



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**  
Assembly Standing Committee

21-23 July 2023

**DOCUMENT 2-CA3**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Uniting Church Defence Force Chaplains Committee Report 30 June 2023</b>
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Report
Assembly or ASC Minute	Reporting on responsibilities as per the Mandate.
Consultation	Convenor of the Uniting Church Defence Force Committee Rev Charles Vesely
Purpose	To update the ASC on matters pertaining to work of Uniting Church Chaplains in the Defence Force.
Rationale & Findings Summary	<p>Currently serving 36, 16 full time and 20 part time, plus 2 currently engaged in the Inservice Training Scheme. 2 new Chaplains have commenced since the start of 2022 7 discharges since beginning of 2022. Two Chaplains deployed in 2023. Challenge for UCA Chaplains to remain compliant with regard to Safe Ministry/ Safe Church Training and Code of Ethics awareness training.</p> <p>Could the Assembly approve a national approach to Safe Church/ Safe Ministry training and Code of Ethics so that Chaplains can remain compliant even when posting interstate and on deployments or operational duties? On the horizon is the provision of Chaplaincy to veterans and their families and training for congregations to become veteran friendly communities.</p>
Attachments	Nil
Proposal/s	<p>That the Assembly Standing Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Receive the report</li><li>2. Approves the process of one Synod providing all of the Safe Ministry and Code of Ethics awareness training courses for Defence Force Chaplains in order to improve compliance and accessibility of training.</li></ol>
Submitted by	Reverend Kaye Ronalds

# UNITING CHURCH DEFENCE FORCE CHAPLAINS REPORT

## Introduction

The contribution of Uniting Church Chaplains continues to be valued across the Australian Defence Force. There are currently 36 Chaplains, 20 are part-time and 16 fulltime Chaplains. There are seven Uniting Church women in Chaplaincy in the ADF and in 2022, Reverend Robyn Kidd became the first Uniting Church female Chaplain to be advanced to Division 3 (Wing Commander.) Two Uniting Church people are being prepared for Defence Force Chaplaincy through the In-service Training Scheme. Two Chaplains have been deployed during the past twelve months. Reverend John Dansie served for four months supporting a small task group in the Solomon Islands from mid-November to mid-March. The mission aimed to strengthen links with the Solomon Islands communities, NGOs, Churches and Faith Groups. It was useful to be able to use our Uniting Church networks such as Uniting World to provide contacts with Faith Group leaders. Reverend Simote Finau, a minister of Tongan heritage, joined the contingent responding to the volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga. Simote was awarded the ADF Gold Commendation from Chief of Joint Operation Command LTGEN , Gregory Bilton, AO, CSC - on behalf of the ADF, as Task Group Chaplain during Operation TONGA ASSIST January 2022. Reverend John Saunders is leading a project to better equip Chaplains for Key Religious Leader Engagement. For example, our neighbours in the Pacific practice Christianity and the Chaplain who is on board with the ADF activities becomes a valuable link with community, religious and political leaders. In Indonesia the presence of an Islamic Chaplain greatly enhanced the arrangements for meeting with community leaders. Reverend Tim Hodgson and Rev Dr Lindsay Carey continue to develop the work on the Pastoral Narrative Disclosure process to address Moral Injury in serving members and veterans. The tools that these Uniting Church Chaplains have developed are being rolled out to all Chaplains in the ADF.

## Pathways to Chaplaincy

Recruiting new Chaplains is an ongoing task and we thank the Presbyteries and Synods who release ministry agents to serve for a season as ADF Chaplains. Other faith groups are actively recruiting and so our “market share” is shrinking. Uniting Church Chaplains are well trained and are greatly valued because of their formation, effective pastoral skills and servant hearted attitudes.

There are two pathways for becoming a Chaplain in the ADF. The first is for MOW and MOD to apply through the Uniting Church member of the Religious Advisory Committee for the Services, Reverend Kaye Ronalds, for endorsement to be recruited. Potential Chaplains are interviewed and those deemed to be suitable will be referred to Defence Force Recruiting for processing. Some people apply direct to Defence Force Recruiting and they get referred to me.

At the moment there are two Chaplains, one Navy and one Army, coming through the Inservice Training Scheme, which means they were serving in some other capacity in one of the services and have been supported by Defence for the period of their formation, academic study and while gaining pastoral experience. Serving Defence Force members may undertake a Period of Discernment and apply to become Candidates for Ministry through their presbytery and Synod Selection Panel, then they seek approval through the Director General of Chaplaincy in their service in order to be approved for this pathway towards Chaplaincy.

We also have some “Blue Patch” Chaplains. That is, they are ministers who have not become Defence Force Chaplains but instead they are officers of cadets and offer Chaplaincy support to units and during Annual Camps and training courses.

