

World watch!

As its inception back in 1977 the Uniting Church issued a *Statement to the Nation*.

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/introduction/item/134-statement-to-the-nation-inaugural-assembly-june-1977>

This document is probably not so well known these days but it does form the way in which our church seeks to address a whole range of public issues. It is a sign of why the Uniting Church is sometimes described as church that is committed to social justice. It is from this statement that we get the language of ‘responsibility’ which lies behind much work done in its name.

For a church to make a statement to the nation like this is rather unusual. In some ways it was designed to introduce the new church that was coming into being; it was also a way of positioning the church along with *The Basis of Union* over and against other denomination—though at the beginning the Uniting Church was hoping not to be a denomination. It saw itself as a pilgrim people on the way to the promised end.

The *Statement to Nation* begins with a recognition that ‘We are conscious of our responsibilities within and beyond this country’. That concern is not understood as the work of some pressure group or political bias. It is established on an affirmation that ‘the first allegiance of Christians is God, under whose judgment the policies and actions of all nations must pass.’ It committed the church to ‘uphold basic Christian values and principles’

This *Statement* identified a number of concerns: the dignity of every human being, the integrity of public office, the correction of injustice, freedom of speech, adequate health care (amongst a number of others). In a way that was surprising for 1977 it concluded with a concern for the ‘basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment.’

These days here we often here more talk about ‘Uniting for the Common Good’. That was the theme for the Synod meeting of 2012. All of sudden members of the Uniting Church were adorned with black tee shirts with Uniting for the Common Good emblazoned upon their chests.

This language of the common good is widely used these days by various groups committed to a civil society, the public good, the flourishing of all. It expresses a hope for a troubled world. It has also been used by many Christian thinkers as they wish to explore the public relevance and witness of faith. They wished to place it alongside the concern for personal salvation and the life of discipleship and mission.

There are many scriptural texts that support this idea of the common good. Some of the most notable are the parable of the good Samaritan, love your neighbour as yourself, and Matthew 25:31-46. The particular text that sometimes catches the eye is Galatians 6:10 which refers to the call to ‘do good to all’.

This week I find these texts—and others like them—being concerned for our neighbours in Afghanistan and Lebanon.

Clive Pearson, 17 August, 2021.