

Ministry update for Synod 2019
Justice and International Mission Cluster

The JIM Cluster 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, and that we as a Church are acting justly.

Context

The JIM unit was brought into the new eLM unit in 2018, following the Major Strategic Review and the work of the Synod's Implementation team. This change, and the reduction / change of staff, has brought about an ongoing refocussing of our work.

The cluster 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 impact on addressing unsustainable destruction of our natural environment.

Each year the Cluster invites supporters and members of the church to indicate the topics or campaigns on which they wish to be resourced, and where they believe the Cluster staff should focus their energy. The Justice Outcomes are listed here in that order, with other additional work included in this list.

1. Justice for People Seeking Asylum

Problem: The treatment and politicisation of people seeking asylum arriving by boat in Australia has continued unabated over the last four years – extremely vulnerable people fleeing persecution, including children, are being used to score political points about 'stopping the boats'. Current policies and practices have been named a 'great moral failure' and the UCA is concerned about the Australian Government punishing those who we should be welcoming. In addition, Australia does not take enough refugees overall towards its fair share of those refugees globally that need to be resettled.

Solution: A genuine regional solution founded on the principles of protection is the right way to stop people boarding dangerous boats. The UCA's long-standing position is that detention centres on Manus and Nauru should be closed and that the claims for protection of people seeking asylum must be processed promptly, fairly and humanely with appropriate legal support on the Australian mainland.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

There have been low level online petitions, letter-writing actions and active involvement in the Palm Sunday rallies. The greatest impacts have been in being part of the campaign to get the children off Nauru, helping to stave off attempts to abolish complementary protection under the Abbott Government, supporting the increase in the humanitarian intake under the current government, pushing for the acceptance of Syrian refugees and encouraging humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which resulted in an increase in assistance.

2. Justice for First Peoples / Covenanting

Problem: First People communities, both remote and urban, experience heightened levels of disadvantage across a range of socio-economic indicators. Too many are marginalised and living in dire poverty. First People have worse health and education outcomes across the board than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

This is linked to the effects of racism on people's lives, unchecked intergenerational poverty and reduced access to basic services that other Australians take for granted. This situation is the legacy of our colonial past and the flawed, abusive and paternalistic policies that have contributed to the breakdown of First People families and communities, such as those outlined in the Stolen Generations report of over a decade ago.

Solution: Justice for First Peoples will depend on adequately resourced policies in the areas of health, housing, education, employment and welfare support. These policies must empower First People communities to address disadvantage without the imposition of 'top-down' solutions by outside welfare and government bodies. Such approaches, accompanied by a practical reconciliation process which develops the capacity of all Australians to recognise the values, culture and traditions of First Peoples, will lead to better outcomes for all.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

The cluster has campaigned for reform of the Community Development Program (CDP), which has discriminated against First People who are not in paid work. The cluster also campaigned against Fortesque Metals contesting the granting of Native Title in the Solomon Hub, with UCA Funds Management holding shares in Fortesque Metals.

3. Curbing Climate Change

Problem: The effects of climate change are already being felt. Globally we are seeing changes in food growing patterns, increase in disease, more frequent and intense flooding, heatwaves, bushfires, and reduced rainfall. Whilst we will all be affected, it is those who live in poorer countries or who are elderly, sick, or live in poor housing stock that will be hardest hit by climate change.

Solution: We need to limit the amount of warming to as far below 1.5°C as possible. The only way to do this is if all countries commit to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions quickly and deeply. As Australia's contribution, we need to shift away from a reliance on fossil fuels to renewable energy, increase efficiency in the way we use energy, and play a constructive and collaborative role in the UN negotiations to which countries will pledge their reductions.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

We have campaigned for the increase in renewable energy generation in Australia. We were also been part of the campaign against the Adani coal mine being established in Queensland. The cluster was part of a very successful campaign to improve the law that prohibits the importation of illegally logged timber into Australia, as illegal logging contributes to climate change.

4. Combating Human Trafficking and Slavery

Problem: There are goods imported into Australia by businesses where slavery and human trafficking have been involved in their production. The Federal Government has begun taking action against slavery and human trafficking in the supply chains of goods imported into Australia. During 2015 it also came to public attention that human trafficking and forced labour was also a problem in some Australian industries including agriculture, construction, hospitality and food processing, and often these situations were driven by labour hire businesses. More recently, evidence has emerged that multinational social media corporations are destroying evidence relating to human trafficking and obstructing investigations into human rights abuses.

