



Justice and International Mission Cluster: Draft Proposals to the 2025 Synod Meeting

October 2024

Below are the proposals which the Justice and International Mission Cluster plans to take to the 2025 Synod meeting, to be held in August. Proposals seek the endorsement of the Synod to ensure the work is in line with the discerned direction of this Council of the church. Synod proposals:

- cannot repeat something that a past Synod or National Assembly meeting has already resolved, as resolutions of the Synod remain in force until they are rescinded by a future Synod meeting; and
- cannot ask the Justice and International Mission Cluster to do something it is already able to do on its own and is within its mandate to do.

At their best the Synod resolutions should set the broad position of the Synod, as guided by the Spirit. In doing so they enable the Synod to be active in the world and empower bodies like the Justice and International Mission Cluster to undertake its work on behalf of Synod as a body, and not just in the name of the Cluster. Resolutions of the Synod shape the work of the Cluster with the broader Uniting Church membership and help to set the direction of the Cluster.

Each proposal will come with an associated rationale, and will be accompanied by a verbal introduction at the Synod meeting. For the sake of space we have not included the rationales here.

We welcome your feedback on the proposals. Your comments, questions and suggestions will assist us in presenting these to the Synod meeting, and assist us in effectively enacting the resolution.

Comments or suggestions on the proposals below can be provided to:

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

Phone: 0409 166 915

E-mail: mark.zirnsak@victas.uca.org.au

Feedback and comments are welcome by **Monday 23 December 2024**.

The Proposals:

Democratic Reform

The Synod resolve:

(a) To express its concern that in Australian democracy a person's wealth allows them to have a more significant say in laws and government policies, often to the detriment of the common good and undermining trust in democracy and government by people on lower incomes.

(b) To request the Australian Government to instigate reforms that will curb the influence of wealth in the democratic system, including:

- (i) Restricting private political donations and the amount candidates and political parties can spend on elections so that public funding of elections is the primary way elections are funded;

- (ii) Implementing a system where all Australian citizens can make a small government-funded donation to the political party or candidate of their choice before an election;
 - (iii) Requiring the amount of all private political donations to be disclosed on tax returns, and aggregated data on political donations by income level be deidentified and made public; and,
 - (iv) Requiring that the public service recognise the value of lived experience by using meaningful codesign with people directly impacted by policy as the default mechanism for designing services and programs that people need.
- (c) Ask the Australian Government to regulate the influence of political lobbying by:
- (i) Legislating the creation of a Lobbying Register that covers in-house professional lobbyists as well as third-party lobbyists;
 - (ii) Requiring all professional lobbyists to disclose to the Lobbying Register who they've met with, when, why, on whose behalf, and the topics that were discussed;
 - (ii) Requiring Ministers to publish their diaries covering official duties on a regular basis; and
 - (iv) Prohibiting Ministers and senior public servants from being employed in direct lobbying activities related to their previous portfolios for at least three years after leaving office.
- (d) To write to the Prime Minister, Special Minister of State, Attorney General, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Special Minister of State, Shadow Attorney General and the Leader of the Greens to inform them of the resolution.

Peace-Building

Recalling that the 1982 National Assembly meeting (Resolution 82.56):

- affirmed that the Uniting Church is committed to be a peacemaking body, seeking to follow the Lord of the Church by encouraging political authorities to resolve political tensions by peaceful means; and,
- called on the members of the Uniting Church in Australia to support and engage in peacemaking programs and resist reliance on military solutions to political problems.

Further, recalling the 2003 National Assembly meeting stated true justice can only be achieved through means that do not consist of violence nor perpetuate the cycle of violence (Resolution 03.19.02)

That the Synod resolve:

- (a) To commit to supporting organisations and grassroots initiatives that seek to prevent armed conflict by addressing injustices, and that seek to bring just and lasting peace to situations of armed conflict through means that reject lethal tactics.
- (b) Encourage congregations, faith communities, and individual members to support such organisations and initiatives through their prayers, financial support, and advocacy.
- (c) To use its social justice efforts to support reforms that address injustice in Australia and globally that make armed conflict less likely.

Rationale

The draft proposal builds on the existing theology of the Uniting Church to commit the Synod to support those organisations, movements and grassroots initiatives that seek to address the causes of armed conflict, and build just and lasting peace.

Movements, organisations, and grassroots initiatives that are committed to addressing injustices around the world without the use of armed conflict usually struggle for financial resources and seek international allies to support their efforts.

Artificial Intelligence and Online Safety

That the Synod resolve:

Recalling Synod resolution 21.2.25.1 that stated “The gospel calls us to relate to each other with love, treating each other with dignity and respect, and to condemn exploitation and abuse of vulnerable people. God’s people are called to pursue justice including by empowering those who are exploited and abused.” Further, “In our age, there is a need to prevent and address human rights abuses online, including acting against the promotion and facilitation of child sexual abuse.”

- (a) To call on the Commonwealth Government to:
 - (i) require artificial technology (AI) products to be ‘safe by design’;
 - (ii) require generative AI developers to have nominated individuals or teams accountable for ensuring the safety of their model;
 - (iii) require generative AI developers to take all reasonable steps to ensure the products they are developing have safeguards against misuse and cannot be easily used to generate child sexual abuse material and non-consensual intimate images. Such safeguards should include not training generative AI on databases that include child sexual abuse material and not allowing users to enter requests that would result in the generation of child sexual abuse material;
 - (iv) to give the eSafety Commissioner the power to require that a generative AI model be taken down until such time as it can be made safe from generating child sexual abuse material and non-consensual intimate images;
 - (v) prohibit generative AI apps that have the purpose of creating a naked image from an image of a real person;
 - (vi) prohibit platforms from hosting clothing-removing apps for download or use;
 - (vii) prohibit the provision of advice, tools or manuals that explicitly advise on how to use AI tools to produce child sexual abuse material;
 - (viii) prohibit search engines to return results to users for generative AI services to produce child sexual abuse material; and
 - (ix) prohibit the creation generative AI chatbots that allow for sexual communication with a simulated child.
- (b) To write to the Prime Minister, Minister for Communications, Attorney General, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Attorney General, Shadow Minister for Communications and Leader of the Greens to inform them of this resolution.

Healthy Food

That the Synod resolve:

- (a) Recalling in the 1977 Inaugural Assembly Statement to the Nation the Uniting Church in Australia committed itself to challenge “acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of the needs of others”. Noting many large food corporations and retailers are placing their profits before the health and well-being of people who consume their products, call on the Commonwealth Government to:
 - (i) Implement measures that make informed healthy food choices easier for people to make;
 - (ii) Heavily restrict the marketing of unhealthy foods, especially to children;
 - (iii) Impose a health levy on the manufacturing of sugary drinks;
 - (iv) Implement mandatory added sugar labelling across the packaged food supply;
 - (v) Implement labelling on products that are ultra-processed foods to warn of the likely negative health impacts of such products;
 - (vi) Regulate to ensure commercial foods for infants and young children provide good nutrition and are promoted in accordance with best practice as outlined by the World Health Organisation;
 - (vii) Ensure that the food regulation system assesses all food additives for their long-term health risks and not just short-term risks before they can be added to food;

- (viii) Legislate to implement in Australia the World Health Organisation *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions; and,
 - (ix) Implement a comprehensive conflict of interest and stakeholder engagement policy to ensure that all food policy is developed without inappropriate influence from food and related businesses.
- (b) Write to the Prime Minister, Minister for Health, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Health, Leader of the Greens and Greens Spokesperson for Health to inform them of this resolution.