

UNITINGWORLD

UPDATE
ISSUE 1
2023

*Sharing a new vision
for our region*

The next generation
of leaders take action.



UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

Pictured: Youth representatives from our partner churches, UnitingWorld staff and young people from the Uniting Church at Parliament house to raise their voices about poverty and injustice in our region.

Young leaders connect to share their vision for our region



Representatives from eight of our partner churches in the Pacific and young people from the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) were part of the inaugural Pacific Australian Emerging Leaders Summit (PAELS), held in Canberra in December.

100 young people from 14 countries were brought together by Micah Australia* and the Pacific Conference of Churches to build relationships and advocate for the issues that matter to them.

Through the generosity of UnitingWorld supporters, we were able to sponsor two young women from our partner church in West Papua to join the delegation. They shared powerful stories from their homeland during

the Summit, and also visited a Uniting Church in Canberra that is home to a large West Papuan diaspora.

The first two days of PAELS were led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders. The delegates spent the first two days listening, learning, sharing their cultures and experiences and being trained and equipped for political advocacy.

The deep conversations and learning from First Peoples continued as the delegates were invited to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, where they received a generous welcome and storytelling from Elders.

Then over two days in Parliament House, delegates shared a vision for 'healthy environments, empowered young people, and flourishing communities across the Pacific region' with 84 Members of Parliament. During the meetings, delegates shared their personal stories and heard from our nation's leaders about their own experiences and hopes for our region.

Climate change, gender equality, self-determination, youth empowerment and economic recovery were key issues that the delegates brought to their meetings in Parliament.

It was also a chance for representatives from our partner churches from Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Samoa, the Solomon Islands and West Papua to meet with UCA and UAICC members.

PAELS was an initiative funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Office of the Pacific and coordinated by Micah Australia.



Raúl Sugunanathan
Uniting Church in Australia
Pictured with Kim Allen,
United Church in Papua New Guinea

"Connecting with leaders from across Australia and the Pacific was such a valuable experience because it showed me the vibrancy and diversity of the church beyond my Inner-West Sydney bubble.

Through the amazing young leaders I met, I learnt first-hand that God is moving through the leadership of First Nations communities from Arnhem Land to Sydney. God is moving through the Pasifika songs and stories woven throughout their island nations and diaspora communities. God is moving through the courage and determination of people striving for self-determination across our region."



Hayden Charles
Wiradjuri man and Uniting Church in Australia member
Pictured with Remwata Nokite,
Kiribati Uniting Church

"I had the privilege to be in a group with members from Sydney and Kiribati to share our vision of the region with four parliamentarians.

Our shared vision will be the focus of the world in a couple of years and that's why we started these conversations in 2022. I hope we as leaders in the Pacific will work side-by-side to keep the conversations at the forefront of these parliamentarians and keep working to build sustainable partnerships in our region.

I would like to thank the team at Micah and all the partners that helped bring together this amazing group of young leaders."



Tetavaa Namoto
Tuvalu Christian Church

"It was such a great experience to share some of the issues affecting my home and our islands.

We have experienced cyclones, drought, climate change and sea-level rise. They say we can migrate, but I don't want to be a refugee. I think that when we lose our land, we would lose our culture too.

We pray, pray, pray that climate change won't happen and won't affect future generations.

I love meeting other young people [at events like this] because we can share stories and it makes me realise there are more people struggling and also working for change."



Grace Talei Tuiono
Fijian-Australian Uniting Church in Australia member

"No one has the same story. Every story is unique in their own way, and every voice is important.

I want to use my voice to tell people of different abilities that they matter. And as a young woman, I want to tell the world, 'You can do it! You have skills and abilities to contribute.'

I learned that perspective from my mother and father, who've never just seen my disability – they see God in me.

I am so grateful that God gave me a voice to share here at Parliament and make a difference. Not everybody gets that opportunity.

I may fall, I may fail, but God gave me the ability and a choice to take it. And when I take it, I believe God will provide for me along the way."

* UnitingWorld is a member of Micah Australia, a coalition of churches and Christian organisations raising a powerful voice for justice and a world free from poverty.

Update from India



"I want to become a basketball champion when I grow up!" said Lakshmi when asked about her aspirations for future. Like Lakshmi, many adolescent girls living in the Durgapur slum community want to pursue careers that defy gender norms and stereotypes.*

She attends a study centre that is part of the Community Development Program run by our partner, the Diocese of Durgapur. The study centre provides the girls with a safe space to learn, connect, practice extracurricular activities, and share their goals and aspirations for the future with their mentors.

Places like these are so valuable in India, allowing those who are traditionally excluded from opportunities to grow and develop into adulthood.

Religious and caste discrimination is one of the leading causes of poverty and social exclusion in India, and this project exists to empower marginalised and economically disadvantaged communities by improving access to quality education, health services, livelihoods and government entitlements.

Looking at the unique needs of adolescents and youth, the project is now looking to expand its scope to include health, education, and career counselling to improve opportunities and prospects for young people.

Your support makes it happen! The sale of Everything in Common 'schoolbooks' cards enables this project to grow and these girls to pursue their dreams. Thank you!

