

## **Main Activities 2016**

### **1) Letters of Concern & Petitions**

Letters of concern, supported by interested congregational members were forwarded to:

- \* the Federal government regarding the Inadequacy of Social security payments to Single parents & their children; Asylum Seeker Policy (as an outcome from the Ecumenical Lenten Bible Studies); Possible privatization of Medicare & PBS Claims & Payment IT services; High Rates of Incarceration of Indigenous People; investor State Dispute Provisions of TransPacific Partnership Agreement & urging an end to organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience & persecution of meditation practitioners in China (on behalf of the Falun Gong (Falun Dafa) Association of Australia Inc.)
- \* the State government regarding Allegations of Abuse in the Disability Sector & Institutional Settings & Ending Sexual Assault & Harassment in Victorian Mental Health Facilities
- \* A Petition from the Alliance for Gambling Reform regarding Con-Free Footy, AFL was processed.

### **2) Submissions & Follow-up Action**

- \* To the City of Greater Bendigo's (CoGB) Cultural Diversity & Inclusion Plan 2016-19
- \* To the CoGB's Draft Reconciliation Action Plan
- \* Discussions with relevant State Government Minister & Secretary, Bendigo Trades Hall Council regarding possibility of having a launch of the final Report of Inquiry into the Labour Hire Industry & Insecure Work, October 2015.
- \* Comments on draft Paper on Payment Difficulties Safety Net as part of Victorian Energy Hardship Inquiry, September 2015.

### **3) Indigenous People**

The 2016 NAIDOC Celebrations were supported by Bruce Keeling & Garth Phillips attending the Aboriginal Flag presentation & morning tea sponsored by the City of Greater Bendigo.

\*The flag continues to be flown continuously.

\* Cluster Councils were encouraged to support the 2017 NAIDOC celebrations & Indigenous flag flying

### **4) Karen Refugee People**

\* The culturally appropriate Vegetable Garden established as a partnership between St Andrews & some of the Karen refugee People has continued, as does its changed role-contributing to the life of newly arriving Karen refugees transitioning into the wider community.

\* Whilst not falling directly within the mandate of the Group, it continues to be pleasing to note the level of support provided by significant numbers of the St Andrews faith community to some of our Karen people via a range of activities, principally homework support for the children.

### **5) Representation on Other Groups**

Membership of the Disability Accommodation Working Group sponsored by the Federal Member for Bendigo continued.

A productive link between a member of this Group (Quality Living Options) & Marong UC re the possible use of the latter's under-utilized land was established.

## **6) Homelessness & Social Housing**

\* A Response to the City of Greater Bendigo's (CoGB) Housing Strategy - Issues & Opportunities Discussion Paper was made.

\* Conversations have continued with the CoGB's Strategy Unit with respect to the development of a Social Housing Policy

## **7) Synod's Justice & International (JIM) Unit Annual Convention**

The Group was represented at the Annual Convention.

Subsequently, requested advice was provided on the Unit's proposed work priorities.

## **8) Refugee & Asylum Seeker Issues**

\* The 4 banners supporting Asylum Seekers were displayed at Eaglehawk, Chum St., Neale St & St Andrews UC's & rotated on roughly a quarterly basis.

\* Ruth & Garth attended the Forum organized by the Bendigo Chapter of Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR). Garth gave a presentation on St Andrews UC contribution to the settlement of Refugees in Bendigo & attempts to attain compassionate Federal Government policies with respect to Asylum Seekers & Refugees.

## **9) Other Matters**

\* Opposition was formulated against the proposal by the Board of Uniting Care to change the Organization's name to "Uniting".

\* Discussions with Rev Di Esbensen & Rob Dagleish (Presbytery Minister, Administration) were initiated regarding the possibility of encouraging Wintringham Housing to establish a service in Bendigo.

\* Discussions were held with the Chairperson, St Kilda UC Parish Mission regarding the possibility of borrowing the Streetscape Project "Deterrence" for display in Bendigo at Easter 2017.

## **10) Social Justice Sunday 2016**

A service was held at St Andrew's with Reflections on Supporting Refugees with Jan Govett from Bendigo Rural Australians for Refugees.