



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Social Justice Network



PEACE IN THE MARKETPLACE

So all may live in dignity

SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2012

From the General Secretary

Throughout the scriptures there are accounts of people who experience economic hardship due to the structures of the day that disadvantage the worker, the widow and those who are oppressed by society.

In 1 Kings 17 there is the meeting of the prophet Elijah and the widow at Zarephath. She is in a place of disadvantage as a widow. She has no opportunity to earn a living and her resources are nearly exhausted when Elijah comes and requests she makes a little cake for him to eat.

Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." (1 Kings 17:13-14)

Using the little she had — to be present at the point of possibility — she provided for Elijah. This is similar to where many find themselves today, wondering how the few resources that they have will be sufficient to provide for them and their family.

Our current world economic situation is the subject of many books, lengthy media commentary and diverse expert opinions posing many questions. "Are we prospering, are we doomed, is the demand for our mineral resources going to last, how much of Australia's natural landscape and ecology can be sacrificed to support our economic growth?" Is the concept of economic growth outdated since it is severely altering the natural world? How do we grapple with the unintended consequences?

These are the big questions of our times.

The World Council of Churches addressed these issues at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2011. The document "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace" was considered by the Convocation. It identifies four themes: peace in the community, peace with the earth, peace in the marketplace and peace among the peoples. The 2012 Social Justice Sunday resource focuses on Peace in the marketplace, drawing attention to the economic structures that govern Australia and much of the world.

The Christian churches are part of these structures and hold a significant place in our society, including influence in their local communities.

This resource is not going to provide the answers for our troubled world economic framework. However, we hope that our parishes and communities will consider our theme this Social Justice Sunday and reflect on the role that each of us has in shaping the future.

The churches have a long history in the teaching of values which have stood the test of time and which guide us in the basics and essentials of our daily lives. When we identify and extend all our small-scale, local efforts that contribute to peace in the marketplace, change is possible. I hope that congregations will discover ways to be present at the point of possibility in their community.

Have a hopeful Social Justice Sunday!

Grace and Peace



Tara Curlewis

General Secretary

National Council of Churches in Australia



The global economy often provides many examples of structural violence that victimises not through the direct use of weapons or physical force but by passive acceptance of widespread poverty, trade disparities and inequality among classes and nations.

In contrast to unfettered economic growth as envisioned by the neoliberal system, the Bible signals a vision of life in abundance for all. The churches must learn to advocate more effectively for full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights as the foundation for "economies of life".

It is a scandal that enormous amounts of money are spent on military budgets and toward providing weapons for allies and the arms trade while this money is urgently needed to eradicate poverty around the globe, and to fund an ecologically and socially responsible reorientation of the world economy. We urge the governments of this world to take immediate action to redirect their financial resources to programs that foster life rather than death. We encourage the churches to adopt common strategies toward transforming economies. The churches must address more effectively irresponsible concentration of power and wealth as well as the disease of corruption. Steps toward just and sustainable economies include more effective rules for the financial market, the introduction of taxes on financial transactions and just trade relationships.

Statement from the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation 2011

How do we measure real progress as a nation?

“Gross National Product measures everything, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

What kind of society do we want and what do we measure as we track our progress towards this vision?

The measure of our progress as a nation that drives the development of Australian economic and social policy is Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is the monetary value of all officially recognised final goods and services produced within a country each year.

The Australian Government releases GDP figures every quarter. If GDP is rising, we are, according to this model, making good progress as a nation. If it's falling or steady, then our progress as a nation has stalled or is regressing. But is GDP the right measure of our nation's progress?

GDP figures measure the financial value of all goods and services produced within a country, including those such as tobacco, landfill, funerals and missiles.

There are many aspects of our lives, however, that are not captured by GDP. GDP does not measure, for example, our physical and mental wellbeing, the quality of our education, living standards

and social relationships, the extent of unpaid and volunteer work in the community and the state of our natural resources and environment. It does not account for the still shocking disparity between the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians and other Australians.

