

Defence Force Chaplaincy

Rev Burt Johns
Rev Kaye Ronalds
Rev Dr Murray Earl
Pastor Melissa Lipsett
Rev John Cox
Rev Peter Woodward

1. THE FOCUS OF THE COMMITTEE

The committee has been meeting in Queensland for four years and has achieved a good understanding of its role and its mandate. The issues on which the committee spends most of its time are recruitment of chaplains, deployment of chaplains, and support for the convenor in his role as a member of the Defence Forces Religious Advisory Committee to the Services. Meetings have been held quarterly and are well supported and the level of debate and discussion has been most encouraging.

During the last three years the Defence Forces level of commitment has continued to be quite high. This has meant that our chaplains have continued to be called on to support our service personnel in a variety of different roles overseas. This has placed a heavy burden on what is a small group of chaplains. The load is also felt by the chaplains not deployed as they have to cover and deal with problems created for families by serving members being deployed and the results of deployment when serving members return to Australia. Both the Army and the Air Force have found it necessary to call on Reserve Chaplains to fill the needs of deployment.

The committee is aware that many congregations and church members pray regularly for our Defence Force personnel and in particular our chaplains. We would strongly encourage this practice, as the situations in which our people are working are often quite difficult and dangerous. We covet your prayers also for the families of our serving personnel and of our chaplains.

2. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the committee has seen little change with Mr Warren Tapp and Mrs Janice Schloss unable to continue because of work commitments. We thank them for their valuable contributions and support.

The committee at present:
Convenor Rev Gale Hall
Chairperson Rev Graeme Adsett
Secretary Rev Bob Heathwood
 Rev Christine Digby

Treasurer Mr Peter Jenkins
 Rev Ann Hewson

The committee has been supported by Uniting Church Principal Chaplains and Senior Chaplains. The Rev Dr Murray Earl became the Director General RAAF Chaplaincy at the end of 2007. The Rev Peter Woodward (previous Army Principal Chaplain) continues to give support to Defence chaplains in matters relating to chaplains' pay. The Rev Graeme Adsett ceased duty as the Principal Chaplain Navy at the end of 2008.

The committee continues to meet four times a year in Brisbane with at least one member on the phone from out of Brisbane each meeting.

3. FULL-TIME CHAPLAINS

There are currently eighteen ministers serving as full-time chaplains in the Defence Force.

Navy Graeme Watkinson
 Murray Lund
 John Marshall
 Christine Senini

Army Phil Anderson
 Kerry Bartlett
 David Jackson
 Mark Hinton
 Christine Digby
 Mau Mau Mouu
 Alamoti Lavaki
 Charles Vesley
 David Prior

Air Force Murray Earl
 Alan Williams
 Craig Collas
 Gary Whelband
 Dean Quilty (an Australian
 minister of the Canadian
 Congregational Church
 seconded to the Uniting Church
 for Ministry with RAAF)

During the last three years Gary Whelband has returned to the RAAF chaplaincy full time. Dave Hosking (Army), Don Kaus (Army), and Noel Williams (Air Force) have moved to the relevant Reserve Forces. We thank them for their valued service over many years and look forward to their continued support.

More than half of the full-time chaplains have spent time overseas on deployment.

Three Reserve Force chaplains, Tim Hodgson (Air Force), Greg McConnell (Air Force), and Gary Whelband (Air Force)

have also spent time overseas on deployment. They are three out of twenty-two part-time chaplains who continue to give valuable support to the Defence Forces. The contribution of our Reserve chaplains to the pastoral care, administration, and training to the Defence Forces is highly valued. Their commitment and support are highly valued by the Defence Forces.

4. THE NEED FOR MORE CHAPLAINS

As reported to the Eleventh Assembly, the decision of the Defence Force to increase the retirement age for full-time chaplains to 60 took some pressure off the need to recruit new chaplains over the next three years. Now the pressure is back on us if the committee is to continue with the policy of having chaplains begin their Defence Force chaplaincy in the Reserve (part-time) before beginning full-time chaplaincy. This has proved to be not always possible.

While it is true that generally Uniting Church congregations are aging, those members of the Defence Force who put their religion as Uniting Church, Methodist, or Congregational continues to be about the same percentage as those declaring a denomination ten years ago. This means that the Uniting Church needs to fill one sixth of the Defence Force chaplaincy places. We are currently two below that in terms of full-time chaplains but our number of Reserve Chaplains is less than half what it could be.

Meeting these requirements has put the committee and the convenor in a very difficult position within a Church with an older, less fit and less healthy ministry than ever before. Many of the Uniting Church ministers who have been nominated as chaplains to the Defence Force in the last three years have been knocked back on health grounds.

