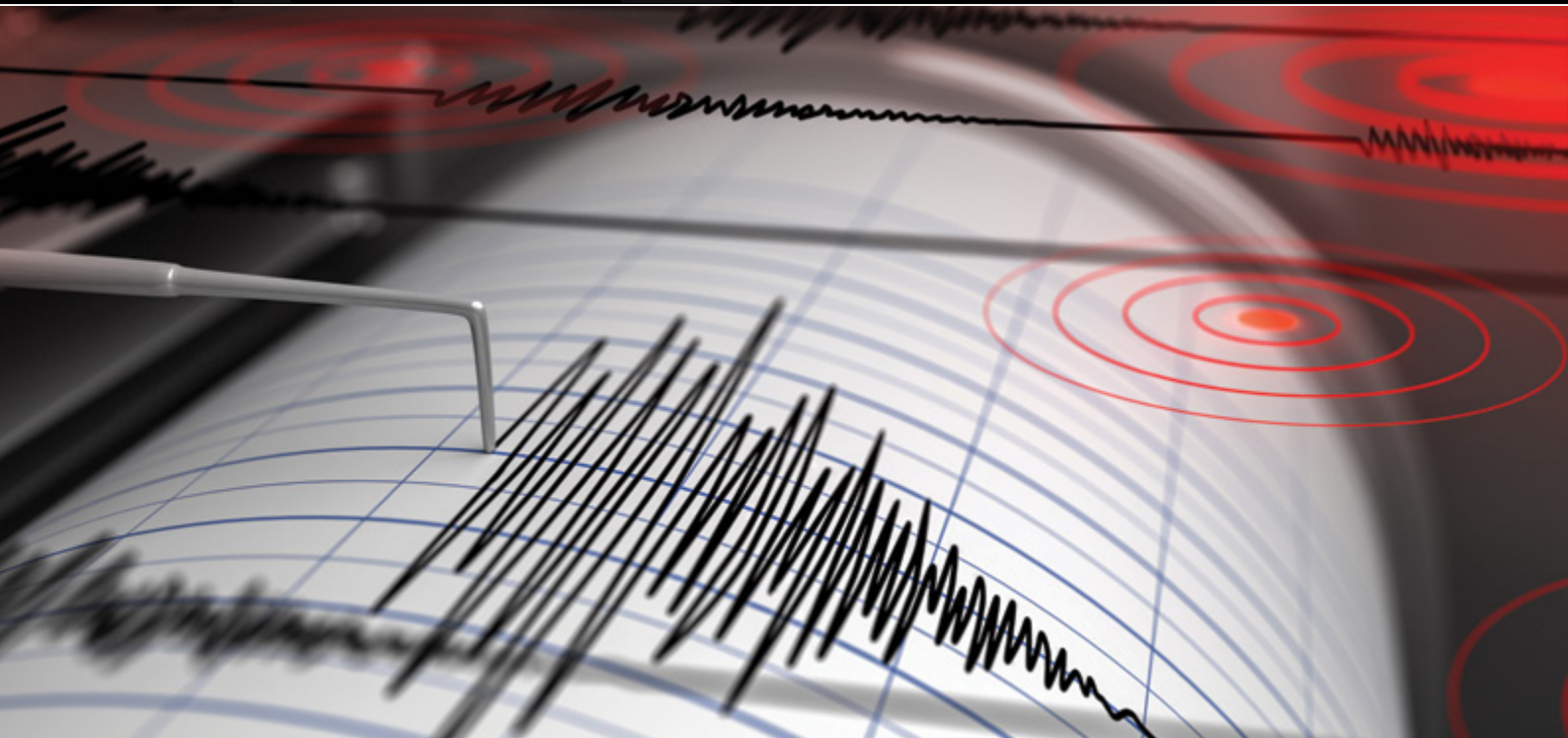


JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

FEBRUARY 2025



SURREY HILLS UNITING CHURCH AND JIM CLUSTER ASSIST A WORKER FROM VANUATU IMPACTED BY EARTHQUAKE

On 17 December 2024, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck near Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, triggering landslides, crushing cars and flattening multiple buildings.

At least 14 people were killed and 265 injured in the earthquake.

On Christmas Eve, an employer on the

PALM Scheme reached out for assistance so that a worker could return to Vanuatu to visit his family, who the earthquake had impacted.

His sister and uncle had died from injuries sustained in the earthquake. His mother was in a critical condition in hospital. The front part of their house fell on them as they tried to exit. His partner and two young children were safe but were sleeping outside.

The worker had sent all his money home to assist his family after the earthquake and did not have the money for an airfare to get home himself.

