

Christians together act for Justice

â??We were appalled that the Northern Territory government won an election on reducing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 10, only to find that South Australia, along with most of the rest of the country, already has 10 as the minimum age of criminal responsibilityâ??way below the global average and internationally recognised age of 14. This disproportionately targets First Nations children, who are 28 times more likely than non-indigenous children to be in detention.â??

Coromandel Valley parish members Vivien and Martin Bleby, along with a hundred others, were in small groups speaking with individual senators and members in Parliament House, Canberra, as part of a Common Grace weekend conference, â??Let Justice Flowâ?? (Amos 5:24).



Jennifer and Eric McCoy, Vivien and Martin Bleby, with SA Senator Karen Grogan

Common Grace is a ten-year-old movement of individuals, churches and communities pursuing Jesus and justice together, for the flourishing of all people and all creation. It uses creative, gracious and hopeful ways of advocating in the public square to amplify the voice of those most affected by injustice. An alternative to other more strident protests, or lobbying that seems to be more concerned with the preservation of our Christian rights, values and privileges.

Common Grace seeks to be grounded in the wisdom and guidance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders. To begin the conference we were taken outside for a smoking ceremony and welcome to country. It took an hour and a half. We realised we needed to settle in to a slower pace. The first session was on deep listeningâ??with all that we are, to all around us. Panel discussions were in the form of indigenous yarning circlesâ??respectful listening and sharing at ever deepening levels.

We heard the grief and pain of aboriginal elders whose families were over-represented in the prison system, with damaging effects. How we are criminalising some of the most vulnerable children in Australia, while crime rates are actually decreasing. Detention costs over one million dollars per child per yearâ??what could be done with resources like that in terms of early intervention, family therapy, and community care? All people, including children, are made in the image of God, and Jesus said to welcome a child is like welcoming God (Mark 9:37).

We witnessed a leading Antarctic scientist weeping as she told us that the ice sheet is melting sooner and faster than they ever could have predicted. A Torres Strait Island Christian elder told us that rising seas are beginning to render some low-lying islands uninhabitableâ??what is to happen for those people, their home country, and culture? Climate justice, as part of the Renew Australia for All Campaign, was the other prong of our advocacy this weekend. The knitting of hundreds of Climate

Scarves, as presents to politicians and world leaders, visually depicting how temperatures have risen since 1990, was an earlier initiative of Common Grace.

We were pleased to be with such a fine and diverse group of people, being introduced and inducted into positive and grace-filled action for justice, in eager anticipation of the â??new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwellsâ?? (2 Peter 3:13).

Further information: Adelaide Dioceseâ??Anglicans for Makarrata:
Jill.Rivers@anglicaresa.com.au

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