

The Back Story  
**Creating the National SIEV-X Refugee Memorial in Canberra**

A Social Justice Group from the Launceston Pilgrim Uniting Church led by Rev. Rod Horsfield (who previously had been a member of the Doncaster Uniting Church congregation), Beth Giddings and Steve Biddulph developed in 2006 a national movement and plans for a Memorial to honour Refugees. A Brisbane schoolboy suggested a public art sculpture on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra – a line of poles (each pole representing a refugee parent or child) reaching from the waters of the lake, across the land, forming the outline of a small fishing boat that carried them part of the way. Our Victorian church magazine 'Crosslight' encouraged our participation. Huge numbers of school youth groups, more than 60 Uniting Church congregations, and other churches responded, each group to paint one timber pole with welcoming images of Australia, a pole metaphorically to be seen as part of the ship's timbers or as harbour poles to guide seafarers safely home.

The Outreach and Justice group from the Doncaster Pilgrim Westfield Drive congregation (now part of our Manningham Uniting Church) painted one pole to contribute to the 2006 National Refugee Memorial in Canberra – with images of our local Yarra River, footsteps for the journey, and the hope of new life with an image of a beautiful butterfly. Some of you will know the poem 'Footprints' with the line: "when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." Other congregations painted images of welcoming landscapes and beaches, of aboriginal patterns and drawings showing parts of Australia that were special.

*On October 15, 2006 more than 1,000 people gathered on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra to simultaneously raise 353 poles to honour all the SIEV-X Refugees who five years earlier had drowned. It was very poignant that each pole was given the name and age of a particular Refugee, where the names were known.*

This nation-wide action all started with a small group of local activists in one church. The SIEV-X National Refugee memorial is well worth a visit the next time you go to Canberra. We were very moved when we meditated there. Visit [www.sievmemorial.com](http://www.sievmemorial.com) for more information and a rich collection of visitors' photos.

**Creating the first local SIEV-X Refugee Memorial at Pilgrim Uniting Church, Westfield Drive**

A group led by Susan a member of Pilgrim Uniting Church, and encouraged by Rev. Mark Dunn – the Minister at the time, designed and painted three more Refugee poles with Australiana motifs in 2006 to create a local Spiritual Public Art Installation at Westfield Drive. Our designers and painters at a couple of group workshops back then included: Lola, Beth, Graham, Margie, Megan, Ian, Susan, Charlie, Brian, Jill, Barbara, Rob and others.

**The New Manningham Uniting Church SIEV-X Refugee Memorial**

The new Manningham Uniting Church SIEV-X Refugee Memorial in the Church Driveway will continue to remind us all of the tortuous plight of so many refugees and asylum seekers in the world today (think Ukraine for a moment), and how we need to constantly try to care about and for the dispossessed and to stand up for the marginalised in our midst.

*Walking with communities locally, nationally and internationally.*

Susan and Graham, Manningham Uniting Church Members