The Surrey Hills Uniting Church partnered with the JIM Cluster to fund the cost of an airfare for the worker to return home to assist his family and then return to Australia to earn more money to meet their needs. ●



WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF JUSTACT FOR 2025

This newsletter serves the purpose of updating you on the progress made on social justice issues we have requested you act on.

Letter-writing actions and postcard campaigns are the main ways we ask you to be involved in seeking reforms on issues that you have collectively prioritized. If you get a reply to any of your letters, we would be very grateful if you could send us a copy to see what is being said in the replies.

The JustAct newsletter also usually includes a supporter profile as well as book reviews of books that may be of interest to you on a variety of social justice issues. Please let us know of any recommendations of people or books we can profile.

The following table outlines how many actions were issued in the areas you indicated were priorities for action in 2024. The number of actions we issued on a particular topic is impacted by how important an issue you rated it and the identification of opportunities to take action on the issue. We prioritise issuing action on topics likely to lead to an outcome in the next year. ●

Issue	Total number of actions issued in 2024
Climate Justice	7
Modern slavery/online safety	4
Peace in Israel/Palestine	4
Climate Refugees and people seeking asylum	3
Overseas Poverty	3
Gambling reform	3
Justice for First Peoples	2
Family Violence	2
Alcohol reform	2
Support for people with disabilities	1
Democratic reform	1
Peace-building in Myanmar	1
Tax reform	1
Ending Racism	0
Housing	0
Human rights in the Philippines	0
Creating more secure work	0
Reform of the youth criminal justice system	0

FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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All of the resources in this mailing can be found on the JIM website.

If you would like to subscribe (or unsubscribe) to either this hardcopy mailing (bi-monthly) or email update (weekly), contact the JIM Cluster.

PROTECTIONS FOR PACIFIC ISLAND WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA YIELD BENEFITS

We have requested that you write letters several times to improve the situation for people working on horticultural farms in Australia, including people from the Pacific Islands working on the Pacific

Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme.

The horticulture sector in Australia has historically been rife with wage theft and mistreatment of workers.

A key problem that occurred on the PALM Scheme was that some employers on the Scheme would bring

out workers from the Pacific Islands to work in Australia but not have lined up enough work for them. As a result, the workers would end up in financial hardship and unable to send money back to their families at home.

We lobbied for reforms to address the problem, and the current government responded by requiring employers to provide a minimum of 120 hours of work every four weeks. In November 2024, the government announced that checks on employers on the PALM Scheme showed they were complying with the new requirement. The check involved nearly one in three of the agriculture and horticulture employers. ●

BAD NEWS ON MIGRATION BILL

In June 2024, we requested that you write to the Commonwealth Government asking that they withdraw the *Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Bill*.

The Bill requires people the

Australian Government wishes to remove from Australia to have to lie to the government of the country they will be sent to saying that they are voluntarily agreeing to the removal.

Some governments will not accept people being sent to their jurisdiction if the person is not voluntarily willing to go to their jurisdiction. Under the Bill, those unwilling to lie to the government of the country they are to be sent to can be imprisoned in Australia for up to five years.

The Bill also allows the government to put bans on issuing visas to people from nominated countries, stopping people from the nominated countries from coming to Australia for study, business, tourism, or to visit family.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters opposing the Bill.

The Government lacked the numbers to get the Bill through the Senate, and so withdrew the Bill.

Unfortunately, in November, the Government gained the support of the Dutton Opposition and got the Bill through the Senate on 28 November. ●

VICTORIAN TREATY NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN

On 13 January 2025 the Victorian Government and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria jointly announced where the focus of treaty negotiations would be focused.

Treaty is about making a better and fairer state for all Victorians.

Key areas to be addressed in the Treaty will include measures to support reconciliation, truth, education and healing between First Peoples' and those who have come since European

colonisation. The Treaty will also consider the role of a representative body of First Peoples in decision-making relating to Victorian Government programs and services for First Peoples.

Congregations can make statements in support of the Victorian Treaty Process. So far, St Michael's Uniting Church in the CBD, Brunswick Uniting Church and Sophia's Spring Uniting Church have made such statements, which have been provided to the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, along with the Statement made by the Synod. If your congregation would also

like to make a statement in support of the Treaty Process, there is still time to do so. ●





PARLIAMENT PASSES WORLD-LEADING LAW ON TAX TRANSPARENCY OF LARGE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

In 2022, it was estimated that multinational corporations shifted US\$1 trillion into tax havens.

The impacts of multinational tax dodging are felt everywhere but especially devastating in Global South countries, with less enforcement capacity and greater reliance on corporate tax revenues. For over a decade, we have invited you to take actions in support of curbing tax evasion and avoidance by multinational corporations.