The firmly entrenched belief that continual economic growth as measured by GDP is the best and only way to measure and direct a nation's progress is not only inadequate but also increasingly destructive. There is rising evidence of the many problems caused or exacerbated by governments' unwavering commitments to continual economic growth. When our progress is measured solely in this way, we easily lose sight of the costs of such unrestrained growth, including environmental damage, inequality, the weakening of community values and the destabilisation of global financial structures.

There is a growing understanding of the need to develop alternative measures of progress that take account of equity and sustainability and that explicitly value the non-material assets that are the true reflection of our wealth and wellbeing.

The idea of a new measure of progress is not new. There is a constantly growing global movement to redefine progress. Bhutan, the most well-known example, has been measuring its progress in terms of a Gross National Happiness Index since 1972. Its index measures health, psychological wellbeing, time use, education, cultural diversity, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and living standards.

In Australia, a new project is under way to define, measure and understand genuine progress. The Australian National Development Index (ANDI) has brought together people from 40 leading community organisations, churches, businesses and universities to produce a holistic measure of progress that will reflect the community's vision of what kind of society we should be striving to become and the priorities for what should be measured in relation to our genuine progress as a nation.

Sarah Harrison, UnitingJustice Australia, Uniting Church in Australia



The Church's social doctrine holds that authentically human social relationships of friendship, solidarity and reciprocity

can also be conducted within economic activity, and not only outside it or "after" it. The economic sphere is neither ethically neutral, nor inherently inhuman and opposed to society. It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner.

The great challenge before us, accentuated by the problems of development in this global era and made even more urgent by the economic and financial crisis, is to demonstrate, in thinking and behaviour, not only that traditional principles of social ethics like transparency, honesty and responsibility cannot be ignored or attenuated, but also that in commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity.

Pope Benedict XVI (2009), Caritas in Veritate, Encyclical Letter On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, n. 36.

An economy for people and the planet

In this world the gap between the rich and the poor is increasingly wide. There are companies bigger, wealthier and more powerful than countries. There is enough food to feed everyone but millions are starving.

There is enough money to provide clean water and adequate sanitation for everyone but we prefer to spend it on the machinery of war. Indigenous peoples around the world continue to suffer the devastating effects of colonisation. More than one third of the growing urban population in developing country cities live in slum conditions and, in countries with wealthy free market economies like ours, we are counting the increasing costs of such illnesses as depression, diabetes, obesity, gambling

the greatest example of market failure.

This global economic system will continue to do harm because of the values and assumptions inherent in it. Like any human construction, economic systems are never value free. Materialism, individualism, greed for money and power, competition, commodification (in which everything can be turned into something that can be bought and sold for profit), unlimited growth and a deeply embedded culture of consumerism: these are the values and the principles that underpin neoliberalism and which are now undermining the health and wellbeing of people and the planet.

Despite strong messages to the contrary, however, the economy is actually not some autonomous beast that is best left to its own devices. An economic system

is just that: a system designed to help us relate to each other around resources and work. If it's not helpful we can change it despite what vested interests would have us believe.

There are now more theologians, economists, philosophers, social theorists, social activists and concerned people all over the world, challenging the assumption that the best we can do is tinker with the system; they are challenging the belief that the system cannot be transformed.

The theme of a just economy runs strongly through the Bible, which is full of stories warning about the dangers of greed and prioritising wealth and possessions ahead of relationships and doing justice. The Judeo-Christian story offers a strong vision for an alternative economics based on such values and principles as compassion, hospitality, generosity, cooperation, relationship and community, respect for the natural world as God's good creation and life as God's abundant gift, and the need for societies to prioritise the needs of those who are poor, marginalised and oppressed.

We all have a part to play in bringing God's economy to life in this world. As Christians and as churches we have a special responsibility to model a different way of living in the world. There is no time to waste.