Solution: The Federal Government introduces reasonable requirements on businesses to ensure that all goods coming into Australia are free from human trafficking and slavery. The Federal Government needs to introduce a licensing system for labour hire businesses in industries with a history of exploitation, require that migrant workers be put in contact with unions and community groups for support when they arrive in Australia and that migrant workers who have been ripped off are granted the ability to stay in Australia to pursue recovery of the lost money. Law enforcement agencies need adequate powers to compel

multinational social media corporations to co-operate in investigations into human trafficking and other human rights abuses.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 – 2019

The cluster initiated the campaign that led to the passage of the *Modern Slavery Act 2018*, that requires companies and organisations with revenues of greater than \$100 million to have to publicly report what they are doing to address the risks of human trafficking and slavery in their supply chains. The cluster has successfully campaigned for improvements to the Seasonal Worker Program to ensure people coming from the Pacific to work on Australian farms get decent pay and treatment. The cluster successfully campaigned for digital currencies to be brought under Australia's anti-money laundering laws, to curb their use in human trafficking activities.

5. Fair Trade

Problem: Many producers of agricultural goods in developing countries do not get fair prices for their products, being exploited by those further up the supply chain.

Solution: A part solution to the problem is for people to purchase products under certification schemes that guarantee that the producers get a fair price for their produce, such as Fair Trade.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

The cluster has continued to promote the take up of Fairtrade certified products by congregations.

6. Gambling Reform

Problem: Gambling businesses cause significant harm in our community. Over one in four people who gamble regularly on pokies have a gambling problem. Online gambling is a small but growing source of gambling harm in our community and there is an opportunity to rein the online gambling businesses in before they build to much power from their size.

Solution: Further reforms are needed in the design of gambling products, their accessibility and the way they are promoted to reduce the harms gambling causes.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 – 2019

The cluster was part of a successful campaign to curb gambling advertising on television, radio and online. It also successfully campaigned for additional consumer protection measures for people gambling online, including the ability to set limits on their losses, exclude themselves from further gambling, restrict inducements to gamble, and banning gambling companies from providing credit to gamblers. The cluster successfully campaigned in Victoria to reduce the amount of money that could be taken out from EFTPOS in pokie venues, ban the cashing of cheques in pokie venues and increase the number of local government areas where the number of pokies are capped. The cluster was part of the unsuccessful campaign to have pokies removed from pubs and clubs in Tasmania.

7. Ending Abuse of People with Disabilities and Mental Health Issues

Problem: Government inquiries at both State and National levels have documented horrific abuse and neglect of people with disabilities and mental health issues in the care of others. The roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) creates substantial risks of the safeguard systems being weakened and those with criminal intent being given greater opportunities to abuse and exploit people with disabilities and mental health issues. The funding model of the NDIS is putting pressure on service providers to employ people with lower qualifications and experience to care and support people with disabilities and mental health issues.

Solution: Better training of people caring for those that are disabled and who have mental health issues, better processes to exclude unsuitable people from being carers and properly resourced regulators with

adequate powers are all needed to make sure people with disabilities and mental health issues are treated with dignity.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

The cluster has successfully campaigned for the Victorian Government to commit to there being no reduction in the protection of people with disabilities and mental health issues as the National Disability Insurance Scheme is rolled out in Victoria. The cluster campaigned in support of Victorian legislation that was passed to screen people working with people with disabilities and ensure better training of those people working with people with disabilities.

8. Alcohol Reform

Problem: A lack of regulation of alcohol advertising and flaws in the taxation of alcohol by the Federal Government contribute significantly to the misuse of alcohol that causes significant harm in our society. The Victorian Government also contributes to the problem by making it too easy for businesses to get a liquor licence and failing to take adequate action against liquor outlets that behave unethically. Alcohol misuse is responsible for more than 1,200 deaths and nearly 40,000 hospitalisations in Victoria every year, and is a contributing factor in over half of all recorded family violence incidents.

