

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

AUGUST 2025



“THE OTHER” A REVIEW BY SUPPORTER RAY HIGGS

“The Other” (a documentary promoted by the Uniting Church) was screened on Sunday 15 June at the Nova Cinema, Carlton.

“The Other” was amazing. Truly moving. The whole world needs to see it.

“The Other” interviews selected Palestinians and Israelis who have been deeply hurt because of the conflict that surrounds them, one losing 60 members of his extended family. Each fellow sufferer tells their story. It's raw.

They have every reason to hate and lash out in revenge. Instead, this intentional community decides to love and forgive. They choose to come

together and to work together. It's powerful.

Upholding humanity above identity, they let go of the rights and privileges their identity assures them. All this to break that perpetual cycle of violence. All this to bring harmony and peace in the Middle East. It's hopeful.

In “The Other”, I see the mustard seed parable. So tiny in number, this rare community that is walking daily the ‘road less travelled’, is big in the way of the Spirit. This is the tree that will grow into a lasting and just peace.

The final scene shows an Israeli and a Palestinian walking together. Both say “amal” (Arabic for hope). How fitting. Then the poem by Mahmoud Darwish:

She says: When are we going to meet?

I say: After a year and a war.

She says: When does the war end?

I say: When we meet.

During the film, I kept thinking back to church that morning. It was Trinity Sunday, and these words were shared ...

... the Trinity shows us love. God, as community, is bonded by love. And we, made in the image of God, are drawn into The Trinity. As we love each other, the way Jesus called us to, we live the way of God, and God's Spirit comes.

That community love and the difference it made were clearly noticeable in “The Other”. It made me think, do people notice love in me?●

WANT TO HOLD YOUR OWN SCREENING OF "THE OTHER"?

The JIM Cluster has access to "The Other" and can provide it for screenings. A screening requires payment to the distributor of the film

of \$800. The Cluster can provide \$200 towards each screening, meaning a congregation would need to be able to have 30 people pay \$20 each to cover the remaining cost of payment to the distributor.●



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT TAKES POSITIVE ACTION ON GAS

In July 2023, we requested that you write to the Victorian Government asking that they move the state away from using gas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

There was good news on 24 June 2025 with the Victorian Government announcing that from 1 March 2027, when a gas hot water system reaches the end of its life, it must be replaced with an efficient electric alternative like a heat pump.

From 1 January 2027, all new homes and commercial buildings (other than industrial, manufacturing or agricultural) will be built all-electric.

About one-third of Victorian households are renters, including

many of the most financially vulnerable. From 1 March 2027, new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards will apply to rental properties and public housing, requiring:

- Hot water systems to be replaced with efficient heat pumps at the end of life;
- Reverse-cycle air conditioners must replace gas heaters at the end of life;
- Minimum R5.0 rating ceiling insulation must be installed at the start of a new lease where there is no ceiling insulation already in place; and,
- Draught sealing, including weather seals on all external doors, windows, and wall vents, must be installed at the start of a new lease.

The Victorian Greens also negotiated with the Labor Government to secure:

- \$10 million for industry to transition to manufacturing efficient appliances;
- \$10 million for food and beverage manufacturers and dairy farms to transition away from gas;
- \$5 million for on-farm electrification projects, to help farmers reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and,
- \$2 million to assist community groups in promoting and supporting residents to electrify their homes.

Thank you to everyone who has taken action to support measures to address global warming.●

FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

Mark Zirnsak – Senior Social Justice Advocate
Tim Molineux – Social Justice Officer

Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Centre for Theology and Ministry
29 College Crescent
Parkville, Victoria 3052

Phone - (03) 9340 8807

jim@victas.uca.org.au
<http://www.justact.org.au>

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.



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT LAGS IN BUILDING SOCIAL HOUSING

‘Social housing’ refers to public housing run by the government and community organisations.

In the April 2025 JustAct, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government urging the construction of 60,000 social housing units in the next decade. In this JustAct, we include a postcard

action on the same issue. Thank you to everyone who is taking action on the issue.

There was disappointing news in the Victorian Government budget in May. Only 2,379 social homes were added in the 2024 – 2025 financial year. The target for the 2025 – 2026 financial year is 2,358.

However, the additional homes

do not consider the number of homes lost. For example, in the 2023 – 2024 financial year, 2,938 social homes were added, but 1,626 were demolished or sold, so the net increase in housing was only 1,312 homes.

