

Responding to Social Justice Issues affecting Women in 2016

In 2016, Commission members embarked on a pressing and very local problem: that of domestic or family violence in our society. It was important that such a day be organised ecumenically, and, with the archbishop's whole-hearted support for the concept, we approached the two other large churches.

Two members (Greg Harris and Margaret Ryan) joined two representatives from the Anglican (Susanna Pain and Stuart Davis-Meehan) and Uniting Churches (Vanessa Crimmins and Delia Quigley) in planning and executing a day's Forum in June, at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at Barton. Margaret Ryan chaired the planning group, Lorraine Barker and Maureen Babler sought financial contributions from various Church organisations, who mainly responded with great generosity: Australian Catholic University, Australian Catholic Retirement and Superannuation Fund, Catholic Development Fund, CatholicCare, and the three participating Churches.

The day ran from 10am - 4pm and was in four parts. After the welcome from an indigenous leader and the three Church leaders, there was an outline of the nature of Family Violence, its scope, myths, stats, its cycle... In Session 2, a panel of women and men, those in many of the frontline services, responded to a hypothetical situation, and described the role/s of their organisations: ACT Policing, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Victims of Crime Commission, Legal Aid and a Women's Refuge.

Before the afternoon session got underway, a booklet specifically prepared for this day, "For Such a Time as This" (containing many real-life stories, with a reflection question and short prayer accompanying each), was launched by the Uniting Church of Australia. Session 3 featured the experiences of three women who have experienced or been involved with domestic violence, as well as a man who works with perpetrators. These were people looking for an working towards change and healing. The final session was a liturgy, acknowledging our (community) guilt, neglect and insensitivity, and praying for God's forgiveness, mercy, powerful healing and social transformation.

A short DVD was made of pertinent sections of the Forum, and this will be available as other Commission members organise similar sessions in the deaneries: it is hoped in Cooma, Goulburn, Tuross Head and Young.

If your parish or school would like a copy, please contact Margaret Ryan or Lorraine Barker via the Commission website: commissionforwomencg@gmail.com