

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

AUGUST 2026



INTERNATIONAL PEACE FUND FOR ISRAEL AND PALESTINE ESTABLISHED

In February and April this year, we issued a letter-writing action and a postcard action urging the Australian Government to establish an International Peace Fund for Israel and Palestine. The JIM Cluster also engaged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the President of the Uniting Church wrote to Minister Penny Wong in support of establishing the Fund.

On 11 June 2026, there was great news: the Foreign Ministers of Australia, the UK, and Canada announced that

they would establish the International Peace Fund for Israelis and Palestinians. The Foreign Ministers stated they remained committed to a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Minister Wong stated that the Fund will help strengthen the voices of moderates and marginalise the extremists, including Hamas. She stated that peace “requires sustained effort to rebuild trust, to strengthen cooperation, and to highlight the shared humanity of people. The Minister stated:

The Peace Fund will invest in programmes that advance a two-state solution, help reduce division, strengthen civil society, and support dialogue and cooperation within and between Israeli and Palestinian communities, building the foundations for peace.

The Fund will complement existing diplomatic, humanitarian and development efforts by helping to build the relationships, confidence and shared understanding needed for successful negotiations.

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The initial funding to establish the fund will only be \$5.8 million.

The International Peace Fund was conceived by the Alliance for Middle East Peace in 2004, inspired by the transformative success of the International Fund for Ireland. The Alliance for Middle East Peace comprises over 200 Palestinian and Jewish peace groups.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters and sent off postcards in support of establishing the International Peace Fund. We will follow up in the future by urging the Australian Government to make meaningful contributions to the Fund so that it can make a difference towards a socially just outcome in the conflict.

The Palestinian and Israeli peace movements have been growing in their cooperation. On 14 May

2026, far-right Zionist extremists carried out their annual “Flag March” in Jerusalem, chanting “death to Arabs”. The peace movement mounted an interfaith response. The Palestinian and Jewish-led Standing Together organised hundreds of activists to provide a protective presence. Using their bodies and their non-violent training, they worked to de-escalate and shield Palestinian residents of the Old City from attack. The next day, peace-building organisations Tag Meir and Women Wage Peace flipped the script, leading a Flower March. A few days later, hundreds marched from Jerusalem International YMCA to the Jaffa Gate for the 4th annual Interfaith March for Human Rights and Peace.

On 12 June, Palestinians and Israelis from the peace movement participated in a Paris summit hosted by the French Ministry of Foreign

Affairs. The meeting developed a “Paris Call 2026” that covered five areas:

- Security for Israelis and Palestinians;
- Humanitarian Action and Reconstruction in Gaza;
- Implementation of the Two-State Solution and Addressing the Threats of Annexation of the West Bank;
- Narratives of Peace, Democracy and Reform; and,
- Regional Integration that delivers Palestinian institutional development, economic viability, and mobility, while offering Israel a security architecture that includes Palestinians from the outset.

The input from Palestinian and Jewish peace-builders is assisting in shaping the efforts of governments to respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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SYNOD FUNDING FOR PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI PEACE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES



The JIM Cluster allocated \$25,000 of its reserves to fund Palestinian and Israeli peace-building organisations. It invited a diverse group of Uniting Church members and ministers to decide which organisations should receive funding.

The Cluster required that four organisations with which it has existing relationships should receive at least \$2,500.

The four people who agreed to decide on the funding allocation were:

- Rev Chris Booth;
- Rev Julie Hall;
- Rev John Bottomley; and,
- John Wardlaw, who had spent three months in the West Bank and East Jerusalem at the end of 2025 and the start of 2026 as part

of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/eappi).

The allocation agreed to was \$4,000 to each of:

- Palestinian organisation Women of the Sun;
- Palestinian organisation Tent of Nations;
- Standing Together, a jointly Palestinian and Jewish-led organisation;
- FeelBeit, a jointly Palestinian and Jewish-led organisation;
- Women Wage Peace; and,
- Jewish organisation Rabbis for Human Rights, which engages in protective actions for Palestinians in the West Bank.

