



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Dear Friends in Christ,

In recent times we have seen both of our major political parties committed to a policy of deterrence when it comes to the treatment of people seeking asylum on the shores of Australia, rather than policies that uphold and respect the human dignity of those who flee persecution in their homelands and seek protection in Australia.

In the last few weeks we have all been further dismayed at the events unfolding on Manus Island, resulting in injuries and the tragic death of Reza Berati, a young Iranian man who came to Australia seeking safety and protection but who was instead, killed while in detention.

As a nation we must do better than this! As a Church we have a long history of positive engagement and advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. We have maintained a longstanding opposition to statements that demonise or vilify vulnerable men, women and children who often have no voice of their own.

In 2000 the Uniting Church National Assembly committed the UCA to ongoing support for refugee and asylum seeker resettlement in Australia; and to affirm the need for fair, humanitarian, adequately resourced and culturally appropriate government policies and procedures for the processing of refugees and asylum seekers both within Australia and overseas. That commitment is just as relevant today, perhaps even more so.

Last year I joined many people from across the Synod at rallies and vigils in support of asylum seekers, and at services of lament which expressed our shared frustration and abject disappointment at the failure to find a humane response to the plight of asylum seekers.

As a Church we will continue to speak out publicly for a more compassionate response to asylum seekers, and to that end I am writing to strongly encourage people from your congregation to consider attending the upcoming **"Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees"** events, to be held on Sunday 13 April.

I have also enclosed a Palm Sunday Theological Reflection prepared by Rev. Dr. Garry Deverell, which includes a strong call to pray for deep congruence between our participation in the liturgical life of our congregations on Palm Sunday morning; and 'taking to the streets' to advocate for justice and compassion towards refugees and asylum seekers.

The Melbourne-based walk will commence at 2pm at the State Library in Swanston Street. Rev. Alistair Macrae from Wesley Uniting Church has invited participating UCA people to gather at 1.30pm at Wesley in Lonsdale Street, and 'process' down to the rally together. Congregations are invited to bring banners of support with either their congregation's name or a message of refugee support, or to gather behind the Synod's banner which will also be prominent on the day.

Further information about the walk is available, including information that you can give people in your congregation. I would also encourage you to join the Synod's Asylum Seeker Support Network, which will keep you up to date on the work that both the Synod and National Uniting Church is doing in this area. For either of these things please contact Jill Ruzbacky in the Commission for Mission on 9251 5266 or jill.ruzbacky@victas.uca.org.au

This issue will require a sustained effort. I urge you to take encouragement from the words found in Galatians 6:9:

“Let us not become weary in doing good,
for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”.

Grace and Peace,



Dan Wootton

Moderator