Australian Taxation Office (ATO) data shows that 32% of large Australian companies listed on the stock exchange paid no tax in the 2020-2021 financial year. Most of these will be for legitimate reasons, but some will have engaged in shifting profits to tax havens to avoid paying tax in Australia.

The JIM Cluster was recently involved in extensive lobbying, writing of submissions, and appearing before a Parliamentary Committee supporting legislation requiring large multinational corporations to report their tax and financial areas broken down by selected tax haven countries. The 40 tax haven countries in question include

Switzerland, Singapore, the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Nauru, Panama, Samoa, the US Virgin Islands and Vanuatu. The work paid off, and the Australian Parliament passed the legislation on 29 November 2024.

The law will ensure the public can determine if genuine business operations align with where profits are reported and taxes are paid.

The Australian Government's legislation, known as public country-by-country reporting, leads the world in increasing tax transparency for multinational corporations, representing a massive improvement on the weaker package implemented in the EU. It paves the way for public country-by-country reporting to be included in upcoming negotiations on a global tax convention at the UN.

The success of the campaign follows an unprecedented push by the Uniting Church, Tax Justice Network Australia, and trade unions: firstly, getting the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to adopt the policy in opposition, then ensuring its adoption into their election manifesto and, finally, holding the government accountable to make sure

that promise was turned into legislation. The Australian government has shown authentic leadership by standing up to massive pressure from corporate lobbyists.

The new law will help deter the tax-dodging games that multinational corporations and their tax advisers have been able to play for too long, to the detriment of ordinary people who pay their taxes which are required to fund the government services we all need and rely on.

In the same week, the Parliament also passed laws requiring large multinational corporations to pay a minimum tax rate of 15% on their profits globally. The law will allow the Australian Government to apply a top-up tax if the multinational corporation pays less than a 15% tax rate globally. Over 130 governments agreed to the global minimum tax rate for large multinational corporations, and it needs to be implemented by each government through its own laws.

Thank you to everyone who has taken action over the years to support reforms to address tax evasion and tax avoidance by multinational corporations. ●



PARLIAMENT PASSES ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING LAW REFORMS

In the October JustAct, we requested that you write to the Australian Government and the crossbench Senators to support passing the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Amendment Bill 2024.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters. There was good news with the Bill passing the Parliament on 29 November.

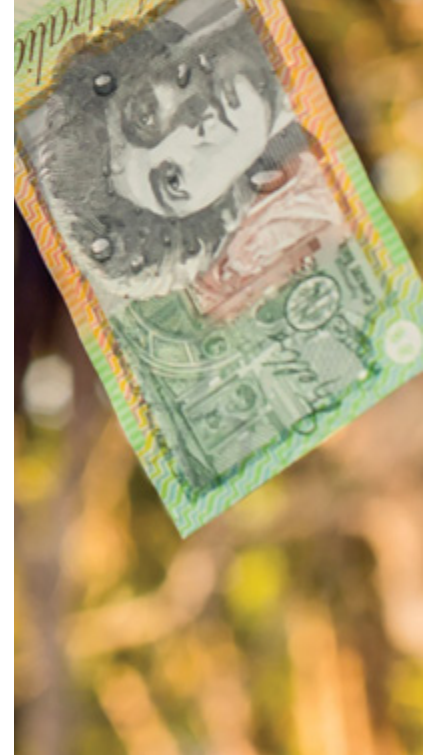
The reforms update Australia's anti-money laundering laws so that lawyers, accountants, real estate professionals and businesses that set up companies for others will be required to disclose any suspicious behaviour by their clients to AUSTRAC. AUSTRAC is the law enforcement agency that oversees Australia's anti-money laundering laws. Professionals such as lawyers, accountants, and real estate agents

are often the people who will see highly suspicious behaviour, such as buying a multi-million dollar property with cash that has not come from a bank account. Getting such intelligence is vital to AUSTRAC and other law enforcement agencies detecting the underlying crimes the funding is coming from, such as corruption, human trafficking, wage theft, illegal logging or the illegal trade in endangered species.

The bad news was that the Law Council of Australia won out and got a significant loophole inserted in the Bill so that lawyers will be the go-to people for setting up legal structures to facilitate money laundering. Lawyers will, in practice, be able to create legal structures to conceal the ownership of funds and transactions involving the profits of crime. They will be able to claim they do not need to report the structure to AUSTRAC as it is part of their privileged advice to their client. By contrast, an accountant setting up the

same structure will be required to report the suspicious request of their client to create such a structure and will face significant penalties for doing so.

Following the passage of the new laws, the head of AUSTRAC, Brendan Thomas, said that his law enforcement agency would use them to crack down on the more than \$60 billion in harm caused by human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, scams and drug trafficking. ●





COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT PROVIDES FURTHER PROTECTIONS FOR PEOPLE ON TEMPORARY VISAS EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

In 2020, we requested that you write letters to the Australian Government seeking improvements for the protection of people on temporary visas who experience family violence.