## Multi-faith Defence Force

The Australian Defence Force is now proudly diverse and inclusive. The Chaplaincy branches of Navy, Army and Air Force are transitioning beyond the Judaeo-Christian heritage to serving people of many faiths and no faith at all (or no “stated” faith.) Outward signs of this transition include a change to insignia on Chaplain’s hats and uniforms. The Defence Values of Service, Courage, Integrity, Respect and Excellence and the culture is shaped on those values.

## **Synod and Assembly visits**

The RACS member seeks to promote Defence Force Chaplaincy at Synod and Assembly meetings and through Theological Colleges. Now that travel restrictions and border closures no longer limit our capacity to travel this Committee plans to have a presence at these gatherings to promote Chaplaincy in the ADF.

## **Fostering the relationship between the sending Faith Group and Chaplains.**

I encourage all full time Chaplains to make contact with the local Presbytery and with the Synod in which they find themselves serving. Presbyteries retain the oversight on matters of faith and order, compliance and vitality of call. Presbytery Secretaries, and in some cases the Synods, keep a record of Working with Children Checks and Working with Vulnerable people cards. Synods maintain the list of Registered Religious Celebrants and submit it to the relevant Registrar of Birth, Deaths and Marriages. I have prepared some helpful information for Presbyteries with regard to building relationships with Chaplains. In the placements processes some part-time Chaplains have found that there is not always a clear understanding about how part-time Chaplains serve and how they can also give themselves fully to a placement in a congregation, mission or Chaplaincy setting.

## **Compliance and Pastoral Supervision**

One challenge for full time Chaplains is being able to attend the Code of Ethics awareness training and the Safe Ministry/Safe Church training. Because of deployments, exercises and chaplaincy duties chaplains may not be available to attend sessions put on by the local Presbytery. There would be benefit in providing training on-line or via platforms for meeting on-line. Perhaps one Synod could be designated as the lead synod for this training. That may also assist ministry agents in other roles which make it difficult to attend Code of Ethics and Safe Ministry training in person. It is a requirement that all full time Chaplains have at least five sessions each year with a Pastoral Supervisor / Professional Supervisor and these sessions are paid for by defence. However, the Pastoral Supervisor must belong to one of the two accrediting bodies in Australia for Professional Supervisors. Part-time Chaplains must fulfill their obligations for Pastoral Supervision as per the UCA National Guidelines for Pastoral Supervision. Their compliance on these matters is reported to the Director General of each service by the RACS member.

## **Retreats**

Retreats are offered each year for full time Chaplains in recognition that they rarely have a chance to retreat with local Presbyteries. In 2022 the Chaplains met at The Hermitage in Mittagong in NSW and Mrs Sharonne Price was the retreat leader. Funding for retreats for full time Chaplains is unlikely to be available in coming years except for gatherings on Defence Bases. This is unfortunate as many Chaplains just need to step out of those environments in order to decompress and attend to their own spiritual well-being.

Several Chaplains have discharged on the grounds of age or health. John Marshall retired after 18 years as a Navy Chaplain in Feb 2022. Lindsay Parkhill after 20 years in Defence and thirteen of them as an Army Chaplain, most recently supporting Australian Army Cadets. Noel Williams after 50 years in Defence and 40 of them as an Air Force Chaplain. Stephen Estherby after nine years as a Navy Chaplain. Greg McConnell served more than twenty years as a Reserve Chaplain in the Air Force at Richmond in NSW. Sharene Fechner enlisted in the Air Force in 1994 and was the first women to come through the Inservice Training Scheme. Sharene was ordained in December 2016 and served as a Chaplain after training through the Inservice Scheme until being discharged in early 2023. Nikki Coleman enlisted in 2017 and served seven years as an Air Force Chaplain. Some Chaplains do not always get a chance to serve for as long as they had hoped to serve so the separation from military life and Chaplaincy service can be disappointing and difficult.

The Chaplains have particularly appreciated the interest and support of the Assembly Presidents Dr Deirdre Palmer and Reverend Sharon Hollis who have prayed for ADF Chaplains and reached out during times of particular difficulty.

## **Chaplaincy to Veterans**

The Royal Commission into Defence Force member and Veteran Suicide has been harrowing for those who have given evidence of their experiences and the difficulty of those who transition from Defence Service to civilian life. On the horizon is the development of Chaplaincy to Defence Force Veterans. There is a pilot project in Perth and in Brisbane to test the style and delivery of Chaplaincy to those who have discharged. There is an opportunity for Uniting Churches to become veteran friendly communities. There will be training developed to assist clergy and community volunteers to be better able to welcome and support veterans and their families.

## **ANZAC DAY and Remembrance Day resources**

Thanks to the Assembly Communications team who reach out to the Uniting Church Defence Chaplains for the resources made available to the whole Church through the Assembly website.

I commend the ADF Chaplains to the prayers of the Church.

Reverend Kaye Ronalds

Uniting Church member to the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services

30 June 2023