Solution: Reducing accessibility of alcohol and reducing the alcohol businesses ability to push alcohol into the community.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 – 2019

Campaigning as part of the Victorian Alcohol Policy Coalition has seen the Victorian Government ban alcohol advertising within 150 m of a school and on public transport. However, more meaningful reforms are yet to be achieved.

9. Maintaining the resources for government to function for the benefit of the community

Problem: The current Federal Government is cutting funds to those who most need it and prioritising the interests of big business. They are able to do this because as a society we have largely accepted the rhetoric that the economy is important, not people. We are seeing growing inequality as wealth continues to be transferred to the already wealthy through government decisions, which in the end has poor outcomes for everyone.

Solution: We need to tell a different story. We do not have a budget problem we have a priority spending problem. Compared to other wealthy nations, we currently under-collect tax. We want an Australia where each person's potential is able to be realised, not just the wealthy few.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

The cluster's work on tax justice saw the Federal Government introduce new legislation to address tax dodging, including the requirement for country-by-country reporting of large multinational companies, increased penalties for large corporations involved in tax avoidance, public disclosure of some tax information for larger companies in Australia, tightening up laws to restrict the use of artificial debt loading as a means to shift profit offshore and automatic exchange of tax information with other tax authorities around the world.

The cluster was part of the campaign that saw the current government abandon its plans for a tax cut for large corporations.

The cluster was also part of a successful campaign to reform the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax, that will result in multinational gas corporations having to pay an estimated \$6 billion more over the next decade for the Australia's natural gas that they extract.

The cluster contributed to the campaign run with other organisations, including GetUp! and ACOSS, that saw the Federal Government reduce the overly generous superannuation concessions for the very wealthy.

The cluster helped mobilise and run a campaign that saw the Federal Government abandon its plans to privatise the current company register, which would have made it easier for the wealthy to use shell companies with concealed ownership.

10. Tax Justice for Developing Countries

Problem: Developing countries lose vast amounts of money to tax evasion and tax avoidance by multinational companies and wealthy individuals. The amounts lost are many times what is provided in aid.

Solution: Governments working together to close tax evasion loopholes from developing countries would allow many of them to be self-sufficient with minimal need for overseas aid. Public pressure and greater tax transparency have also been shown to curb tax dodging activities by corporations.

The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

The cluster successfully campaigned for the Australian government to be part of an international treaty to curb tax evasion and avoidance by multinational corporations, with the treaty having some benefits for developing countries.

11. End Christian Persecution

Problem: Christians continue to suffer persecution in parts of the world for the practice of their faith. Secular human rights groups often do not take up cases involving the persecution of Christians. Right-wing Christian groups from the US seek to use such cases in some of the Synod's congregations to promote anti-Muslim messages.

Solution: Governments around the world respect people's rights to freedom of religion and freedom to express opinions that flow from religious beliefs (within the limits of these freedoms not harming others). The cluster produces material to take away the need of congregations to have to rely on material produced by right-wing Christian groups on this issue.

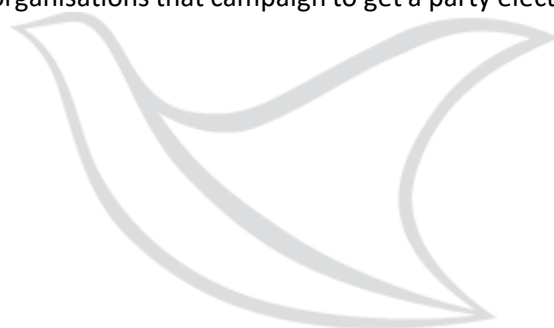
The JIM Unit's contribution. 2017 - 2019

The Unit maintains a network of people who write letters for cases in which Christians overseas have been subjected to severe persecution. Letter-writing actions are usually issued once a month. The actions put the cases in a wider human rights context and the network offers members of the Uniting Church concerned about the persecution of Christians an alternative to anti-Muslim Christian organisations that offer prayer actions.

12. Government and Corporate Transparency

Problem: The Australian Government provides laws granting a higher level of secrecy to the activities of businesses operating in Australia compared to many other countries around the world. This hampers civil society groups and journalists from holding businesses to account for actions that cause harm both in Australia and overseas. Shell companies with hidden ownership are used to hide those who profit off great harm inflicted on people through human trafficking, forced labour, tax evasion, theft of public money, fraud, and bribery.