Survivors of family and domestic violence are waiting more than 17 months for a social home.●



Image credit:
SviatlanaLaza

PROTECTING CHILDREN AT WORK IN VICTORIA

The JIM Cluster lobbies the Victorian Government to reform child employment laws.

Over many years, advocacy has seen significant improvements to the laws and regulations governing the employment of children. The laws seek to ensure that the safety of children is not put at risk and that any work they do does not harm their

education and well-being.

The reforms have led to actions against employers who have failed to properly consider the well-being of children they employ. For example, on 21 March 2025, the owner and operator of Donut King stores in Rosebud Plaza and Berwick was fined \$10,000 for employing three children under 15 without a child employment licence. The children were supervised by people who

did not have Working with Children Checks to ensure the supervisors did not have a criminal history of abusing children. The children were provided with inadequate rest breaks and were employed for excessive work hours.

The court did not record a conviction against the owner of the stores, taking into account the early guilty plea and the lack of prior offending.●



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' THEOLOGICAL RESOURCE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The World Council of Churches has released a resource, *Life in Church. Theological Reflections of Persons with Disabilities* (2024).

It can be downloaded from <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/life-in-church>

The publication responds to gaps that still exist in disability inclusion in churches.

The first part of the publication outlines the experience of ten

people with disabilities currently serving their churches in various roles and capacities. They share their view that persons with disabilities are willing and available to participate in active decision-making in their churches if given the opportunity. The experiences outlined show that some churches have done tremendously well in including persons with disabilities, while others have overlooked the potential of persons with disabilities.

The second part of the resources shares the recent World Council of Churches statement, "A Gift of Being:

Called to be a Church of All and for All." The statement was inspired by persons with disability no longer demanding recognition from the margins of the churches. Instead, they are channelling their mission from the margins to the mainstream. They are urging churches to affirm the agency of marginalised people, to participate in their struggles and share their hopes. They hope to encourage churches and societies and transform them, so that churches are just, responsive and inclusive. ●



BRIGADIER GENERAL VACH REFERRED TO THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

In the June 2025 JustAct, we requested that you write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Penny Wong, supporting the government's ongoing advocacy for an end to the Israel-Hamas war, funding for peace-building organisations and the sanctioning of Israeli

Brigadier General Yehuda Vach.

The Hind Rajab Foundation has revealed that in February 2025, it submitted a formal complaint against Brigadier Vach to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The complaint included the case of two Palestinian children murdered by soldiers under Vach's

command. The complaint also alleged Brigadier General Vach's responsibility for the demolition of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital and the massacre of 15 emergency and humanitarian personnel on 23 March 2025 by soldiers under his command.

It is not too late if you did not get a chance to write letters using the June action.●

SOCIAL JUSTICE BOOK GROUP?

Would you be interested in joining a social justice-focused book group, in person or onlinebook? If so, please

get in touch with Mark Zirnsak at mark.zirnsak@victas.uca.org.au or phone 0409 166 915.●

LIVING IN AUSTRALIA— HOW DO I RESPOND?



**REVIEW BY SUPPORTER DR
VIVIENNE MOUNTAIN OF THE
BOOK BY KATE GRENVILLE
“UNSETTLED - A JOURNEY
THROUGH TIME AND PLACE”,
2025.**

Feeling unsettled is a strong personal emotion for Kate Grenville, one that has been with her since childhood.

Living as a non-Indigenous person, she is aware that her rich life in Australia has been built on a violent past.

This land was taken. Kate writes with a sense of unsettled lament, shame and sorrow. She recognises that her family has lived and prospered on stolen land for five generations.

For Kate, it was a shock that 60% of our nation voted 'NO' in the Voice referendum. The failure of the Voice to Parliament referendum propelled Kate to confront her unsettled spirit through travel, investigation and writing. She wanted to remember, recognise, and speak out, as well as some personal confession of lament, sadness, and shame.

Solomon Wiseman was Kate's great, great, great-grandfather. He was sent to Sydney as a convict in 1806. After some time, Solomon bought his freedom. Their fortunes grew. Wisemans Ferry is the name of the settlement he founded. Starting with a ferry service across the Hawkesbury River, then building a sandstone hotel, Solomon finally took up a sizable piece of fertile land

for farming. 'Taking up' land was the benign term given to this enterprise, implying a kind of continuance of care. 'Taking' should have been the honest term. His prosperity came through taking the tribal lands of the Dharug and Darkinjung peoples.

