



B7 DEFENCE FORCE CHAPLAINCY

1. INTRODUCTION

The connection between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Australian Defence Force happens formally in two ways. Uniting Church Ministers are appointed as Chaplains and our Assembly nominates a person to serve on the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services (RACS). Informally, there are many connections as serving and retired ADF members and their relatives participate in the life of our congregations and wider church life.

Since the last report to Assembly, Rev'd Dr Murray Earl has concluded as the Uniting Church member on RACS. Murray served for six years in that role and for the last two years he chaired the Committee. His season as Chair coincided with a period of transformation of RACS into a multi-faith committee. Until that time there were only Christians and Jewish members. Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh representatives have been appointed to the Committee. As RACS member, Murray provided pastoral care for all UCA Chaplains and their families, facilitated the recruitment of new Chaplains and maintained the bridge with the wider church whilst ensuring that UCA Chaplains remain compliant with the required professional standards for UCA ministry agents.

Rev'd Kaye Ronalds was inducted into the role of Uniting Church member on RACS by the National President, Dr Deidre Palmer, on 4 December 2019.

At the time of writing there are 40 UCA Chaplains - fifteen full time male Chaplains, four full time female Chaplains, 18 part-time male Chaplains and three part-time female Chaplains. There are three people who are participating in the In-service training scheme. A serving member of the Australian Defence Force who is accepted as a candidate for the ministry in the Uniting Church is funded for the period of study and for the initial period of gaining pastoral experience. The Rev'd (DCN) Santina Waugh will be appointed as an Army Chaplain within a matter of months. A Navy Chaplain candidate and an Army Chaplain candidate are part-way through their training.

Since the last Assembly the following Chaplains have transitioned out of ADF Chaplaincy – the Rev'ds Kerry Bartlett, Norman Grandin, Lin Lin Chew, Mark Dunn, Murray Lund, David Jackson, Don Kaus, Kaye Ronalds and David Thiem. Unfortunately Rev'd Kerry Bartlett passed away suddenly in October 2020.

The key role in the ADF for Chaplains is to provide pastoral care, spiritual care and guidance and advice on ethical issues.

2. RECRUITMENT

Recruiting new Chaplains is always a challenge. Across Australia the Church needs suitable people to serve in congregational settings, and in variety of Chaplaincy roles. To be eligible for Defence Force Chaplaincy one must meet the required medical, fitness and age categories and have at least two years pastoral experience. As a minimum a bachelor degree in theology or ministry, and two years pastoral experience post ordination and two years post degree are required. While other faith groups do not require Ordination, this remains a requirement for Uniting Church applicants. Seeking to demonstrate collaboration between our Synods and other councils of the UCA, the various Synods' Placements Committees now have the information which might assist them to suggest possible Defence Force Chaplains. The Australian Defence Force is working towards greater diversity, therefore, female Chaplains and

Chaplains of other faith groups are highly valued. We, as the wider UCA, will need to work hard to recruit suitable Chaplains otherwise the opportunities will pass to other Christian Churches and other faith groups.

3. OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT

Uniting Church Chaplains have provided significant service and many have been deployed overseas or within Australia to support the Australian Government response to crises at home and abroad.

For example Rev'd John Dansie served in Iraq in 2019. Rev'd John Saunders served in Afghanistan, and was awarded a commendation from both the Australian Government and the United States Defense Force. Rev'd Janice McWhinney, Rev'd Charles Vesely and Rev'd Alan Williams served in the Middle Eastern Region of operations.

Rev'd Andrew Watters and Rev'd Charles Vesely participated in APEC Assist in PNG. In 2019, Andrew, Charles, and Rev'd Alamoti Lavaki were involved in the engagement in South West Pacific Region which included visits to Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Samoa, building relationships, good will and providing assistance. As part of the enhanced engagement in the South West, Pacific Rev'd Andrew Watters acted as the subject matter expert on Religious Leader Engagement.

Most recently, after Cyclone Yasa, Rev'd John Saunders and Rev'd Simote Finau spent some weeks supporting personnel involved in the recovery efforts. In that circumstance the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade requests the Australian Government to send ADF support. Both chaplains also made important connections with the local Churches and government leaders.

An extract from the report prepared by John Saunders illustrates how it happened in Fiji.

“On Sunday 17 Jan 21 both Chaplains participated in a joint worship service with the Methodist congregation on Yadua Island, facilitated by CHAP Finau during his CAT visit. The regular congregation on HMAS ADELAIDE was moved to the island by air assets to attend. This was a great time of celebration and relief donations from the crew of ADELAIDE were presented to the local community. The public pinnacle of the Religious Leader Engagement/Chaplaincy effect during was the engagement of CHAP Finau with the Fiji Prime Minister, Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, where he seized the opportunity afforded him to pray the Aaronic blessing over the PM during a *sevusevu* ceremony on Galoa Island. This was fully reported in the Fiji Sun newspaper, and included a photograph of CHAP Finau and the Prime Minister . The subsequent Galoa school completion ceremony was attended by both Chaplains, with the local Methodist minister providing opportunities for the Task Group Chaplain to pray at the *sevusevu* and bless the re-opened buildings. Again, the Fiji Sun covered the event with articles and a photograph of CHAP Finau.”

