human rights abuses and environmental destruction are not be used primarily as vehicles to further other goals, such as recruiting people into the Synod and its gathered communities or raising funds for the Synod. This might still happen in an effective campaign, but it is not to be the primary goal if the Synod is to remain faithful to the Gospel.

Integrity and Justice.

The implication of this principle means that JIM will not work on justice issues that conflict with the operations of other parts of the Synod or the wider Uniting Church without their agreement to do so.

Deepening Discipleship.

In all its work JIM seeks to deepen the engagement of individuals and communities to reflect on their faith and strengthen their discipleship. This may come in many forms from participation in Justice networks, or in local studies resourced from JIM to deepen involvement in a local justice issue engaged in by a local congregation.

Partnerships.

JIM will always seek partnerships to strengthen engagement, and the maintenance of healthy relationships where appropriate and beneficial. Relationships are key in working collaboratively and cooperatively in many areas of justice seeking and campaigns – whether it be relationships with presbyteries, congregations or with external agencies seeking a common good.

Respect for Expertise and Scientific Knowledge.

Consistent with Paragraph 11 of the Basis of Union, JIM respects and draws on scientific knowledge and expertise to inform its work and its goals. Included in the approach, JIM draws on the latest research from behavioural sciences to inform the way it engages with people and sets its goals.

1 www.wesleybros.com/wesbros/three-general-rules-infograph

2 www.wvi.org/peacebuilding-and-conflict-sensitivity/do-no-harm

CORE STRATEGIES

1 Engagement

The importance of engaging people in the work of justice is twofold:

- To achieve social justice campaign outcomes that the Synod collective body has decided are important to achieve.
- To deepen people's faith understanding of, and commitment to, social justice in their day-to-day discipleship and within their communities where their faith is expressed

The engagement strategy is informed by the principle of subsidiarity and the inter-conciliar structure of the Uniting Church. JIM staff add value to the work of the Synod by doing things appropriate to the Synod sphere and avoid undertaking activities that could be done by congregations or presbyteries themselves.

Where possible engagement work will be carried out in partnership with others.

Engagement to achieve social justice campaign outcomes that the Synod collective body has decided are important to achieve.

JIM works from the position that the Social Justice outcomes of the Synod find the best possible outcomes through relational engagement with Church members, inter-conciliar collaboration with staff in other Synods or Assembly, and collaborations with like-minded organisations, agencies or individuals. One assumption with this outcome is that the more people advocating for an outcome, if well targeted, the greater the likelihood the outcome will be achieved. Another assumption is that participating in ongoing relationships will produce a better society and mitigate division and siloing in communities. In this way relationships can be transformative and exemplary, and not simply instrumentalised or transactional.

- The areas of work for JIM have been informed by what Church members are passionate about, prepared to act on, or where church members have lived experience on a topic.

When engaging in these specific areas, Church members will be motivated to act, write or actively advocate in some way. This is a different strategy from JIM staff making a decision about issues, and expecting that congregational members will engage with these issues.

- Many of the outcomes sought by JIM are best effected by nation-wide action on the part of the UCA. JIM intentionally seeks out perspective, input and collaboration with staff from Uniting World, Assembly, other Synod justice teams, Uniting Vic.Tas, as well as our own Synod Ministries and Operations staff (e.g. Culture of Safety, Legal, U Ethical, etc).
- Collaboration with like-minded organisations, agencies or individuals is essential in achieving best outcomes. Politicians, political staff, unions, businesses and advocacy organisations all provide open doors for increased advocacy, skills in writing or presenting material, accessible relationships, or a wider pool of passionate supporters.

Engagement to deepen people's faith understanding of and commitment to social justice in their day-to day discipleship and communities

JIM has worked from a position that its role in helping members grow in their discipleship is through deepening people's understanding of the Christian faith and social justice and revealing the intrinsic integration of faith and social justice action.

Although many of the UCA core documents on discipleship do not explicitly mention justice, there is no expectation that justice is excluded.

The expectation in these documents is that Christian Faith is lived out through service, and that this action of service is for the transformation of the communities and world in which we live. (*"In entering into this union the Churches concerned are mindful that the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died, and that it awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ ..."* (Basis Of Union 1))





There is also encouragement for congregations and faith communities to more fully live into their Christian identity as communities of justice – where the work of justice is displayed beyond an individual's discipleship – and as a calling on the community as a whole.

Existing activities undertaken by JIM to contribute to the discipleship of congregational members and faith communities has been:

- Material embedded in the JustAct mailing packs distributed during the year;
- Consultation and position papers on specific issues and theological responses to them;
- Sessions within the annual JIM Convention;
- Resourcing members of Synod at meetings with a view to deepen discernment on social justice decisions;

- Intentional engagement with Pilgrim Theological College on the issue to identify areas for improved synergy; and
- Direct involvement in congregation worship services and presbytery events.