The large fertile river bend at Wisemans Ferry was slowly transformed, the fields of Yam Daisies (*Microseris Lanceolata*) were dug up, wildlife was shot, land was cleared, sheep came to graze, and corn grew. She calls it the 'toxic legacy of colonisation'.

Kate's travel became like a 'pilgrimage' looking for the whole, truthful story of the occupation of the land. Speaking to one Indigenous elder, she learnt that cultivating the Yam Daisy was like the method used in Irish potato farming, digging the roots for food and replanting some for the following season's crop.

Kate's journey followed the settlements established by Solomon's sons along the Hawkesbury River.

Over time, some government Reserves were set aside for First Peoples' settlement. Missions, training homes and boarding schools were established. There was much discussion of the "vanishing race" and the intention of "breeding out the colour". In 1915, the Aboriginal Protection Board had the legal right to remove children

from their families, not just the "half-castes" or those orphaned or neglected.

In conclusion, Kate focuses on one clear event recorded in detail, the Myall Creek Massacre of 1838. While the indigenous men were away collecting bark in the bush, a small group of European men captured 30 women, children and older men, tied them up, and killed them. They then burned the bodies. A rare case of thorough investigation led to an unusual trial. Seven of the

murderers were convicted and hanged for killing the children. This was the first and last time colonists were hanged for the murder of black people.

Kate's writing is her response to feeling unsettled by the truth of settlement in Australia. Her writing is a necessary interruption to the status quo in

Australia. The beautiful detail in her descriptive words and her heart's passion make this book powerful and essential.

'Unsettled' seems an apt word for many aspects of modern life. There is geo-political violence and destruction, growing evidence of climate deterioration, and the vast global inequality of power and privilege.

As a person of faith, I see Grenville's book linking with the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition, to speak out for truth and justice in the face of social power and apathy. ●





BOOK REVIEW: THE HOLY AND THE BROKEN

**REVIEW BY MARK ZIRNSAK
OF THE BOOK BY ITTAY
FLESCHER, "THE HOLY AND
THE BROKEN", 2025.**

Ittay Flescher's "The holy and the broken" is a must-read for anyone wanting to understand the Australian Jewish community and their connection to Israel.

He also outlines non-violent pathways towards peace in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Ittay was a member of the Jewish community in Melbourne. He was a teacher at several Jewish schools in Melbourne. He taught Jewish students about the Nakba (the catastrophe) when at least 750,000 Palestinians were violently driven from their homes by Zionist militias in 1948. He is now the education director for Kids4Peace in Jerusalem, an interfaith youth movement for Israelis and Palestinians.

Ittay provides a great guide on various Palestinian and Israeli perspectives on the conflict. He outlines how the language people use around the conflict gives away their perspective on the conflict. For example, those with a Palestinian-aligned perspective will speak of the "West Bank", while those supportive of Israeli settlers will refer to "Judea and Samaria".

The first part of the book is on how Hamas' attack on 7 October has hardened hearts and made peace much harder. Ittay relates the story of a Palestinian working for a peace-

building organisation who, after the 7 October attack, changed his WhatsApp profile picture to an image of a paraglider. Paragliders were one means by which Hamas militants had launched their attack. Ittay raised it with him, and he responded that, "While I'm against the killing of women and children, Israel has kept my people under siege for so long. I have family in Gaza. You can't keep people in a prison for decades and not think a day will come when they try to break out. For me, this picture represents freedom. I want my people to be free."

Ittay asked, "Why do you still work in a peacebuilding organisation?" He responded, "I do this because it's a job, but really it's all bullshit."

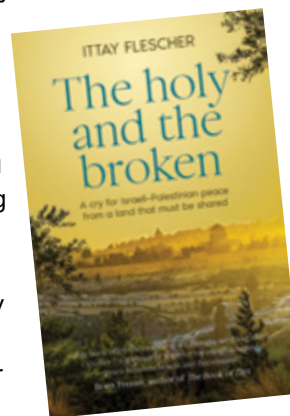
On the Jewish side, after the 7 October attack, Ittay writes:

Suddenly, many Australian Jews whom I knew personally – especially those on the left who had, on 6 October, been ashamed of Israel's far-right government – changed their tune. From being Israel's most ardent critics, or just indifferent to the Jewish state, they put their qualms with Netanyahu aside to become ardent defenders of the IDF's conduct in Gaza. War can do that to people.