The JIM Cluster allocated \$1,000 to Parents Circle – Families Forum, which is made up of Palestinians and Jews who have lost loved ones in the conflict.

The JIM Cluster has advocated in support of the Parents Circle – Families Forum. The organisation has developed peace-building resources for Israeli high schools. The right-wing Netanyahu Government Ministry of Education has blocked the use of the resources for the last three years. There was finally good news in the middle of June when an Israeli court ordered that the peacebuilding program be reinstated in Israeli schools. The court ruled that the fact that the program presents both Jewish and Palestinian pain is not grounds for disqualifying it.

ESAFETY COMMISSIONER TAKES FURTHER ACTION TO ADDRESS NUDIFYING APPS

We have invited you to write to the Commonwealth Government to take action against apps that use artificial intelligence (AI) to turn existing photos into naked images of children or adults.

There has been good news: the government has empowered the eSafety Commissioner to take action against nudifying platforms through Age-Restriction Material Codes, which commenced in March 2026. The Codes are designed to protect children from accessing or being exposed to age-restricted material, including high-impact violence, self-harm, suicide, disordered eating and pornography.

On 20 May 2026, the eSafety Commissioner reported they had issued a Direction to Comply against one of the most popular 'nudify' platforms accessed in Australia, which was being visited on average 50,000 times a month. The Direction to Comply gave the

Argentina-based company 14 days to implement stronger protections to prevent children from accessing the platform. The failure to comply with the Direction to Comply can result in fines of up to \$49.5 million and require search engines to stop assisting users in finding the site.

The platform allows users to upload images of real people and generate on-demand, sexually explicit deepfake content, posing serious risks, including potential non-consensual exploitation and harm to children.

In response to the Direction to Comply, the corporation withdrew its service from being accessible for use by Australians.

On 26 June 2026, the eSafety Commissioner reported that two more AI-powered nudifying platforms widely used by Australians withdrew their services from the country.

The eSafety Commissioner reported that seven of the most widely used nudify platforms in Australia, previously visited hundreds of thousands of times a month, have now either withdrawn access or taken measures to comply with their obligations under the *Australian Online Safety Act*.

In addition, the Commonwealth Government has provided \$6 million to extend the "Safe Kids are eSmart Kids" initiative delivered by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation. The initiative teaches young people how to be safe and smart in the digital world. The resources have reached over 230,000 students and 6,500 educators as of the start of June 2026.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in support of measures to curb the use of AI in facilitating the abuse and exploitation of children in the online world.





DEVELOPMENT OF A FAITH-AI COVENANT

The World Council of Churches is part of the development of a Faith-AI Covenant. The Covenant is a multi-faith, multi-stakeholder framework designed to establish moral safeguards for artificial intelligence (AI) across societies. Discussions have included consideration of the shared responsibilities of faith leaders, AI developers and civil society.

The JIM Cluster and U Ethical attended an AI Safety Summit held in Sydney on 7-8 July, with representatives from AI corporations, government bodies, the new AI Safety Institute, academics and not-for-profit organisations. The Synod was the only religious organisation and the only large-scale membership organisation represented among the over 300 attendees.

MAJOR WIN ON TAX REFORMS TO ADDRESS HOUSING INEQUALITY

We have invited you to write letters to the Commonwealth Government in support of reforms to Capital Gains Tax (CGT) and negative gearing that have overwhelmingly favoured people who are already wealthy. Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to these actions.

The Labor Government has managed to pass positive reforms to the CGT and negative gearing through the Parliament. As the secretariat of the Tax Justice Network Australia, the JIM Cluster appeared before the Senate Economics Committee and spoke in favour of the reforms. The reforms reduce CGT and negative gearing tax breaks, except for new properties. The reforms aim to reduce competition between

investors and people wanting to buy a home to live in for the purchase of existing properties. Investors will receive an incentive to invest in building new properties to increase the number of houses available for people to live in.

