

ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH

SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY – 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2018

A PLACE TO CALL HOME: MAKING A HOME FOR EVERYONE IN OUR LAND

How do we respond?

Faithful discipleship includes seeking ways to implement our understanding of economic justice. This involves questioning beliefs which define wealth too narrowly and restrict enjoyment of the many gifts God has provided. It also includes challenging those practices and systems that lead to brokenness and distortions in communal life and undermine the wellbeing of the whole. The growing division in the availability of decent, secure, and affordable housing has become such an issue.

(Uniting Church Social Justice forum)

THE UNITING CHURCH AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Uniting NSW/ACT has been actively involved in an affordable housing campaign since 2015. You might remember that St Ninian's and other churches in the Canberra Region Presbytery as well as other Presbyteries throughout NSW took part in a number of table talks on affordable housing in our regions to help guide the Synod's work. Among other issues St Ninian's reported that for its demographic there was stress of transition from independent housing to dependent aged care, selling one's home didn't always cover the cost of senior's accommodation, difficulties for older single women who may have no or inadequate super. During this time Uniting has partnered with the Sydney Alliance to raise awareness of the need for more affordable housing and bring about change.

*If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat our fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.
(James 1, 15-17)*

Uniting has met with political leaders and members of parliament and made submissions to government reviews. It has also begun meeting with local councils and holding community forums in different locations across Greater Sydney in the leadup to state elections next March..

Positive steps recommended by Uniting and its partners that could be taken by governments that could significantly improve provision of secure and affordable housing are:

1. Develop a long-term social and affordable housing plan
2. Legislate for "inclusionary zoning" in new developments – to set aside legally enforceable minimum percentages of units for low-moderate-income- affordable rental.
3. End "no grounds" evictions in NSW law which leave low-income renters unnecessarily vulnerable

Public meetings have been held to rally community members to join the campaign for affordable housing.

Earlier this year the NSW Government agreed to its first-ever commitment to legislated affordable rental targets in new developments. See report in Insights 22/3/2018. It will not be enough housing but it is a step in the right direction urged by Uniting.

THE UNITING CHURCH AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN THE ACT

LOCALLY in the ACT the Presbytery Social Action group has been working over a couple of years on a response to the ACT Government Discussion Paper on Housing in the ACT

This discussion paper included 4 goals and ways of achieving these goals.

1. Reducing Homelessness
2. Strengthening Social Housing Assistance
3. Increasing Affordable Rental Housing
4. Increasing Affordable Home Ownership

SAFE SHELTER

We have probably all heard of Safe Shelter. This began because of the enthusiasm and passion of the Rev. Myung Hwa Park and her late husband Brendan Kennedy. After much deliberation with government and finally with the help of Uniting, St Columba's opened its hall to bed homeless men during the winter months in the ACT. Initially it was available on a couple of nights per week at St Columba's only but is now available in 3 locations every night of the week during winter. The latest report for August this year says that 190 homeless men were guests over the 31 days.

EARLY MORNING CENTRE

The Canberra City Uniting Church addresses homelessness issues and provides a warm safe space and friendly people at its Early Morning Centre which opens each week day from 7.30am – 8.30am to provide breakfast. It also supplies support and referral services and office facilities including desk, phone, computer with Internet access, post office box address and safe collection point for mail

ST NINIAN'S

St Ninian's holds regular clothing sales where clean clothes are sold cheaply enabling those on low incomes to cloth their families

USE OF CHURCH LAND FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

ST JAMES, CURTIN AND ITS ONGOING DETERMINATION

I am not sure if others here know about the ongoing determination of the members of St James to provide affordable accommodation on a block of land in Curtin.

Because of an agreement with the local Anglicans to share church buildings, part of St James' original 1960s grant of land in Curtin was never built on. St James has been exploring ways to use this land ever since but always failing because of financial or planning constraints. Five years ago a group called MyHome in Canberra approached them to ask if the land was available for housing for people with an enduring mental illness, housing much in short supply in Canberra. They agreed subject to certain conditions. Progress was slow, but a milestone was the commitment in the 2016 ACT Parliamentary Agreement between the Greens and Labor to build a MyHome type residential complex (though no site mentioned).

The proposal has developed further over the past couple of years. One factor has been the preparation of the Curtin Group Centre Master Plan which has highlighted the value of the block as a community asset suitable for various types of housing. Another factor has been the increased involvement of Uniting with its expertise in major residential projects and its interest in providing affordable housing on church land. They are now talking about developing the whole block which would involve demolishing the existing church manse. It has taken years but we now have the keen interest of government - both housing and planning authorities - in the development of a large mixed housing (supported accommodation, affordable housing and market-related housing) development on the site. After four decades we hope that the next 12 months will finally see this valuable property put to good community use.

SOUTH WODEN

South Woden Uniting Church supports a refugee family who live in the manse at heavily subsidised rental. This family receives no government support and very much appreciates the care given by South Woden Uniting Church.

ST. MARGARET'S

St Margaret's built Ross Walker Lodge – supported residential accommodation for people with intellectual disability.

ST AIDAN'S

St Aidan's Court Retirement on St Aidan's land in Narrabundah.

ACT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The May 2018 rental affordability index found that low income households in the ACT pays particularly unaffordable rents – Canberra was the 2nd least affordable area for almost all lower income household types behind greater Sydney.

On census night in 2016, 1,596 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in the ACT. Of these 54 were rough sleeping. For every 10,000 people in the ACT 40.2 people were homeless significantly higher than reported rates in 2001 which was 30.4.

In 2016-17 ACT specialist homelessness services assisted 4,585 clients of whom 46.1% (2,053) were homeless.

On any given day in 2017, 42 specialist homelessness services in the ACT were supporting 1,500 clients.

In 2016-17 for 32.6% (1,084) of clients needing accommodation, that need was unmet.

HOW A LIFE CAN SUDDENLY CHANGE (an excerpt)

My husband did not come home from work one day. He had died after he got to the office, suddenly and very unexpectedly.

Now I was widowed, unemployed, a single mother with one child in his first year of school and the other only just walking. I had no family in town. The mortgage suddenly seemed impossible. I owed money on the newer car and the bills kept coming in. We needed to eat and stay warm. I have a chronic health condition that needs careful management. I had no other source of income. We were also all severely traumatised, so what was once easy and regular became confusing, exhausting and even impossible. (from Stories of Home published by ACT Shelter and ACTCOSS)

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FINDING A WAY BACK (an excerpt)

I suffered a bit of depression from that. When my partner moved on I stayed for about five months, but I was struggling to pay the rent on one income – before that we were both working.

I left and went to my Pop who is suffering emphysema down on the farm. Unfortunately, his health declined and he is now in a nursing home.

I've tried to find private rents but I can't really afford it on my wage. I've looked online and done a lot of searching. I've read the paper. The people here at the refuge have been helping me look. But what's available is too expensive or too far out at Queanbeyan which is difficult as I don't have my licence at this time.

I've got anxiety and depression so being in a house around people who might be violent, drunk or on drugs is not good for me. I'm doing a lot of counselling to help me manage my anxiety and depression. Since then I've been couch surfing and living in a car. It was terrible. If it was rainy or a hot day it was awful. Even trying to make a cup of coffee or eating in the car. At the time I had my dog with me as well. It was not something you would choose to do if you had options. Every time you hear a noise or something you get woken up. You don't know if a group of people are going to come up and have a go at you. (from Stories of Home published by ACT Shelter and ACTCOSS)

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited. (Matthew 25:35-36)