The Rev. Elenie Poulos, Social Justice Network, NCCA.

In this world the gap between the rich and the poor is increasingly wide.

addiction, drug dependence and loneliness.

It is true that through industrialisation, technological development and the globalisation of the free market economy, millions of people around the world now experience greater levels of health and prosperity than their ancestors could have imagined.

But, somewhere along the way, this economic system started to do more harm than good. This was the force of "neoliberal economics", also called "market fundamentalism" or "extreme capitalism", being spread through the work of influential economists and the global financial institutions and public policy decisions by powerful governments. Now it reaches into every part of the world. The Global Financial Crisis did not just affect the bankers and the traders in virtual money that caused the collapse in the United States; its effects rippled across the world. Climate change is now also widely regarded as

I understand that living the simplicity testimony means to choose to walk in the light — to make this a constant priority — a simple (though hard) priority:

- Is this going to improve my connection with my inner self — help me to be centred?
- Is this going to enhance my connection with God?
- Is this going to improve my connection with others?
- Is this going to help me be connected with the earth?

I came to these guidelines by approaching the simplicity testimony from the angle of outer simplicity. I was asking Aziz Pabeny, an elderly Indian friend, how we would decide what to do with the resources that would be liberated if we could convince people living in Western society to live more simply and stop hogging the earth's resources. He said that I needed to understand that we in Western society don't need to be living simply in order to help the third world; we need to be doing it for ourselves — we need to reclaim our connectedness with each other, the earth and God.

Jenny Spinks, "this we can say", Australian Quaker Life, Faith and Thought, 2004

Challenging the force of consumerism



In a world where we are bombarded by messages trying to convince us that the “good life” can be realised through the “goods life”, one of the greatest challenges for Christians is simply: how shall I live?

For some, staying true to their Christian principles is a matter of eschewing consumerism and materialistic tendencies. For others, it remains a highly contested space: we consume because of our needs and our desires but there is a nagging guilt over our purchases and our seemingly excessive lifestyles.

While there is little doubt that consumerism is fed by — and in turn feeds — inequality in our world today, does the answer really lie in a simple redistribution of goods or a life of asceticism?

While consumerism and Christianity may be unlikely and uncomfortable bedfellows, it is the Church that holds the key to confronting the challenges of modern-day materialism. Our churches are inherently relational. They are built on a sense of community — with each other, with God and with the world at large. Conversely, consumerism is driven by the individual,

a spirit of competition and by an endless quest for a sense of identity and self in our chaotic world through material wealth.

Pro-social behaviours — those that communities are built upon — stand at odds with consumerist tendencies. Research has shown that, when we focus on money and accumulating more “stuff”, there is less room in our lives for compassion and empathy, and that we are less likely to cooperate with those around us. The reverse is also true: when we spend more time focusing on our relationships with our families and our friends, our capacity to care for others increases.

Finding a way to block the onslaught of advertising convincing us that we must own the latest and the greatest is difficult in a society that spends over \$400 billion a year to persuade us otherwise! But it is vital that we develop ways to diminish the influences that drive consumer contagion.

Understanding the reasons why we prioritise materialistic desires is an important first step. Much of what we accumulate is an attempt to overcome our personal insecurities: we often feel a sense of fulfilment when we buy something. Acknowledging that this is an all-too-brief feeling can inspire us to seek out

alternatives when life deals us challenges. Meeting up with friends or finding a local volunteer opportunity are examples of behaviours we can substitute for time in the shopping centres. We can also be more vocal about removing advertising images from public spaces and reclaim those areas for ourselves once again.

Appreciating the world around us is another important tool in our arsenal against rampant consumerism. Australians throw out about 14 million tonnes of rubbish each year — that’s about 800 kilograms each! A more ecologically sustainable world begins by pausing to think about where all the packaging we use comes from and how easily we dispose of it and unwanted products.