Faith Group leader engagement is one of the unique contributions of the Chaplains in those environments.

In the 2019-2020 summer bush fires occurred across large tracts of Australia, ADF Chaplains both reservists and full time members were activated to support in operational and recovery efforts. Many of our chaplains Reserve and Full Time, were recalled from leave. Rev'd's Maumau Mono, Charles Vesely, David Prior, John Ruhle, Stephen Esterby, Robyn Kidd and Rev'd Dr Christine Senini and were involved in various ways including some key leadership roles. Rev'd Andrew Watters was the first Chaplain activated on Operation Bush Fire Assist and he was the only one deployed in the maritime environment. That included support to the isolated community of Mallacoota where, for a time, he was the only religious leader.

When Australia began to respond to the threat of COVID 19, planning began for involvement of Defence Force members, including how to maintain an effective Chaplaincy presence on border posts, hotel quarantine and testing centres. Several of our Reserve Chaplains were again called up. Canberra based Uniting Church Air Force Chaplain, Rev'd Dr Nikki Coleman, was seconded to ACT Health to assist in writing pandemic triage guidelines for the ACT which were subsequently used as the basis of COVID triage throughout Australia. The Rev'd Dr Coleman is also an internationally recognised leader in the field of space ethics, and this year she will contribute to developing space ethical policy for the ADF.

4. HIGH RECOGNITION

Rev'd Dr. Lindsay Carey and Rev'd Dr Tim Hodgson achieved recognition for their ground-breaking work on developing strategies to manage Moral Injury through Pastoral Narrative Disclosure. Tim won the Sir Edward Weary Dunlop Award in October 2019, which is awarded by the Australian Military Medical Association. It is anticipated that this work will significantly improve the care of veterans.

5. SUPPORT FOR ADF MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Our Chaplains are engaged in supporting ADF members who have been impacted by the Brereton Inquiry. Serving and retired Chaplains have responded to individuals, former and serving ADF members, and their families.

Chaplains have an ongoing role in providing advice to Commanders on matters of ethics, morality and decision making. For example, the Rev'd Matthew Stuart is the Coord Chaplain at Kapooka (1 RTU) where the training of recruits occurs and that includes a few days with the Chaplains participating in a course on Character Guidance. Rev'd John Saunders is posted to the Combined Arms Training Centre where the chaplains influence the formation of ADF personnel in training as war fighters.

Rev'd Robyn Kidd is helping to shape the Ethical Framework for the Air Force and this work will have lasting impact. In 2018 the position of an embedded chaplain into the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance world of Air Force was created. The sole purpose was to be the project lead to develop and implement a wellbeing and resilience framework to provide mitigation, response and ongoing support to enable the positive emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing of personnel within the Information Warfare sector, particularly in the area of exposure to abhorrent imagery. This project includes our International colleagues. This is a whole new area of Chaplaincy where the demands, and qualifications are expanded, such as the requirement for a Top Secret clearance, have been implemented.

6. SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING TO ADF MEMBERS

Chaplains are trained to deliver Suicide Prevention Training to ADF members. While statistics indicate that the number of completed suicides by serving ADF members is lower than in the wider Australian community, ADF members who transition out of the Defence Force are significantly vulnerable to suicide. Improving the care of veterans is high on the radar of the government and retired Chaplains frequently provide support to veterans and their families in their local communities.

Chaplains of Cadets provide an important presence during courses and annual camps supporting cadets between the age of 12 ½ and 20 years plus staff and families. Some Chaplains working in cadets are Reservists. However, to serve as a Chaplain with Cadets you do not need to be a Chaplain in the ADF so there is an opportunity for Uniting Church Ministry agents to be involved. Rev'd Mark Dunn is the point of contact for enquiries.

7. CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

Currently the Uniting Church Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee consists of the following members:

Chair: Rev'd Charles Vesely (Army), Secretary: Rev'd Andrew Watters, (Navy), Treasurer: Rev'd Mau Mau Mono (Army), members Rev'd Dr Nikki Coleman (Air Force), Rev'd Alan Williams (Air Force), Rev'd Andrew Delbridge (Army) and retired chaplain, Rev. David Jackson.

8. APPRECIATION

I am deeply grateful for this committee for supporting the work I do as Uniting Church member on RACS. We appreciate the work of Presbyteries in ongoing oversight of Chaplains and helping to welcome and support Chaplains as they are posted in and out of their regions. Defence Force Chaplains live out their call to ministry in circumstances that are diverse, challenging and responsive to the needs of the people that they serve. At times that means being away from home for long periods or at short notice. Border closures and interruptions to travel in 2020 compounded the personal sacrifices that are routinely made by the Chaplains and their families. I commend to the Assembly the work of the Uniting Church Chaplains of the Australian Defence Force.

Rev'd Kaye Ronalds

Uniting Church Member for Religious Advisory Committee to the Services

Rev'd Charles Vesely

Chair Uniting Church Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee