

Speaking out for children in detention

Dear Friends

We are writing to invite your congregation to participate in an appeal to your local Federal Members of Parliament to end the practice of indefinite child detention. Each month, for the remainder of the year, we will be asking the congregations in two to three Presbyteries to engage in concentrated letter writing.

This action is a part of our Give Hope campaign, an initiative of the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and the ACT's Social Justice Forum. As you know the Give Hope campaign seeks an end to child detention and for all asylum seekers to be treated with dignity and compassion.

On May 19th 2014, our Moderator, the Rev Dr Brian Brown, made his personal commitment to this cause clear. Together with four other Uniting Church Ministers, two Catholic priests, a nun, two Baptist pastors and an Anglican Priest, he took part in a prayer protest against asylum seeker policy in the office of the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott. After politely refusing to leave, the group were arrested by police and escorted from the premises. A similar prayer vigil took place at the same time in the office of the Opposition leader, Bill Shorten.



The Rev Dr Brian Brown leaving Prime Minister Tony Abbott's office

Commenting on the reasons for their action the group stated it was “in response to Australia’s cruel treatment of asylum seekers and an appeal to the two major parties to end the tragedy of offshore detention, especially for children”. Rev Brown said their group believed that, “to be silent is to be complicit in the injustices being perpetrated against asylum seekers.”

We are asking other Uniting Church members to join this call for change.

We ask that you encourage members of your congregation to write letters to their local Federal Member of Parliament urging an end to child detention.

To assist, we have enclosed the following material:

- An information sheet on child detention outlining the impacts and benefits of processing asylum claims in the community (the alternative that the Uniting Church supports).
- A paper titled “Why Churches Care about Asylum Seekers”, by Rev Elenie Poulos, Director UnitingJustice Australia that provides a theological background to the Uniting Church position on asylum seekers.

- A sample letter for those who would like some guidance on what to say (but not to be copied)
- Tips for writing your own letter

If you don't know who your local Federal member is or their contact details you can find them here: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

The Social Justice Forum recognises that Uniting Church members hold a range of views on this issue. So the decision to take part is entirely up to the individual. However, please consider the example of our leaders and the deep concern that our church as a whole has expressed about our nation's treatment of asylum seekers.

Some ways that you could put this action into practice in your congregation

- Hold a letter writing afternoon or evening. Provide some food, make the background information available and provide letter writing material and stamps
- Highlight the issue of asylum seekers in a worship service and make material available for people to take home.
- Ask fellowship, bible study, youth or other groups within the church to write letters as part of their group's normal activities during the month
- Ask an existing social justice or social issues group to lead letter writing activities for the month within the congregation

Congregations wanting to go further might consider arranging a meeting with their local Federal member to express their concerns. Here is a link to a Micah Challenge information sheet on 'How to Visit a Politician' that may be useful:

[http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/assets/pdf/Action-Guide-\(VISIT-A-POLITICIAN\).pdf](http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/assets/pdf/Action-Guide-(VISIT-A-POLITICIAN).pdf)

More information

If you have any questions about this initiative or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact Jon O'Brien, Social Justice Advocacy Coordinator, UnitingCare NSW.ACT on (02) 9407 3225 or Email joobrien@unitingcarenswact.org.au

It may be possible for a member of the Give Hope team to speak about this initiative in a worship service or at a meeting of the church council or other interested group within your congregation. If you are interested please contact Jon O'Brien (as above) or the Give Hope team.

The Give Hope team

Socialjustice@unitingcarenswact.org.au