Discipleship at the congregational level is best pursued by intensive engagement from the congregation leadership. People are most influenced in their faith journey through the close relationships they have with those in their immediate faith community. JIM can assist congregation leadership with specific resources on matters that have broad interest or specific requests, although there is a limit to the number of specific requests that can be resourced. JIM can play an important role in making apparent the intrinsic nature of certain social justice issues and the Christian faith where such a connection may not



be obvious to congregation members. Such issues may include environmental destruction, family violence, privatisation, support for people who are unemployed and the role of government in a just society. For many of these areas extensive written theological and discipleship resources already exist. Within limited resources JIM seeks to fill existing gaps as well as more effective promotion of the resources that already exist.

Beyond resourcing specific issues, discipleship engagement intentionally develops leadership capacity for justice from a Christian perspective. JIM resources leadership development through promotion of the justice principles outlined in this paper, which describe how Christian faith might be lived out in a justice context. Modelling Christian faith in daily engagements with congregation members and leaders further enhances the building of leadership in areas of justice.

2 Advocacy and Campaigning

Advocacy and campaigning involves the councils of the Uniting Church or the social justice active members identifying issues of injustice that they wish to be involved in correcting and measures to improve the common good for people and the planet. When an injustice is identified, work is then undertaken to identify the vision of a just solution to the injustice. Where church members have lived experience or expertise in an issue they will guide the identification of the just solution. Where this is not the case, identifying the just solution will be facilitated by JIM staff and their partners.

Identification of the just solution requires being in relationships with all relevant stakeholders and people impacted. It requires a serious engagement and evaluation of all relevant experiences, information and perspectives. The proposed solution needs to be considered in relation to the theological perspectives of the Uniting Church. It involves a risk assessment that a particular solution may create unintended harm.

Having identified a just outcome to the issue of injustice, the decision maker or decision makers are then approached for dialogue. If the decision maker agrees to work towards the outcome the work becomes supporting them in the implementation. If the decision maker refuses to support the outcome, the outcome is re-evaluated against the reasons for the decision makers' opposition. The outcome may be modified or the original intention may be pursued.

A plan is then established based on what is likely to persuade the decision maker to agree to implement the just solution. Contextual consideration is also given to what is most likely to ensure the solution will have durability. The plan is very different if a decision maker would like to implement the solution but needs a show of support from the community to do so compared to if the decision maker is ideologically committed to inflicting harm and suffering on people.

The campaign activities seek to maximise the participation of Uniting Church members while aiming to have maximum effectiveness in persuading the decision maker or decision makers to implement the solution.

Actions that can be undertaken include:

- Petitions;
- Postcard campaigns;
- E-mail campaigns;
- Letter-writing campaigns;
- Lobbying visits with or without church ministers and members;
- Public art displays;
- Building relationships with those able to have greater influence on the decision maker;
- Media coverage; and/or
- Research reports.





OPERATING PARAMETERS

The Synod Strategic Framework included three strategic priorities:

- 1) ministries which foster diverse gathered communities of renewal, Christian practice and mission;
- 2) culturally diverse mission and ministry; and
- 3) mission and ministry with children, youth, their families and young adults

and four areas of focus:

- 1) The identity of Jesus Christ and Christianity in a post-Christendom world;
- 2) Multi-cultural and multi-faith Australia and its relationship to its First People;
- 3) Peace-making, power and powerlessness, being with and for the poor; and

- 4) Inter-faith and intercultural engagement, encounter and learning.

Additional parameters for JIM include:

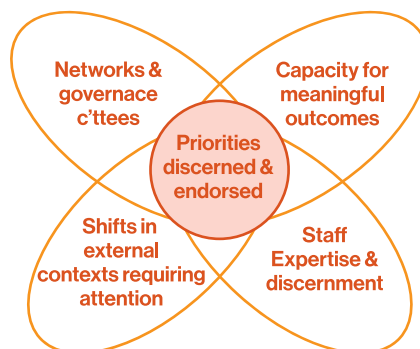
1. Increase engagement with all church members, growing congregations' and their members' awareness of the work that JIM undertakes on their behalf.
2. Through communications and presbytery engagement strategy increase ownership of JIM's work across the congregations of the Synod
3. Ensure explicit theological content in JIM's communications.
4. Intentionally engage in partnerships



PRIORITY SETTING

As in many places within the Synod and Church there is an organic approach to focussing work and ministry. The wider Church and the governance bodies may well seek to influence or direct the work of JIM, as well as the assumption (well placed) that the expertise and skill set of the staff will identify and influence the priorities and work areas undertaken. The setting of priorities for any specific time or season is a dynamic tension between these important influences.