The grip that consumerism has on our society may seem inescapable and there are certainly powerful forces in place trying to convince us that materialistic values trump all else. But, by adopting some simple strategies for change and devoting more time to strengthening the relational aspects of our lives, we stand the best chance of building a more compassionate society, increasing our own wellbeing and ensuring our world is a sustainable one.

Siobhan Marren, UnitingJustice Australia, Uniting Church in Australia

One of the greatest challenges for Christians is simply: how shall I live?

A consumer-oriented picture — one in which the human person is a customer before all else, looking for goods that can be acquired — is pretty hostile

to a traditionally religious framework in which you find your meaning in the attempt to become aligned with, or united with, a reality that entirely exceeds your grasp, and in which you expect to be drastically changed by the practice of faith.

Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

Work life balance

Australia was once recognised as the “worker’s paradise” and one important reason for that was the steady adoption, from the 19th century on, of the eight-hour day.

This development — eight hours’ work, eight hours’ recreation and eight hours’ rest — helped to ensure workers’ health and safety and gave them the opportunity to participate in family and community life.

Over the next century, more Australian workers won the right to decent working hours. By 1981, the standard working week was 38 hours and workers were entitled to four weeks’ annual leave.

Over the last three decades, however, there has been a profound change in Australia’s working patterns. We now work some of the longest hours in the developed world. In

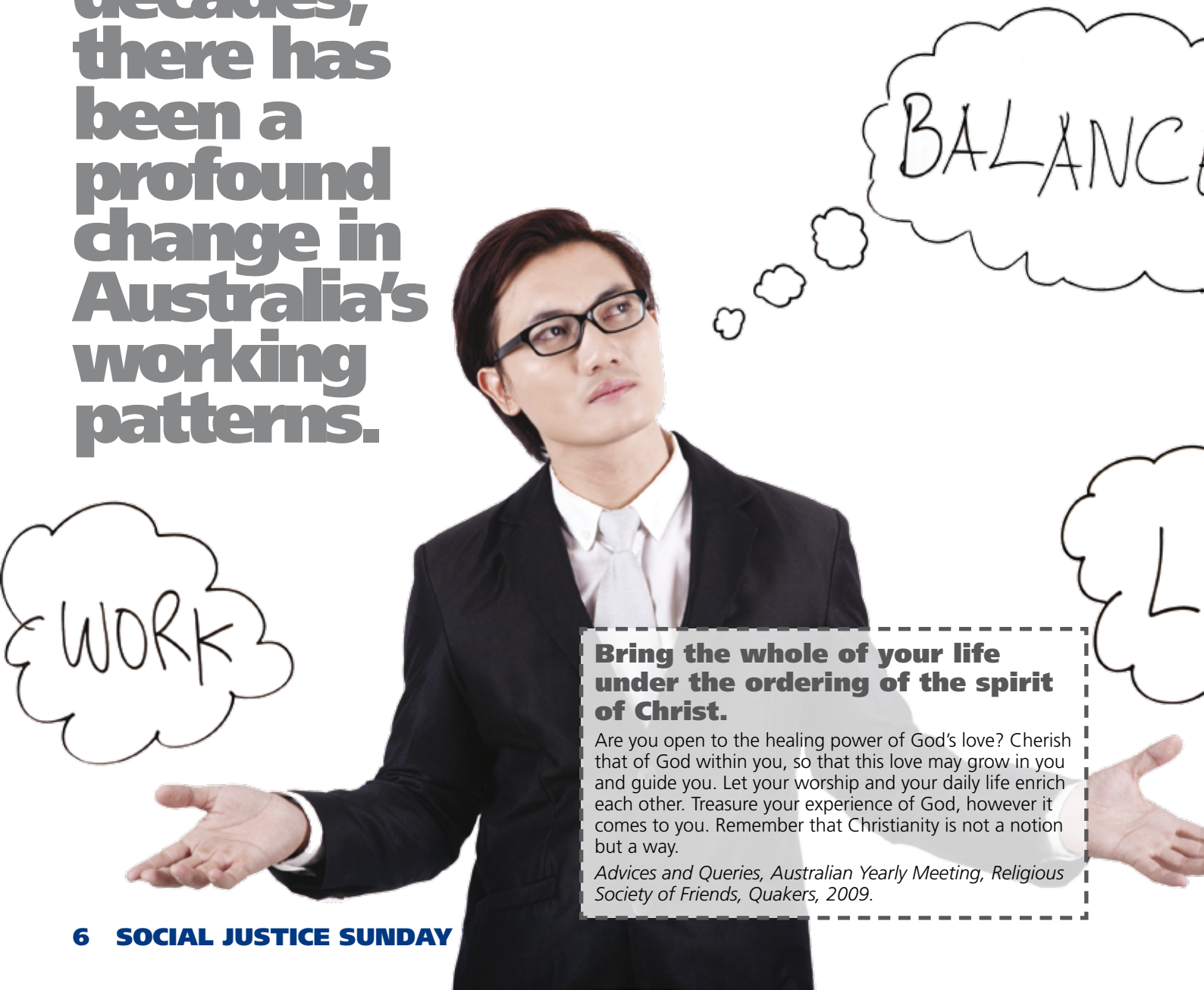
Over the last three decades, there has been a profound change in Australia’s working patterns.