Ittay argues that the way forward is a peace settlement where Palestinians and Israeli Jews share the land in a single state. The model he favours is

that there would be a Palestine and an Israel based on the 1967 borders, but there would be no hard border. The two states would be a confederation. He fears there are many on both sides committed to perpetual war:

Too many Palestinians think Israelis are colonists who'll return to some imagined metropole in Russia if the violence is bad enough. Too many Israelis think Palestinians can be subdued, bribed, pacified or demoralised to accept anything less than freedom and equality. Both analyses are grounded in lazy stereotypes and ill-fitting precedents.



Ittay argues that there needs to be contact between Israeli Jews and Palestinians to build relationships of trust at the grassroots if a

constituency for peace is ever to be achieved. He believes that currently, a barrier to dialogue "is the perception that hearing the story of the other and expressing empathy with their pain is an act of disloyalty or betrayal to one's own nation and people."

Ittay sees a place for moderate religious voices to play a peace-building role:

When these voices of moderation hold space for the human spirit to overcome our most base urges of revenge, affirming that all humans are created in the image of God, our world will be better for it.●



SUPPORTER PROFILE DAVID ARNOTT

I grew up on an orchard north of Sydney where the foundations of working with nature were laid. I was interested in knowing how things worked and, in 1972, I received a PhD in solid state surface physics, which led to a career in tertiary teaching and research both in Australia and overseas.

After retirement from the Defence Science and Technology group in 2005, my wife Truda developed motor neurone disease, followed by a tough two years. But God was looking after me, and I met and married Margaret, who took me in a new direction of a healthy vegan diet and fitness training.

Around 2012, I found a book called "The Spirit Level" by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, thinking that I was buying literature with spiritual insight. It was far more than that and realigned my thinking. Summarised – "Those nations with greater equality do far better on every social measure". This social research from the UK is profound and aligned with my understanding of the teaching of Jesus.

I have always had an interest in Earth Sciences, and way back in the

1970s, I collaborated to develop a degree in environmental science, long before the environment was a fashionable topic. Decades of reading and research led me to the Club of Rome think tank and their 2023 book "Earth for All – A Survival Guide for Humanity". It describes the changes needed for civilisation to survive and focuses attention on five areas:

- Renewable Energy,
- Regenerative Food,
- Overcoming Poverty,
- Inequality, and,
- Empowerment of Women.

The three social actions are as important as the two physical requirements and give the church a legitimate role in the biggest issue of our time, the survival of human existence on planet Earth.

Around five years ago, the Village Church, Mt Eliza, formed a Toward Zero Committee to look at ways to reduce our carbon emissions in response to the Synod call to act. Despite having considerable demands on our budget to deal with large expenses for building maintenance issues, we have managed to "abolish" gas at the manse and make substantial progress at the church and community centre.

Three years ago, we installed 10 kW of solar panels at the church and ceased relying on gas to heat the buildings. Synod have responded to the pressures on our budget through a grant for a heat pump hot water system, which currently serves the church kitchen and bathrooms and will be extended to serve the community centre as the budget allows. The grant application process through Synod's Justice and Mission group was straightforward, but our commitment to achieve net-zero emissions before 2040 was essential. We at the Village Church Mount Eliza have a plan to go beyond net zero by future efforts to augment solar at the church/community centre, install 5kW solar at the manse, add

batteries at both sites and replace gas cooking at the church and community centre.

The Toward Zero Committee at Mount Eliza has laid the plans for physical action and has concluded that social and spiritual action is now the necessary focus of attention.

In November 2024, we joined forces with the High Street Uniting Church, Frankston, to form a joint Justice Action Group. We agreed that their four pillars: sustainability (climate change), First Nations justice, refugees and homelessness, were the key actions we would take. Personally, I feel that I have the capacity to focus on the first two: -

1. Progress on sustainability comes down to the Club of Rome's realisation that addressing inequality through a change in our economic system is a top priority. I want to spread this message to the whole Uniting Church and beyond.
2. First Nations justice is very close to my heart, as we have an Aboriginal daughter in our family. I have seen racism, and I have experienced the supportive, gentle culture of First Nations people, which contrasts with the self-centred culture of the Western Second Nations people. The Western culture does not have the right to impose solutions; instead, it should work collaboratively to achieve the best outcome.

At the recent pre-election poll for Flinders, I talked with supporters of various candidates. It was clear that Christians with a dogmatic fundamentalist view, based on information derived from the distant past, had the potential to impede progress on the sustainability of human existence on Planet Earth. In contrast, those with an open mind had the ability to change course toward a new way of responding that would work toward us turning to a focus on the well-being of all people in the future.●