Beyond the study centres, we're supporting the Diocese of Durgapur to offer skills training to marginalised women and farmers so they can build sustainable incomes close to where they live, as well as providing communities with access to and information about a range of government services and schemes.

Thanks to your support, our partners are helping communities to become empowered, organised, educated and healthy, involved in local governance and capable of accessing government services and schemes. The project impacted the lives of more than 4,000 people in the last financial year.

**Name changed for privacy*

Everything in Common



Thank you for sharing Everything in Common

Everything in Common 2022 was a great success. 92 churches hosted gift stalls across Australia and we sold 3406 gift cards. Every card sale and donation through Everything in Common is helping our partners fight poverty and build hope in the world. **Thank you so much for your support.**

Cards are still available at www.everythingincommon.com.au – you don't need to wait until next Christmas to give a meaningful gift to your loved ones.

lentevent

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO PRAY, LIVE SIMPLY AND GIVE THIS LENT

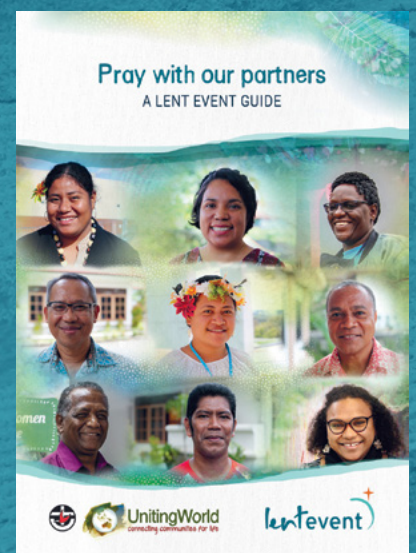
Lent is a season to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, seeking to practise a life focused on prayer, simplicity and generosity. It's a precious opportunity to step back from the noise, take some intentional time and fix our hearts on what we can do to love our neighbours and heal a hurting world. Through Lent Event, we hope to raise \$300,000 to support the life-changing work of our partners.

Visit www.lentevent.com.au to access free resources, make a donation, or to set yourself a fundraising challenge. Together we can make a big difference.

Lent Event 2023 Prayer Guide

For one of our resources, we asked our church partners from around the world how we can support them in prayer over the season of Lent. Their responses allow us to pray in solidarity, but also to learn about their struggles and what they long to see in their communities. Through this journey, we hope you feel more connected to the global body of Christ and how God is moving through it.

Get your copy from www.lentevent.com.au



UNITING WORLD SUNDAY

A CELEBRATION OF
OUR GLOBAL NEIGHBOURS

Based on the feedback you've given us, we're launching a new initiative called UnitingWorld Sunday to help churches deepen relationships with our global partners and celebrate all that we do together.

Save the date – **Sunday 7 May 2023** (or you can do it any time to suit your calendar). Watch out for more details!

www.unitingworld.org.au/sunday

MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR



A season of change

There's change in the air. Maybe you feel it.

For the longest time, an elephant in the room of Australia's contributions to end world poverty has been the question: what about the struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here at home?

This was a challenge and reminder posed to the whole UnitingWorld team by Professor Anne-Pattel Gray, UCA theologian and Aboriginal leader, who was a special guest presenter at our annual team week in February.

Her words were not bitter or angry, they were deeply introspective, herself having travelled to do mission and community development work among Dalit peoples in India.

While there, she was struck by her relative privilege, and realised how difficult it can be when you are well-meaning, but ultimately have little connection to people's unique experiences of poverty, racism and injustice.

It led her to focus on what Christianity has to say about the value and dignity of all life, and the call on Christians to be a "transforming presence" from inside the dominant system – to turn oppression and domination into justice.

It's a calling to work that has no borders or postcodes because it's about *who we are*.

Her words made me think of you, and the thousands of people touched by this mission we do in partnership with the global church. In our constantly changing world, we can't pit local and global issues against each other – we need to address suffering and injustice wherever we can, with whatever skills we can bring.

The young leaders who attended the Micah Summit understand this, and their commitment to embedding justice for First Peoples within their vision of our region is truly inspiring.

Our international partners understand it too, always eager to meet, honour and gain the wisdom of the First Peoples who cared for this land for millennia.

We've started a conversation within UnitingWorld about how to strengthen links between our partners and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and embed a First Nations perspective into our work.

Change is happening in our government too, with the search for an Ambassador for First Nations People going on as I write.

As the national conversation about Voice, Treaty and Truth goes forward, I hope and pray that whatever happens, we Christians would strive to be that "transforming presence" alongside First Peoples that Professor Pattel-Gray described.

When I asked her what gives her hope for the change she works for, she gave my whole team this encouragement: "**my hope comes from the Creator, who has the power to transform people and communities.**"

Amen.

Dr Sureka Goringe
National Director
UnitingWorld

P.S. Thank you so much to everyone who supported Everything in Common by running stalls or buying gifts for Christmas. And thank you to everyone who is right now praying and acting in love and solidarity with our partners as part of Lent Event. It makes such a huge difference.

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UnitingWorld is an agency of
the Uniting Church in Australia.

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