Solution: The Australian Government change laws to provide greater transparency over the activities of Australian businesses and political donations. The government restrict reforms on political donations to target political parties, their associated entities and those organisations that campaign to get a party elected or not elected.



The JIM Cluster's contribution 2017 - 2019

The cluster was part of a successful campaign that saw the introduction of laws at the Federal level to restrict anonymous donations to political parties and their affiliated organisations, as well as ban foreign donations.

13. Reforms to Protect People from Pay Day Lenders and Consumer Lease Companies

Problem: Pay day lenders and consumer lease companies prey on vulnerable people in the community, exploiting them to boost their profits.

Solution: The Commonwealth Government needs to strengthen the laws and regulations that govern the practices of pay day lenders and consumer lease businesses.

The JIM Cluster Contribution 2017 – 2019

The cluster was part of the campaign for these reforms, but the Coalition Government failed to proceed with their own reform legislation, which included very worthwhile improvements.

14. International Mission

The Unit continues to work in collaboration with UnitingWorld on international mission issues, including assisting in fund raising for projects being supported by UnitingWorld with partner churches.

In addition the Unit maintains a relationship with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). The Unit has been supporting the UCCP in its concerns about the human rights and environmental impacts of mining projects in the Philippines.

The Unit is resourcing UnitingWorld in its partnership with the churches in West Papua to address issues of human rights abuses by Indonesian security forces and dispossession of the Indigenous people of their land.

Connecting with Congregations and Supporters

Communications and Capacity Building

The JIM Cluster continues to publish a bi-monthly newsletter JustACT (available online at www.justact.org.au) to update stakeholders on campaign outcomes and justice news. JustAct remains a key component of the JIM cluster's communication engagement strategy, and print versions are available to subscribers. JustUPDATE, A fortnightly e-news update, is emailed to around 5,000 registered recipients, informing them of events and contemporary news. To subscribe to either of these, please contact us at JIM@victas.uca.org.au.

JIM Cluster staff continue to offer interactive workshops where supporters are able to gain campaigning skills and increase their general knowledge of advocacy. Community members outside of the church are also welcomed at these workshops, which assists local congregations build networks in their communities. The workshops also give supporters an opportunity to provide feedback to the cluster on how our work is going. Capacity building workshops have been offered on Asylum Seeker campaigning and Climate Change campaigning. Recently, we have been offering workshops with an election theme, to help Congregations to run their own candidates' forums.

JIM Cluster staff are available to speak to anyone around the work of the Cluster, to offer workshops or advice, or to engage in conversations about how we might move towards 'Seeking Justice for All' through congregations, presbyteries, the Synod, and the wider church community.

Convention

The Justice Conventions were held in 2017 and 2018, continuing the work of listening, learning and encouraging each other in the work of Seeking Justice for All.

- 2017: Building Bridges, Not Walls

With this theme the Justice Cluster wanted to incorporate issues around the growing right wing nationalist trends around the world, and link that to social harmony in Australia. The key note speech was delivered by Joseph Camilleri OAM, and workshops included Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, Human Rights in an era of growing nationalism, and a Communications Master Class- capacity building for social justice groups. There were approximately 100 people at this event .

- 2018: Growing Peaceful Communities

The keynote speaker was Rev Dr Sean Winter, Head of Pilgrim Theological College. Panelists included Ziona Walker-Nthenda, diversity inclusion specialist and Inspector Mark Nichols from Victoria police.

The theme was centred on peace and how to achieve it at the family level and at the international level. Workshops included: Family Violence; how to spot it and what to do about it as a church, run by Wendy Adams from the Manningham Uniting Church; Marginalised Communities and Violence, run by youth advocate Afadang Akuey alongside Denisse Sandoval; Mark Zirnsak ran workshops on Youth Justice, and the risk of privatisation in Disability care. We had around 90 people attend this event.

Finally

We give thanks for the life and passion of Jill Cooper Ruzbacky, who was a JIM staff member until her death in April 2018. Many people in our church were impacted by her love for justice, and her hope for reconciliation with First Peoples.

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