The tax reforms also move towards a system in which income is taxed at a similar rate regardless of how it is earned. Most capital gains (that is, income from investments) will be subject to a minimum tax rate of 30%. The changes will mean most income from investments will be taxed at a similar rate to income from work. Before the reforms, most investment income was taxed at a lower rate than income from work. Wealthier people tend to have more investments, so the arrangement favoured those with greater wealth.





THE QUIET GARDEN AT BELLBRAE UNITING

The Bellbrae congregation is concerned about the effect of climate change on our planet, our only home, and is a member of the Uniting Church Climate Action Initiative.

In 2022, Michael Lambkin painted the first protest sign at the corner of Anglesea Rd. "Climate Action Now."

The church is situated at the entrance to the tiny hamlet of Bellbrae, Victoria, where it has been an active part of the community for about 160 years.

When considering "what is our mission," a commitment was made to trial new approaches to worship to encourage Christian spirituality and to broaden our outreach to our surrounding community.

Bellbrae Uniting Church has been exploring different types of Christian Spiritual Services since the 1990s, including Taize at Easter.

An idea for a quiet garden at Bellbrae Uniting Community Church germinated in August 2024, when a congregational member, Maxine Flakemore, was spending quiet time at home recuperating from COVID.

In June 2024, Maxine spent time in the Bush Botanic Garden at Halls Gap. Whilst wandering through, she was inspired when she read about how the First Peoples used native plants.

The Bellbrae congregation embraced the idea of a reflective garden of Indigenous plants, meandering down the hillside to a quiet space of reflection. In this place, outdoor events and spiritual retreats can be held, with information about the plants' uses along the way.

A budget of \$5,000 to create the garden. Trial plantings began in September 2024, along the School Rd boundary, with tube plantings among the wallaby grass. The existing grass has provided nurture and shelter to the young plants. These have survived and flourished, despite the rabbits and drought.

On 27 July 2025, Rev Tina Lyndon Ng blessed the garden and named it "Toombi Guyong."

"Toombi" is the Wathaurong name for quiet. Guyon is from Madame Jeanne Guyon, a French woman accused of inciting "quietude" and imprisoned in solitary confinement in the Bastille in 1695 for over seven years after she wrote a book on how to pray. Her book is a Christian classic still in print today.

Bellbrae Uniting Church are now nurturing a recent refugee couple from Pakistan, through the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement.

From being an aging congregation, they have become a multicultural, all-age worshipping community.



SUPPORTER PROFILE:

REV ESTEBAN LIÉVANO

My name is Rev Esteban Liévano, and I am the minister of St. David's Parkdale Uniting Church in Melbourne's bayside region. I was born a stateless person. My family's early years were shaped by displacement, first through missionary work in Colombia during the ongoing civil conflict, and then in Brazil. I grew up amidst violence, insecurity, and unstable housing and work. Later, my parents were invited by a church in Australia to minister among Latino refugees and migrants in Melbourne's inner west. I arrived in Australia in late primary or early high school, and I was deeply affected by the realities faced by refugees trying to build new lives in what is often called "the lucky country." Becoming an Australian citizen was a moment of great pride, marking the end of my statelessness, though I soon discovered that belonging within mainstream culture remained complex. As a result, I was often drawn to liminal spaces, both as a young person and into adulthood.

In 2007, I answered a call to ministry in the Uniting Church. I was privileged to be part of the Queensland Synod's pioneering Vision for Mission initiative, led by Rev Duncan McLeod. Through this program, my team and I planted a Spanish-speaking Community of Faith within the Presbytery of Moreton Rivers. Beyond worshipping in language and building a congregation, we aimed to connect with and serve a growing community of Colombian and Venezuelan migrants who

were arriving in Australia to study or escape political instability. After nearly two years, I discerned a call to ordained ministry and commenced full-time theological study.

I was ordained in the Synod of South Australia in 2014, following a formative student placement with the Adelaide Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress congregation at Salisbury. During this time, I travelled to the APY lands, sitting with First Peoples to learn their stories of struggle, resilience, and hope for reconciliation and healing of people and Country. This experience profoundly shaped my theology and practice. Social justice and advocacy became integral to my ministry, and ordination provided a platform to speak alongside CALD communities and First Peoples.