At the time, a person on certain temporary visa types who suffered family violence was at risk of visa cancellation or visa refusal if they separated from a perpetrator or reported the abuse to the police. Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to that action.

Since that action, the JIM Cluster has engaged with the Department of Home Affairs to follow through on the requests

contained in the letter-writing action.

The action and the lobbying have paid off, contributing to the adoption of some of the requested reforms.

At the end of 2024, special family violence protections for people on temporary visas were extended to the spouses and partners of people on 18 types of visas. The change means that the spouse or partner of a person on one of the identified visas will not be worse off as a result of leaving a violent relationship. Their ability to remain in Australia will not be impacted. The Government had allocated \$8.9 million in the 2023-2024 budget to allow the

expansion of the protections.

In a further positive change, the Department of Home Affairs has introduced changes so that when a person eligible to apply for the special family violence protections reports alleged family violence, their dealings with the Department will be separated from that of the alleged perpetrator and their migration agent. In the past, the perpetrator or their migration agent could still access the immigration account of the victim, in some cases being able to identify where the victim was living if the victim had fled the perpetrator. ●

REFUGEE INTAKE REACHES 20,000

We have been running a postcard campaign urging the Commonwealth Government to fulfil its promise of increasing the

refugee intake into Australia to 32,500 annually.

Thank you to everyone who has sent off the postcard or encouraged others to do so.

In good news, the Australian Government provided 20,000 refugee places last year, which was previously reached in 2013 before dropping to 13,750 places. The only time the refugee intake has been higher was in the early 1980s.

The main sources of refugees in the last two years have been from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Myanmar and Congo.



The Coalition Opposition has stated they will cut the refugee intake to 13,750 places annually if elected. ●

GOVERNMENT TAKES ACTION ON DODGY MIGRATION AGENT

In June 2024, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government seeking reforms to better regulate migration agents.

Dodgy migration agents seek to exploit vulnerable people by offering bad advice or taking money to apply for visas the person is not eligible for, including visas claiming to be a refugee. Thank you to everyone who wrote

letters on the issue.

To highlight the problem, the Department of Home Affairs recently cancelled the visa of a person from overseas who had charged over 1,000 people applying for visas large amounts for advice. The person encouraged the people seeking a visa to claim to be refugees despite



knowing they were not eligible to make such a claim.

The illegal activity caused significant delays in visa processing for people with genuine refugee claims. ●



VICTORIAN GAS TRANSITION

The JIM Cluster has requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government about transitioning away from gas as a fossil fuel as part of the action needed to address climate change.

The Victorian Government released an update on their efforts to curb the use of gas in the state. On the positive side, since May 2023, the Victorian Energy Upgrades Program has resulted in over 24,000 gas heaters and 34,000 gas hot water systems being upgraded to efficient electric alternatives.

Starting on 1 July 2024, new homes requiring a planning permit must be all electric.

Since August 2018, the Solar Homes program has provided around 350,000 rebates and loans (as of 6 November 2024) to Victorian households to support the installation of rooftop solar panels, heat pumps, solar hot water systems and batteries.

On the negative side, the use of gas still contributes 16% of Victoria's emissions.

In further bad news, the Victorian Government is concerned that demand for gas in Victoria will exceed

supply by 2028, so they have granted production approvals to commence gas production at Beach Energy's Enterprise field in the Otway Basin.

Thank you to everyone who has taken action to encourage the Victorian Government to get the State off gas. ●

FURTHER GOVERNMENT ACTION ON ILLEGAL LOGGING

In 2024, there was a very positive development with the Federal Parliament passing reforms to improve the Australian law that prohibits the importation of timber and wood products that have been produced through illegal logging.