The capacity of a particular action or engagement to create meaningful action and change is also considered within the setting of priorities.



The wider context within society will also influence and demand attention from time to time – and may impact on the directions suggested by the wider Church and/or the perspective of the JIM staff.

The key priorities in any one season will be reported to the Ministry and Mission Committee, along with any significant shifts in these priorities. With any set of priorities (including campaigns and reach into congregational/ presbytery engagement) JIM will need to assess the capacity of JIM staff to deliver on these priorities. Of course this is factored in to any advice or influence to the priority setting spheres (as identified above).

FINANCIAL UNDERPINNINGS

Funding for the work of JIM comes from the following sources:

- **Mission and Service budget:** This funds the operating costs of the JIM staff and operations (salary / stipend and associated costs, training and development of staff, travel, hospitality, ongoing costs of printing and postage, equipment, library costs, internet and website costs, phones).
- **Reserve Funds:** Funds raised or donated for particular purposes. This includes money nominated specifically for the International part of our work, as well as for specific and general projects.
- **Donations and Gifts:** Funds given on an ad-hoc basis for the work of the cluster. This is normally applied to the reserve funds, and tagged for particular work if required.
- **Fundraising:** Funds specifically raised for particular campaigns or purposes.
- **Payment:** Funds given or paid to the organisation for work conducted by JIM staff.
- **External Funding:** Funds given or gathered from external parties for particular projects, campaigns or outcomes: These funds can be provided through a coalition (where we are the collection point) or where we have applied for government or grant funding for a project.
- **In-Kind:** Time given by volunteers for research, packing the bi-monthly mailing, etc.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this document is to invite partners, governance committees and supporters into a fuller understanding of the background to the work of JIM. It outlines the framework for guiding the work, highlights the tensions and hints at the challenges that are always before this work of Justice and International Mission. The document is to serve as a conversation starter as well as a foundational framework for the UCA's ongoing commitment to justice.

The JIM Cluster staff invites your feedback, comments and suggestions on the matters outlined in this document, and on our wider work. We also invite you to join us in our work of seeking justice and reconciliation for the whole of creation.

APPENDIX ONE

Justice and International Mission Public Policy Risk Assessment Matrix

The Justice and International Mission Cluster seeks to uphold the 'do no harm' principle in its work, trying to avoid unintended harms and minimising the risk that the public policies it pursues will result in harm. Thus, the Justice and International Mission Cluster assesses the risks that outcomes it is pursuing in public policy matters may cause unintended harm.

The process for assessing the risk is as follows:

- Examine all relevant publicly available material produced by impacted stakeholders to the policy outcomes to identify risks they state may happen;
- Meet with relevant stakeholders to discuss possible risks of harm from the policy outcomes;
- Examine the experience of any similar jurisdiction that has implemented the measure for unintended harms that may have resulted in reality;
- Consider any similar experiences for possible risks of harm. For example, has the same government law enforcement agency used similar powers in the past and were they misused for harmful purposes;
- Where the public policy has no similar experience to compare it to the JIM Cluster makes its own judgment call on the risks of harm.

The following risk matrix is then applied to the process:

The harmful risk from the policy.
The level of harm as a result of the risk.
Likelihood that the harm will occur.
The acceptability of the cumulative risks based on consideration of the likely benefits of the public policy compared to the level of harm and the risk of the harm occurring.

Risks that are considered are:

- Harm to people, including:
 - Loss of life;
 - Injury;
 - Mental harms;
 - Societal harms, such as loss of trust and empathy;
 - Economic harms, such as loss of employment or loss of social security support;
 - Developmental harms, especially for children; and
 - Spiritual and moral harms, the erosion of individual or societal spiritual well-being and a sense of right and wrong making further harms and corruption more likely.
- Unsustainable harm to the natural environment including to flora and fauna and the climate.

Where the assessed risk of harm is at an unacceptable level compared to the benefits that are likely to flow from the public policy change, the JIM Cluster does not pursue achieving the public policy outcome and may even oppose its adoption.

Financial, material and reputation risks to the Synod's operations are not considered as part of the above risk assessment process. Where public policy will impact on the Synod's operations, the JIM Cluster will consult with the parts of the Synod impacted. The JIM Cluster will normally advocate that the Synod should seek to adapt its operations in line with good public policy and best practice to serve its commitment as a biblical witness, rather than place its own operational convenience ahead of improving society and the planet.



JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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