

Refugees

Palm Sunday saw 62 people walking around Lake Weeroona as part of a national campaign to call for permanent visas for some 10,000 refugees who have been living with uncertainty for up to 10 years.

These include men in Bendigo who have been living among us and contributing to our community, but who have been cut off from their families for many years. Until permanent visa status is granted such men can do nothing to be reunited with their families. The Refugee Council of Australia tells us that there is a 13 year backlog in family reunion applications. Pause, and think what this means for a man separated from his wife and children.

As a result of our Big Walk we added 198 km to the national tally, which stands at 73, 625 km.

Settling Refugee Families

Over the past 18 months three families have been welcomed to Bendigo by Rural Australians for Refugees, Bendigo, under the Government's CRISP program. We expect to receive a fourth family in the coming months, and are most grateful for the support of many of our church people in both goods and donations. We are also very appreciative of those who have offered storage space to allow us to gather household goods and furniture in preparation for the new families.



David and Jenny Shield with their family at Palm Sunday's Big Walk for Refugees.

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Bendigo Uniting Churches Social Justice Group

*This is the first Insert for 2024;
it is circulated within all Bendigo Congregations.
We thank them for their support and welcome
opportunities to share their social justice concerns.*

Acting for Justice – a Christian Imperative.

The Bendigo Churches Social Justice Group meets monthly to consider and to act upon issues of social justice. It is our firm belief that Jesus command to love our neighbour includes the call to act when we see our neighbours suffering because of injustice.

Our congregations are diverse, with members who have a wide range of views and experiences. Each congregation will have its own justice priorities and concerns, and we are here to offer our support and encouragement in your efforts to build a fairer Australia, and a more just planet.

There is a standing invitation to all our people to join us. Tuesday, the first in the month, 4.00 pm at St Andrews.

There are a number of activist groups in Bendigo that could benefit from your involvement. Rural Australians for Refugees, Grandmothers for Refugees, Amnesty International, Reconciliation Bendigo, Central Victoria ACF Community Group are among the more obvious ones. You might like to think about it.

Current Letter writing Kit from Rural Australians for refugees.

<https://ruralastraliansforrefugee.s.org.au/write-a-letter>

Provides suggestions and background information you need to write letters to MPs and newspapers.

Contrary to what some say, being critical of Israel with regard to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza does not mean that you are anti-semitic.

Haiku

Jesus left Zion
to sit among the ruins
of Gaza, weeping.

KJR



Killing For Country. A Family Story.

David Marr. Black Inc. 2023

Reviewed by Ken Rookes

Last year it became apparent that many Australians have little appreciation of the violence of the colonisation process that led to our indigenous peoples' removal from their lands and the murder of many thousands of them.

David Marr's *Killing for Country* brings home the brutal reality of that part of our history. When an "ancient uncle" asked David to look into the story of David's great-grandmother, Maud, he found that Maud's father, Reg Uhr, had been an officer of the Queensland Native Police.

Marr uncovered a long forgotten family secret - the dark story of his forebears' deep involvement in many murders and massacres of Aboriginal people. It is believed that more than 40,000 First Nations people were killed by the Queensland Native police.

The book shines a spotlight on the essential racism that underlies colonialism; the commonly held belief that the native people were lesser creatures, and that they could be killed with impunity. They simply didn't matter. Something of this belief persists in dismissive attitudes today.

Marr's story begins in the colony of New South Wales in 1809, with the arrival of Richard Jones, "a quiet, fearless and mighty Christian who would seize from the Aboriginal people by influence, chance and cunning 600,000 acres of their country." It spans the colonies of NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The family narrative ends with the death in 1907 of one of its key figures, D'arcy Uhr.

Victoria does not figure in his story, but we should not imagine that such murders and massacres did not happen here. The killings followed the expansion of agriculture, in particular the sheep industry, with graziers being granted huge swathes of land. The original inhabitants were deemed an inconvenience, and a danger to the grazing enterprise, and were moved on; but there was nowhere for them to go. Resistance was met with violence. They were "dispersed" or "driven off" – terms that disguised the nature of that dispersal; they were shot.

There was general belief that any prospect of civilising indigenous people depended upon establishing a rule of fear. Killings were often indiscriminate and excused as necessary reprisals for Aboriginal crimes; although few attempts were made to punish the actual perpetrators of those crimes. Wooden spears offered little defence against guns and rifles, and the killings often included women and children. There were other crimes committed against Aboriginal people, too, including mass poisonings and the stealing of children and women, who were effectively made slaves.

In this thoroughly researched book, Marr gives many first-hand accounts of murderous encounters. It is an interesting, if disturbing, *warts-and-all* read; structured around the stories of his colourful forebears, and meshing with the political and social history of the times.

Marr includes many excerpts from newspaper reports and debates. People at the time were generally aware of the violence and murderous dispossession. There were many who were deeply disturbed by it, and called for the violence to end – including the winding up of the notorious Native Police. Sadly, there were not enough of them to effect a change. Governments invariably took the side of the squatters, most of whom wanted the security that the reign of fear provided by the Native Police.

David Marr is one of Australia's leading writers. The unease that he felt as he uncovered this dark family story was shared by other relatives, some of whom were further troubled by his intention to share the story in this book. We should be glad that he did. Truth telling is an essential part of the journey towards healing for our First Nations people, no matter how uncomfortable it might make us feel.

Footnote: Yoorook Justice Commission.

On 25 March, Yoorook began hearings into injustices against First Peoples related to land, sky and waters with a ceremonial hearing on Gunditjmara country near Portland, where the colonisation of Victoria began.

For further reading about this period of our history, you might try *Truth Telling*, by Henry Reynolds, reviewed in an earlier Bendigo Churches Social Justice Insert.

Tyesha,
from
Willowra
NT..

Linocut



Social Justice Calendar

APRIL

7 World Health Day
22 Earth Day

MAY

3 World Press Freedom Day
11 World Fair Trade Day
16 International Day of Living Together in Peace
22 International Day of Biodiversity
26 National Sorry Day 2017
27 May-3 June National Reconciliation Week

JUNE

2 Reconciliation Sunday, Uniting Church
4 International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression
5 World Environment Day
8 World Oceans Day
12 World Day Against Child Labour 1988:
17 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
19 International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict
17-23 Refugee Week 20 World Refugee Day
26 International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

JULY

7-14 NAIDOC Week
11 World Population Day
28 National Tree Day
25 Earth Overshoot day
30 World Day Against Trafficking in Persons