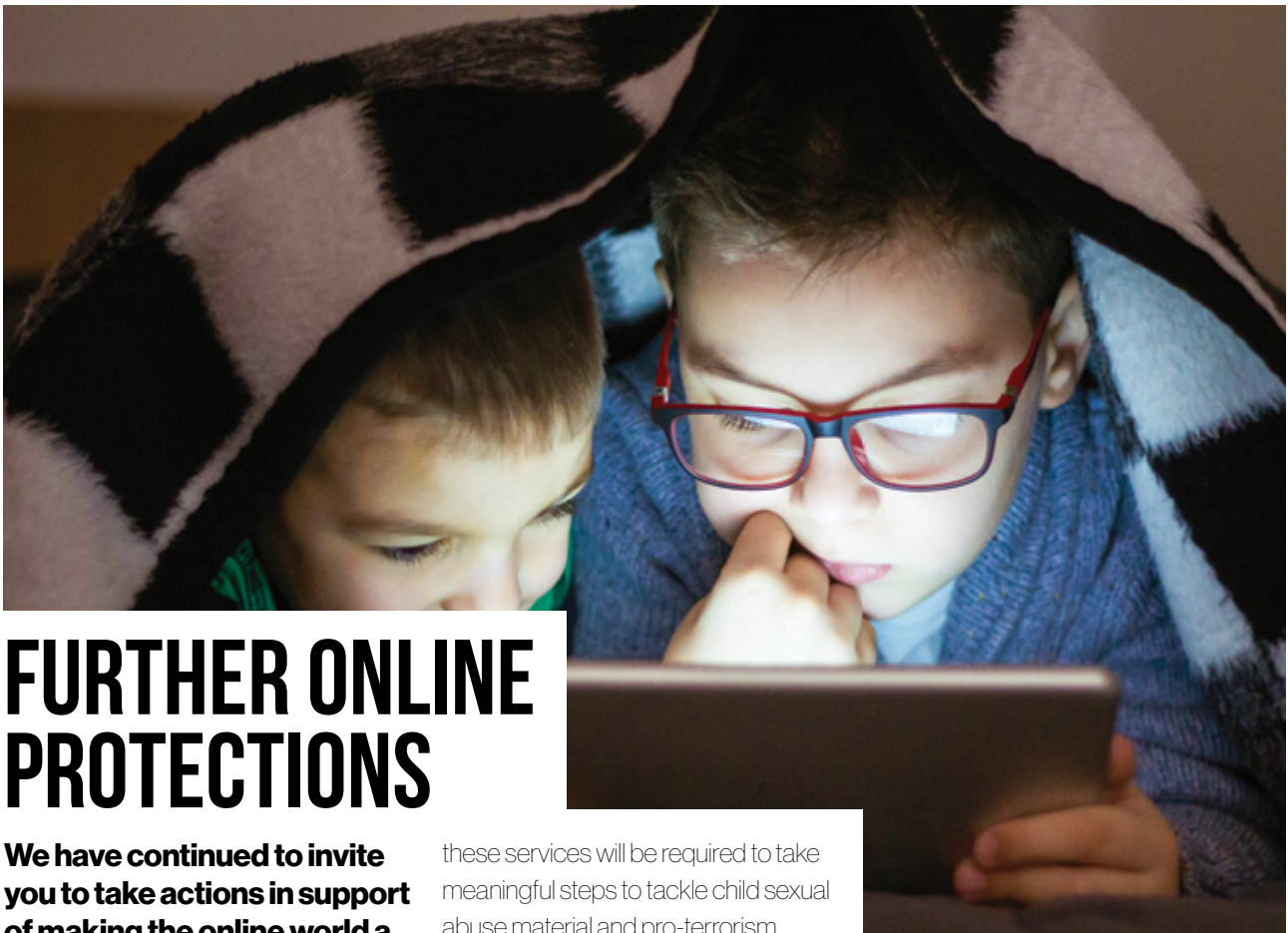
Many of you have taken action in support of the reforms over several years.

In September 2024, the Commonwealth Government reported that they have been taking further action to make the law more effective. The Government commissioned research into wood and timber products being imported into Australia. They examined everything from construction timber to paper drinking straws and wooden hair combs. Over 170 products covering 39 species were examined from 40

retailers across four states.

The testing showed that 25% of the products contained wood inconsistent with the declared species or place of origin. While the inconsistency is not necessarily evidence of illegality, it is a significant risk factor.

There was uncertainty around the origin of some of the products declared as Burmese teak. The JIM Cluster continues to campaign for the Australian Government to ban the importation of all timber and wood products from Myanmar, as at least part of the profits from the sale of such products goes to prop up the military junta in the country.●



FURTHER ONLINE PROTECTIONS

We have continued to invite you to take actions in support of making the online world a safer place for everyone.

In January 2023, we issued a postcard action calling on the Australian Government to implement such reforms.

In December, there was further good news with the eSafety Commissioner issuing an industry standard for cloud storage services and online messaging platforms. The corporations providing

these services will be required to take meaningful steps to tackle child sexual abuse material and pro-terrorism content. Cloud services covered include Apple's iCloud, Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive. Platforms with more than one million users must invest in actions to detect child sexual abuse material on their platforms. Corporations that fail to comply with the standard face fines of up to \$49.5 million.

The standard will also require

corporations to take action on apps that use artificial intelligence to 'nudify' images of real people, including children. The artificially generated naked images can be used to extort the real person to provide actual naked or sexual images of themselves under threat that if they do not, then the predator will release the artificial images publicly.

