



Supporting Social Justice Through Prayer

In response to inquiries we have received, especially through the Living is Giving Program, we offer the following suggestions for supporting the social justice work of the Uniting Church through prayer.

1. Praying for social justice involves all the different types of prayer. We work for justice because of the nature of God, whom we praise in prayers of adoration. We need to confess our contribution to injustice. We are allowed to lament (complain) when we are victims of injustice. In intercessory prayer we seek God's help in rectifying injustice, and ask God to care for victims of injustice. In the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Holy Communion we remember what God has already done to set right the world.
2. Praying for social justice helps our prayer life become less self-centred and more focused on the world God loves. It is a way of loving our neighbour and acting as neighbour to those in need. It has a place in the prayers of individuals, small groups and the congregation.
3. The Bible offers a lot of material that can be used as the basis for prayer for social justice. Reading Genesis 1 or some of the Psalms can lead to prayer for environmental responsibility. Isaiah 1, Isaiah 5:1-8, Isaiah 42: 1-9, Isaiah 61:1-3, Luke 1: 46-56, Matthew 25:31-46 are a few of the many passages that can inspire our prayers.
4. Social justice involves responding to current issues, and developing appropriate responses. Some of the solutions are within the power of individuals, but often the solution requires action by government, community groups (including the churches), and business. Information on issues comes to you daily through many sources:
 - Radio, TV, newspapers, the Internet
 - Church publications such as UnitingCare NSW.ACT's *Interchange*, and the Synod magazine *Insights*. (You can ask to go on the Interchange mailing list by emailing unitingcare@nsw.uca.org.au or read it on the Internet at <http://nsw.uca.org.au/bsr/ich/index.html> . You can also find information on the National Social Responsibility and Justice Webpage on <http://nat.uca.org.au/nsrj/NSRJWeb.html>
 - Issues may be discussed in church study groups, or mentioned in sermons or prayers at church.
 - Publications about social justice issues, from a Christian perspective. These include bible studies, analysis of the issues, liturgies for public worship, prayers for private use. National Social Responsibility and Justice publish congregations with worship resources for Social Justice Sunday (last Sunday in September) each year. UnitingCare Burnside also provides material.

- Both the Assembly and the synod social justice agencies publish material at times of crisis or decision-making. For example, resources were provided about East Timor. Assembly and synods provide material in the lead up to elections, outlining the social justice issues that need to be considered.
 - The stories of people who experience injustice
 - The stories of organisations and groups who work for social justice. Eg talk with your local community health centre, advocacy agencies; women's networks etc.
5. Praying for social justice means praying for all the people involved:
- The people who experience injustice - people who are poor, people who are unemployed, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, people in rural and remote areas, people who experience discrimination because of race, religion, gender, disability or sexuality, and so on. Also people in less developed countries.
 - The people who cause injustice. They may act in many different ways, from committing overt violence to opposing attempts to prevent exploitation or reduce poverty.
 - The people who have the power to change the situation - government, community groups (including churches), unions, business.
 - The local community and Australia generally - our attitudes affect what actions politicians and others take to remedy injustices.
 - Governments of other nations, and international government and business organisations, who influence "globalisation".
 - The church agencies and community organisations who lobby for more just policies and actions. In the Uniting Church these include *UnitingCare NSW.ACT*, National Social Responsibility and Justice, *UnitingCare Australia*. There are also social justice units in other synods. We work with community organisations such as ACOSS, NCOSS and Fairwear.
6. Praying for social justice means praying for change. What makes this situation unfair? Who is affected? How are they affected? What needs to change?
7. Praying for social justice can be related to the Christian year. For example, the Christmas Bowl material sent to congregations each year includes prayers for justice and relates them to the Advent themes.
8. Praying for social justice means living as people of hope. It involves having a vision of your local community, and of the whole world, as they could be, and longing in our deepest being for change to achieve that vision. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven".
9. Praying for social justice involves silence. In the silence we can begin to sense what it is God wants us to do to bring about justice. We can start to see the world from a different perspective, through the eyes of people who

experience injustice. We can begin to sense the wonder of creation. In the silence, God can transform us into agents of social justice.

10. Social justice will not be achieved by prayer alone. If we pray for social justice, we will find ways of working for social justice. That is the best "amen" to our prayer. For some that will mean supporting their local congregation's decision to give to social justice work in the church. For some it will mean being active, vocal advocates on behalf of people who suffer injustice. For others, it will mean taking opportunities to influence our neighbours or families. It might mean thinking about what you buy (e.g. the Fairwear Campaign). It may mean joining a group that focuses on a particular issue. Or it may mean something else. Social justice education materials and events such as Social Justice Expos offer many ideas for action.

UnitingCare NSW.ACT
Uniting Church in Australia (NSW Synod)
Phone: (02) 8267-4300
Fax: (02) 9267-4842
PO Box A2178
Sydney South NSW 1235
unitingcare@nsw.uca.org.au