As my ministry developed, I supported the establishment of faith communities among emerging CALD groups and worked closely with First Peoples Pastors and Ministers within and beyond the Uniting Church. In 2019, I participated in the Queensland Synod's Community Organising Training, reflecting its commitment to the Queensland Community Alliance. I subsequently held the Community Organising seat on the Synod's Just Action Team until our family's relocation to Victoria in August 2025.

Through community organising, I learned the power of shared voice and collaboration beyond the walls of the church, and how standing in solidarity with marginalised people often means standing alongside Christ in his incarnational ministry.

I have also served as a Community Organising Educator with the Queensland Community Alliance, facilitating foundations training with leaders across Far North Queensland, the Hunter Valley, Sydney, and Auckland. A core value of community organising for me is its commitment to deep listening. Alliances have brought together community centres, unions, environmental groups, and diverse faith communities to discern local needs and act collectively. In a world dominated by constant noise, I have found this intentional listening and collaborative action deeply life-giving, whether through advocacy with decision-makers or mobilising community support for change.

As a Christian minister engaged in justice work, I have occasionally encountered suspicion from those outside the church because of the church's historical harms. Yet, through broad-based community organising, I have found meaningful opportunities to demonstrate my faith by listening well, learning from others, and strengthening collaboration among organisations already serving their communities.

Micah 6:8 continues to ground my ministry: to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. I am encouraged by the social justice and advocacy work I have already seen in the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania, and I hope to see its voice continue to grow. We need stronger voices advocating for the most vulnerable in our society, and I will continue to work where I can to empower the church to find its voice in that space.

BOOK REVIEW:

MARIANA MAZZUCATO, “THE COMMON GOOD ECONOMY: A NEW COMPASS” (2026)

Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value at University College London, Mariana Mazzucato, has been an advocate for governments delivering innovation and services for their citizens. She has been a fierce critic of private consultants who hollow out the public service while enriching themselves (as covered in her book, “The Big Con” (2023)).

In her latest work, *The Common Good Economy*, Mazzucato offers a positive response to the situation we find ourselves in, one that churches could align with our theology. She urges us to reclaim the term “the common good” to replace the more malleable “public interest”. While the roots of a Western concept of the “common good” rest with Greek and Roman moral philosophers, the Christian interpretation lies with the Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), who saw it as essential to the cultivation of virtue within

Christian theology. He argued the ultimate purpose of society was to guide people towards holiness and union with God. For Mazzucato, “The common good cannot be an afterthought but must be placed at the centre of all economic relationships.”

Mazzucato argues that democratic governments need to reshape markets to serve the common good over privatised profits.

She states:

It has become more and more clear to me that to successfully address the big problems we face today – such as health for all and combating climate change – we need not only an entrepreneurial state and mission-oriented policies but also a new economics of collective action around the common good. This is because all the problems we face require collaboration between different actors and collective intelligence between them. If we do not know how to work together, with collective value creation at the centre, then we cannot reach ‘good’ outcomes. And critically, that notion of ‘good’ cannot be just filling the gaps for what the private sector does not do. It must be an objective we reach together – not a correction for something that is missing.

She argues that governments need to shape markets to serve the common good, as the notion that markets are neutral is false.

She states:

Shaping markets is about steering with a clear direction: less about levelling the playing field and more about tilting it, rewarding and incentivizing projects that contribute to collective objectives. This means changing how we view government in the economy from a passive regulator to an active shaper of markets oriented around solving concrete problems – from achieving net zero to ensuring health for all.

She also argues for the need for global solidarity:

Indeed, without global solidarity and learning from experiences across the world, we end up with nationalistic policies around ‘good’ that only increase inequality, worsen geopolitical tensions and make it harder to find collective solutions to our common problems.

Mazzucato argues that to revitalise our democracies, we need to collectively pursue measures that will deliver:

- transparency of government;
- accountability for those in government who make decisions; and,
- mass participation for ordinary people.

The Common Good Economy is a book that inspires hope about positive pathways forward to address major issues of our time.