Increasing online protection is needed. The Australian Federal Police-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) reported at the start of September 2024 that it had received 58,503 reports of online child sexual abuse in the 2023-2024 financial year. That was a 45% increase over the 40,232 reports it had received in the 2022 – 2023 financial year. The increase in the number of reports reflects increasing levels of online child sexual abuse being detected, alongside greater awareness in the Australian community on the issue.

There was positive news that the

number of cases of sexual extortion of children online had declined. In the first months of 2024, the ACCCE received 560 reports of sexual extortion, an average of 93 reports per month. That compared to an average of 300 monthly reports in the 2023 calendar year.

Sexual extortion is where predators trick or coerce someone into sending sexual images of themselves before threatening to share the images unless their demands are met. The demands could be for money, gift cards or more graphic content.

Since 2022, the Australian Federal Police and AUSTRAC have been able

to close 1,800 Australian bank accounts and digital currency accounts linked to offshore organised criminals sexually extorting Australian teenagers.

The Australian Federal Police stated that the reason for the decrease in the number of cases of sexual extortion of Australian teenagers was due to "Increased public awareness, especially of parents and young people themselves, combined with the AFP's work with partners like AUSTRAC." They said organised criminals are now complaining online about how difficult it is to extract money from young people in Australia. ●

CASE STUDY

COMBATING ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In November 2024, the Australian Federal Police and the Philippine National Police were able to rescue six children from ongoing harm.

In March 2024, the Australian police searched the King Meadow's home of a 41-year-old Tasmanian man. They found child sexual abuse images and videos and a record of an online conversation the man had with a person facilitating the sale of child sexual abuse material. The

facilitator was based in the Philippines. The case against the Tasmanian man is still before the courts.

A second 41-year-old man was arrested by the police at Melbourne airport on 11 April 2024 after child sexual abuse material was located on his phone as he was returning from the Philippines. A search of his home found evidence he had sexually abused children overseas. The man



has pleaded guilty and will be sentenced in April 2025.

Both Australian men had abused some of the same child victims in the Philippines. The Australian and Filipino police were able to work together to raid a home where two women, aged 43 and 23, were arrested on human trafficking and child sexual abuse offences. Six children, the youngest just two years old, were removed from harm and placed in the care of the Philippines child welfare services. ●

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT PROSECUTOR SEEKS ARREST WARRANT FOR MYANMAR MILITARY LEADER

We have invited you to be part of campaigning for the Australian Government to put pressure on the military dictatorship in Myanmar to return the country to civilian rule, including letter-writing

actions and a postcard campaign.

Thank you to everyone who has taken action in response to those actions.

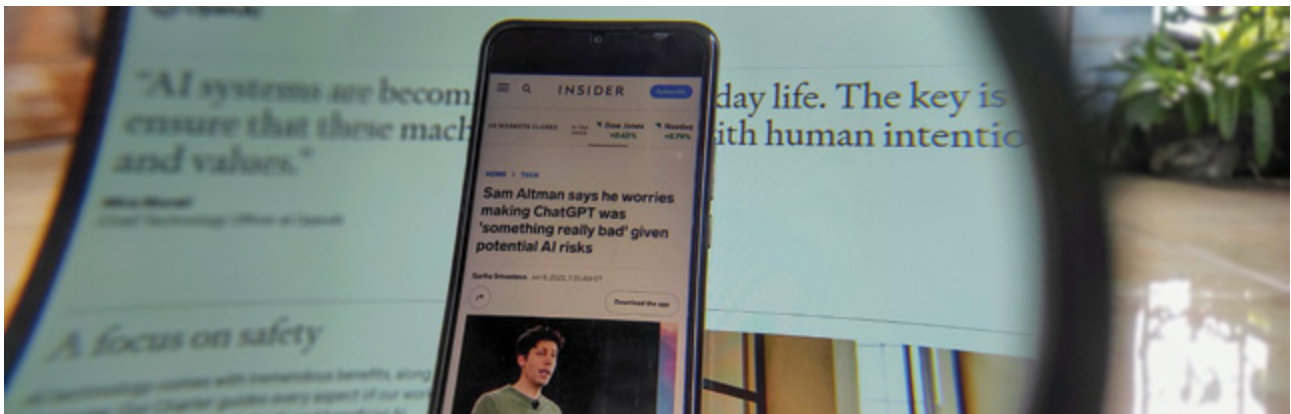
At the end of November 2024, there was a positive development with the chief prosecutor of the International



Criminal Court (ICC) announcing they had requested an arrest warrant for the head of the military junta, Min Aung Hliang, for crimes against humanity committed against Rohingya Muslims.

Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Rohingya were forced to flee from Myanmar in 2017 to escape a campaign of genocide waged by the Myanmar military. Tens of thousands of Rohingya were murdered.