2011 the OECD rated the average Australian working day as the fifth longest out of 29 developed nations and estimated our average working week as more than four hours longer than the standard 38 hours.¹

Australia has also seen the emergence of the seven-day trading week, leading to demands — particularly in retail, hospitality and related industries — for work outside traditional hours, without the benefit of penalty rates. Australia is now the only high-income country that combines such long working hours, such a high incidence of work at nights and on weekends, and such a high rate of casual employment.²

Some reasons for this radical change in work patterns are Australia’s involvement in the global market and the growing pressure on managements to produce shareholder returns, which in turn means increasing demands on the labour force.³

These changes in work patterns have had serious effects on workers’ health and family relationships and on their children’s wellbeing. The 2010 Australian Work and Life Index reported that 60 per cent of women and nearly 50 per cent of men felt time-pressured, and most felt there was strain on the time available for themselves and their families, friends and communities. Six out of ten workers did not take



Bring the whole of your life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ.

Are you open to the healing power of God’s love? Cherish that of God within you, so that this love may grow in you and guide you. Let your worship and your daily life enrich each other. Treasure your experience of God, however it comes to you. Remember that Christianity is not a notion but a way.

Advices and Queries, Australian Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends, Quakers, 2009.

Every person and every group in society must be able to meet their material needs and realise their potential in a social, economic and spiritual sense.

We are called to realise that, just as it is in family life and among friends, so it is in the life of our community: if one person is disadvantaged or left behind, we are all diminished. We cannot survive without others and can only grow and achieve our potential in relationship with others ...

... It is important that together we face the reality of poverty and seek ways to address it, however difficult that might be at a personal or societal level. As a country that espouses the value of the "fair go", it is time to act for those who have missed out on the benefits and opportunities that the good economic times have provided this nation.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, A Rich Young Nation: The challenge of affluence and poverty in Australia, Social Justice Sunday Statement 2008, p.13.

the leave they were owed, and many contract or casual workers had no leave entitlements at all.⁴

And it seems that things are only likely to get worse for Australian workers and their families as they face more job instability, increased casualisation, more work responsibility and growing household debt.⁵

Australia's increasingly globalised economy needs to regain its focus on the dignity and rights of its workers and on the needs of families. That should include more genuine workplace flexibility and more recognition of the needs of women workers.

Sr Helen Kearins RSM and Dr David Brennan

¹ J. Fear (2011), "Polluted Time: Blurring the boundaries between work and life", Policy Brief No. 32, The Australia Institute, p. 6.

² P. Shepanski and M. Diamond (2007), *An Unexpected Tragedy: Evidence for the connection between working patterns and family breakdown in Australia*, Relationships Forum Australia, p. 19.