The first Uniting Church member to make use of the Defence Force In-service Training Scheme for Chaplains is now an intern working in a placement in a congregation. He worked well as a student and is showing real promise in ministry. The committee is monitoring and looking forward to the time when he can return to the Defence Force as a chaplain. A second Uniting Church member of the Defence Force has commenced the full-time study phase of his preparation for ministry. This young man has had a number of deployments and is seen by his peers and the officers with whom he has worked as having great potential as a chaplain and has been strongly supported by his Presbytery in his call to the Uniting Church ministry.

This scheme has been extended and other churches are about to use it to support the training of theological students who have indicated a willingness to spend some or the greater part of their ministry as chaplains within the Defence Force. Our committee has deliberately not yet made this widely known within the Uniting Church.

5. RETIREMENTS

The Rev Graeme Adsett retired as Principal Chaplain Navy (Protestant Denominations) at the end of 2008. As indicated, the Rev Peter Woodward who was previously Principal Chaplain Army (Protestant Denominations) has continued a limited involvement with the Defence Force in relation to chaplains' pay as has the Rev Stephen de Plater who was previously the Principal Chaplain RAAF (Protestant Denominations).

The Rev Noel Williams (Air Force), Rev Don Kaus and Rev David Hamilton have moved from full-time to the Reserve. We thank these ministers for their long and valuable service to the Defence Force. They have provided good ministries in the areas of leadership, pastoral care, and training and we honour them for their commitment.

6. THE RELIGIOUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE SERVICES

The Committee is made up of the Catholic Bishop to the Forces, the Anglican Bishop to the Forces, the Convenor of the Uniting Church Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee, a Presbyterian representative, the Chair of the United Church Chaplaincy Board (representing most other Protestant denominations) and a rabbi representing the Jewish faith. The task of the committee is to give advice to the Defence Forces on matters relating to religion and pastoral care.

The RACS spent a large amount of meeting time on matters relating to smaller and emerging denominations and other faiths. After much work and changes to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Churches and Defence Force, the Chief of the Defence Force and those authorized to sign on behalf of the Churches signed an amended Memorandum of Understanding which now allows for employment of Assemblies of God ministers as chaplains. The changes will also make it easier for other emerging denominations to nominate ministers for employment as chaplains.

The committee has also had discussions with the Buddhists and The Church of the Latter Day Saints, and about Muslims and

the possibility of there being chaplains from these faiths. At present the Defence Force census numbers do not indicate that there are sufficient numbers from these groups to warrant the appointment of chaplains. The Buddhist numbers are increasing.

The RACS meeting has spent time on matters relating to deployment, the carrying of arms by chaplains, chaplaincy to military cadet units, and the recruitment of chaplains.

During 2007 the then Minister for Defence requested a review of the Chaplains Branches in the Defence Force. The results indicated that the Chaplains Services were highly valued and that they should be more strongly supported. The RACS and the Principal Chaplains had all indicated to the Review Team the need for more chaplains. To date this has not been realized even though there is support from the Chiefs of the Forces. The main factor preventing increases has been budgeting restrictions. It is, however, clear that at all levels our chaplains have done well.

7. SPECIAL MENTION

The Rev David Jackson (Army) and the Rev Graeme Watkinson (Navy) have received *Conspicuous Service Medals*. The Rev Christine Digby received a Training Commander Commendation. The Rev Charles Vesley received an Australian Day Medallion

These chaplains have been acknowledged for a high level of care, commitment, and skill.

8. CONCLUSION

At time when much has been asked of our Defence Forces our Uniting Church Chaplains have performed well. The Committee has worked well and is looking for ward to continuing to serve the Church.

**Rev Gale Hall
Convenor**

DEFENCE FORCE CHAPLAINCY MANDATE

- Responsible to:** The Assembly
- Reporting arrangements:** The Assembly and the Standing Committee
- Mission statement:** To advise the Assembly on matters concerning defence force chaplaincy, and to act on behalf of the Uniting Church in relation to defence force chaplaincy in accord with Assembly policy.
- Mandate:**
1. To advise and support the Uniting Church member of the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services (RACS).
 2. In consultation with synods, to approve the placement of Uniting Church ministers as defence force chaplains, and to determine on behalf of the Assembly which chaplaincy positions are regarded as approved placements within the Assembly.
 3. As requested by the Uniting Church member of the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services or by the General Secretary, to liaise with the Department of Defence and with representatives of other churches and other faiths on matters related to defence force chaplaincy.
 4. To ensure the provision of pastoral care for defence force chaplains, their spouses and families.
 5. To consult with and work with Synod bodies relating to defence force chaplaincy concerning the work and welfare of defence force chaplains.
- Power to appoint:** The Reference Committee has power to appoint working groups to operate within this mandate.
- Membership of the Reference Committee:**
- Convener:** the Uniting Church member of the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services, appointed by the Assembly following receipt of a nomination from the Reference Committee.
- Up to 14** persons appointed by the Standing Committee, to be located within a Synod as determined by the Standing Committee (normally the Synod of residence of the chairperson).
- Corresponding members:** chairpersons/conveners of Synod bodies related to defence force chaplaincy.