A panel of three ICC judges will rule on the request for an arrest warrant. ●



THE NEED TO REGULATE AI

In the October 2024 JustAct, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government on regulating artificial intelligence (AI).

There has been further evidence of why we must ensure that the development of AI is appropriately regulated.

Professor Geoffrey Hinton was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on AI. In December, he told the BBC that there is up to a 20% chance in the next 30 years that AI could result in a catastrophic outcome for humanity when AI exceeds human intelligence.

In 2023, Professor Hinton resigned from Google to be able to speak openly about the risks posed by unconstrained AI development. He expressed

concern that “bad actors” would use the technology to harm others.

He has stated that technology corporations cannot be trusted to develop AI safely. “So just leaving it to the profit motive of large companies is not going to be sufficient to make sure they develop it safely”, he said. “The only thing that can force those big companies to do more research on safety is government regulation.”

In October 2024, the UN Secretary General’s High-level Advisory Body on AI delivered its final report, “Governing AI for Humanity”. The Advisory Body urged the UN to lay the foundations for AI governance based on international cooperation. They called on governments and other stakeholders to work together in governing AI to foster

the development and protection of all human rights.

The Advisory Body urged that children be priority stakeholders in AI governance, respecting their right to develop free from the addictive effects of technology and their right to disengage from it. The long-term impacts on children’s perspectives, self-image, life choices and opportunities need to be considered in the development of AI. Including children in the design and governance processes is crucial to ensuring that AI systems are safe and appropriate for their use.

On 18 October 2024, the Governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US issued a joint statement expressing concern at the use of AI to facilitate the creation and distribution of misinformation and disinformation, malware, terrorist and violent extremist content and child sexual abuse material. ●

LENTEN BIBLE STUDY - MONEY TALKS: CAPITALIST ETHICS, COLONIALISM AND DIVINE GOVERNANCE: COVENTRY PRESS

Written by Uniting Church minister John Bottomley, the Lenten Study Money Talks engages the lectionary psalms and gospel texts for year C of the Revised Common Lectionary, Lent 2025.

The studies acknowledge it is not possible for a disciple of Jesus Christ to replace the worship of God with the worship of wealth. To order *Money Talks* online, go to <https://coventrypress.com.au/money-talks>

The following abridged review by Matthew Anslow was published in

Uniting Church Studies volume 25 no. 1, 2023.

I find the phrase “money talks” rather evocative. For me, it conjures images of smartly besuited people – specifically men – shaking chubby, orange-tinged hands on some dubious business deal involving property, a merger, or

some shady aspect of our political life. It induces thoughts of elitence, exclusivity, perhaps even secrecy, thoughts of an arena of wheelings and dealings unknown and inaccessible to the hoi polloi. "Money talks" gives voice to the prodding feeling many of us experience that numerous of the decisions made in our society are the result not of democratic voices but of economic ones. If money talks, what it says seems profoundly consequential, though many of us are not conversant in its language. It seems fitting that *Money Talks* is the title of John Bottomley's excellent series of studies on capitalist ethics and colonialism. Bottomley's studies invite us to consider what money might be saying and to listen to its conversation with other important and interested voices.

The book is composed of a series of small group studies. It is not an academic treatise but a group activity for laypeople, featuring readings, questions for reflection and discussion, and prayers. As such, *Money Talks* is not an attempt to break new theological or economic ground but rather to aid the task of Christian discipleship as it pertains to the world of finance.

Indeed, in *Money Talks*, Bottomley does not offer much in the way of new insights in terms of biblical interpretation. Four out of five of the key passages explored come from Luke's Gospel. For those who have read, say, Ched Myers, William Herzog, or Jonathan Cornford, there is little here from an exegetical perspective that would count as new insight. But, then again, most Australian Christians have not read these authors, and, as noted, Bottomley is not seeking to revolutionise biblical scholarship on economics. Bottomley makes some

sharp economic-focused readings of Scripture available to the layperson and, in doing so, provides an important service to the church.

Where Bottomley provides innovation is in his observations about our contemporary economic context, particularly those relating to the financial services industry. Each study oscillates between biblical reflection and testimonies from those working in the financial sector (taken from the University of Divinity's Religion and Social Policy Network for Australia's Finance Sector Union). These testimonies emphasise the ethical dilemmas such workers face and paint a disquieting picture of the state of the financial sector, even in the aftermath of the 2018 Royal Commission into banking. By knitting together biblical reflection and testimony from within the financial sector in this way, Bottomley brings the economic wisdom and judgement revealed in Scripture to bear on a realm of life that affects us all but that almost none of us understands.