³ Ibid.

⁴ B. Pocock, N. Skinner and S. Pisaniello (2010), *How much should we work: Working hours, holidays and working life: the participation challenge*. The Australian Work and Life Index 2010, Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

⁵ Shepanski and Diamond, p. 32.

So all may live with dignity

Intercessions for Social Justice Sunday

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'

God of the poor,

We hear your voice calling us to the reality of life in our land, in the country and in our cities.

The goodness of your creation has been twisted out of shape by the greed of people.

The land lifts up its voice in mourning, and the poor of the land cry out for justice.

Help us live out your just kingdom here in this part of the earth.

'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.'

God of the hungry,

Our Indigenous brothers and sisters still struggle with worse health and lower life expectancy than the rest of our population;

asylum seekers still wait months and years for settlement in safety; the elderly, ill and unemployed struggle to live on pensions.

Help us know how to share our resources wisely and generously so that all may be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'

God of the desolate,

Young girls are exploited to sell fashion clothes, while women slave in sweat shops for minimum wages.

Men work long hours at dangerous jobs and young people turn to drugs and alcohol to cover their hopelessness.

We in the developed world enjoy our luxuries at the expense of those who struggle to make a living growing them.

Help us protect the humanity of those who produce the goods we use.

'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you.'

God of the marginal,

Governments appear to favour those with economic power, instead of investing in education;

megastores drive small businesses to the wall; people deafened by the strident call to consume

fail to hear the whispers of the homeless and hungry.

Help us to speak fearlessly for those with no voices, and to remember that your grace is abundant enough for all to share.

'Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven.'

God of joy,

We pray that we who follow the way of Christ might live by your grace, modelling care and integrity in our business transactions, courage and hope in our politics, and love and reconciliation in our relationships.

May our lives be evidenced by generosity, daring to live in hope, that our life together might point beyond ourselves to the One in whose image we are made. In the name of Jesus Christ, who showed us how to live.

Amen.

(Based on Luke 6:20-26)

Resources

Social Justice Resources in Australian Churches

- Anglican Church of Australia: http://anglican.org.au/Web/Website.nsf/content/Who_We_Are (then the Social Issues tab)
- Australian Catholic Social Justice Council: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au
- Society of St Vincent de Paul: www.vinnies.org.au
- Catholic Social Services Australia: <http://catholicsocialservices.org.au>
- Brotherhood of St Laurence <http://bsl.org.au>
- Quakers: www.quakers.org.au (see Quaker action)
- Uniting Church in Australia UnitingJustice, A Just and sustainable economy: www.unitingjustice.org.au/just-and-sustainable-economy
www.adifferentstory.org
- NCCA Social Justice Network: www.ncca.org.au/departments/social-justice
- The Salvation Army: www.salvos.org.au/justiceunit
www.salvationarmy.org.au/justsalvos

Resource Links

- International Ecumenical Peace Convocation: www.overcomingviolence.org/
- Australian National Development Index: www.andi.org.au
- New Economics Foundation (UK): www.neweconomics.org/
- Centre of Full Employment and Equity (CofFEE): <http://e1.newcastle.edu.au/coffee/>
- The Australia Institute: www.tai.org.au/
- Brian Howe at the National Press Club: www.actu.org.au/Media/Speechesandopinion/BrianHoweaddresstotheNationalPressClub.aspx
- Micah Challenge: www.micahchallenge.org.au
- Jubilee Australia: www.jubileeaustralia.org

Worship Resources

- NCCA Social Justice Sunday: www.ncca.org.au/departments/social-justice
- Liturgy and Social Justice www.fdlc.org/Liturgy_Resources/LITURGY_&_SOCIAL_JUSTICE.htm
- Dorothy Day, The Mass is our Life and Work: www.fdlc.org/Liturgy_Resources/LITURGY_JUSTICE_TheMassIsOurLife&Work.htm

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