One of the studies uses Jesus' words on coming judgement in Luke 13:1-9 to encourage reflection on imagination and repentance. Bottomley suggests that repentance is a kind of conversion of the imagination, such that we begin to see things as they really are. In another study, Bottomley uses Luke's Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15) to explore covetousness (qua sin against

God and neighbour) and restorative justice. Bottomley considers how the covetousness inherent in colonial capitalism's approach to the world has led to environmental ruin and economic inequality. He suggests *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* might represent a voice yearning and hoping for a change of heart, much like the father in the parable.

Depending on the education level of the group using the material, some points could be challenging, but generally, it would suit most churchgoing audiences. At times, the studies move quickly from one focus to another, and, as a result, they can feel erratic. This necessitates that the group leader(s) read the material before using it with a group.

Talking about money is, as Bottomley's introduction notes, a social taboo. Indeed, I suspect most Christians would prefer to discuss pornography than their money. However, the questions asked in Bottomley's book are important, and these studies are well worth a look, particularly for those in the Australian context. ●



SUPPORTER PROFILE

PETER SMERDON



So that our readers can get to know you, please tell us a bit about yourself and your story?

I grew up on a dairy farm outside Gympie, in South-East Queensland. My career was in broadcast technology, starting as a trainee technician at the local radio station at age 15. I worked as the Engineering Manager for commercial radio stations in Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, and Melbourne, as well as SBS Radio in Melbourne. I continued in that field until my retirement in the late 2000s.

I joined the Croydon Uniting Church post-lockdown in 2021, having recently moved to the area.

After a period of settling in, I was asked to join the church AV team, where I was able to utilise and update my broadcast/audio engineering skills. I am now starting to learn new skills in video production.

I have recently been elected to the Church Council as an Elder, and I look forward to further serving our congregation and Christ by taking on further responsibilities.

What does Community mean to you?

An important way our Church community serves God is by serving others – the wider community. We witness to Christ’s love by loving and seeking to protect and sustain all people.

Croydon Uniting Church is a recipient of a Synod Emission Reduction Fund grant. What does this mean to that community?

This grant will enable installation of rooftop solar much sooner, resulting in:

- (1) visible expression of our deep concern regarding climate change;
- (2) reduction in our church’s carbon footprint;
- (3) economic benefit; and,
- (4) supports UCA net zero emissions goals.

To explain my thinking, I have repurposed an old saying about the best time to plant a tree – “The best time to install rooftop solar was five years ago. The next best time is right now”.

What social justice issue do you think about most, and why?

The intergenerational trauma of Australia’s First Nations people, separated from Country, and in many cases separated from family and mob. This has been a most unChristian treatment of our First Nations people by the Second Nations people.

What are the social justice activities you and your communities are involved in?

I am a member of Croydon Uniting Church’s Living Faith group, which actively pursues climate and environmental justice, and justice for First Nations People, asylum seekers, and other marginalised people. We seek justice through a mix of hands-on activities, education and advocacy. Recent projects include solar panels for the church, establishing an Indigenous garden at the church, installing a climate justice banner at the church entrance, and framing and displaying the Uluru Statement.

Members of our Living Faith Group have sought to deepen our understanding of social justice issues through interaction with various related organisations and activities. Some of us attended the recent Justice and International Mission Conference on Food and Social Justice. We also participated (virtually) in Synod’s Accessible Worship online training, the NSW/ACT Synod’s Uniting Climate Conference and Common Grace’s “Let Justice Flow” preliminary sessions

leading up to their November Conference. Some members also participated in the September launch event for Australian Religious Response to Climate Change’s Week of Action for Climate Change. In October, I attended The Wesley Centre’s public forum “Reconciliation and the Referendum: Where

are we now?” marking one year since the failed Referendum on enshrining an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

What personal and formative experiences have shaped your sense of social justice?

As a young man, I studied and socialised with many Indigenous “Missionary Scholars” at Brisbane’s Methodist Training College. I particularly enjoyed the company of (the late) Mr Yunupingu, who later returned to his Yolngu community in East Arnhem Land and went on to become Chairman of the Northern Land Council. He became a primary driver of the Barunga Statement of 1988, calling for a treaty between First and Second Nations. Watching his struggle for justice from afar contrasted with the carefree young man I knew, highlighting how little I understood of First Nations’ disadvantage and struggle.

What Christian perspectives do you bring to bear in your service to social justice?

I find it impossible to ignore the example set by Christ when he ministered to the marginalised. This leads me to strive to understand, support, protect, and advocate for those marginalised by their circumstances or the colour of their skin.

Should the church have a voice or role in social justice?

I believe that the church needs to perform the function of a moral compass for the community, so it is vital that the church is both active and vocal on all matters of social justice. I have long watched the Uniting Church take up the baton and champion issues that promote fairness and justice, whether popular with the wider community or not.

This is truly Christ’s work. ●