

# Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee

## 1. MANDATE

- 1.1 To advise and support the Uniting Church member of the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services (RACS).
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 To ensure the provision of pastoral care for defence force chaplains, their spouses and families.
- 1.5 To consult with and work with Synod bodies relating to defence force chaplaincy concerning the work and welfare of defence force chaplains.

## 2. THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- 2.1 Convenor (Rev Neale Michael); Chairperson (Rev R A Macintosh); Secretary (Rev W D Reddin); Assistant Secretary (Mrs L Stuckey); Treasurer (Mr L J Gaghan); Ms Margaret Pitman; Mrs Margaret Sandow; Mrs Marion McCarthy; Mrs Trish Perkins; Rev Mark Hinton; Rev John Maddern; Rev Graham Pitman; Rev Dr Peter Ryan; Rev Ben Usher.
- 2.2 The Committee is located in Adelaide and meets three times a year. It has reduced its numbers to 14 as required by the Review of Assembly agencies and rectified the previous gender imbalance.

## 3. THE CHAPLAINS

- 3.1 There are presently 14 Uniting Church ministers serving as full time chaplains. They are the Reverends P Woodward; K J Bartlett; P R Anderson; R M Peacock; D W Hamilton; M A J Curnow; D E Jackson; and D L Kaus (Army); the Reverends G N Adsett; G M Watkinson and M Lund (Navy) and the Reverends N D Williams; M D Earle and G Whelband (Air Force).
- 3.2 In addition we have 26 women and men serving part time as Defence Force chaplains.

## 4. EAST TIMOR

- 4.1 The INTERFET operation in East Timor placed significant demands on chaplaincy resources. One result was the need to call upon part-time chaplains to serve directly or indirectly in support of ministry to Australian Defence Force personnel.
- 4.2 At the time of writing this report Chaplain Don Kaus (Australian Regular Army) had been serving almost from the beginning with INTERFET in East Timor and continued with his Battalion after the main force had returned to Australia. He has ministered faithfully to the soldiers under most difficult conditions.
- 4.3 Chaplain Graeme Watkinson RAN, likewise, served from the earliest days of INTERFET on HMAS Jervis Bay until March this year. He is to be commended for his ministry, not only to the ship's crew, but also among members of the East Timorese population. This included his participation in an ecumenical burial service for 23 victims of a massacre.
- 4.4 Both the Committee and I have maintained regular contact with the families of these ministers during their prolonged absence. We are grateful to them for their forbearance.
- 4.5 Part-time chaplains who were released for extended periods of service included the Rev David Thiem of Queanbeyan Parish who served aboard HMAS Jervis Bay and HMAS Melbourne, and the Rev Kaye Ronalds of Capricorn Coast Parish, who filled in at Rockhampton. I have written to their respective parishes thanking them for making their ministers available for temporary full-time service.

## 5. THE RELIGIOUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE SERVICES

- 5.1 RACS is unique to Australia as a link between religious communities nationally and the Defence Force (ADF). Its purpose is the provision of advice on religious matters to the ADF and the provision and supervision of chaplaincy services.
- 5.2 RACS works in conjunction with the Principal Chaplains' Committees (PCC's). In brief RACS role is ecclesiastical while the PCC's are administrative though there is some overlap.
- 5.3 In the ADF at least two-thirds have a religious affiliation but most members utilise chaplaincy facilities at some time.
- 5.4 The contribution made to ADF members by the religious communities through RACS and the PCC's includes chaplains, advice on chapels, worship services and other religious activities, facilities for pastoral care and counselling, concern for morale, workplace harmony and family support, advice and guidance when members are posted to areas where there are particular religious mores and customs, and

concern for the efficiency, morale and personal and family well-being of chaplains.

- 5.5 The contribution made to the ADF as a whole includes advice on relationships with the religious communities; containing or preventing religious controversy; insights on social issues such as sexual mores and drug taking, and advice on appropriate issues of national policy.
- 5.6 The co-operation between the religious communities on every level of the ADF reflects the unique arrangement whereby RACS members, all equal in status, learn to understand and accommodate each other's position. This is reflected on the PCC level by a committee system whereby no denomination has or can be perceived as having greater status or power than another.
- 5.7 The military chaplain belongs to and is answerable to two systems at the same time -- a religious community and the ADF. RACS is the medium by which both systems recognise each other's special position and needs.

## 6. RETIREMENTS

- 6.1 **Principal Chaplain Bruce Roy (ARA; Ares)**  
In a Minute of Appreciation the Assembly Defence Force Committee noted "its very real appreciation for the service given to chaplaincy in the Australian Regular Army and the Army Reserve by the Rev Dr Bruce Roy.

We note his long involvement with chaplaincy commencing in January 1968 with 3 and 5 Cadet Battalions, then on 17 December 1969 his appointment to the ARA (3 Aust Task Force); service in Vietnam with 1 Aust Task Force; HQ Puckapunyal; 1RTB Kapooka; 1 Div (SCHAP PD); 1Mil Hospital Yeronga; DSU Randwick; HQ 2 MD (Staff Chaplain and SCHAP PD for Field Force and Training Command, rising to Staff Chaplain, Senior Chaplain and Chief Instructor Chaplaincy Centre and thence to Div 5 Principal Chaplain PD in the Army Reserve.

*"Bruce was the last of the currently serving chaplains to have served as a chaplain in Vietnam.*

*"He brought a disciplined mind and committed spirit to the task of defence chaplaincy. This Committee, in particular, appreciated his wisdom and commonsense. Bruce enjoyed the company of his fellow chaplains and was among those instrumental in developing the PD Retreats which have become an important annual point of reference for Protestant chaplains in the ADF. We thank Bruce Roy and pray good health for him and his wife Beverley in the years to come."*

- 6.2 **Principal Chaplain R H Boerth, AM (RAAF)**  
Under new RAAF regulations Principal Chaplains will serve no more than eight years and as a result Rodger Boerth, with 12 years of service as a RAAF Principal Chaplain, will

conclude his ministry in the ADF on 5 May. His has been a long and distinguished period of service which will be appropriately noted in the our report to the 10th Assembly.

## 7. WOOMERA

- 7.1 It has been the practice for the Uniting Church to take its turn in providing ministry at the United Protestant Church in Woomera. This is a joint arrangement between RACS, this Assembly Committee and the Presbytery of Frome. In January, 1998 the Rev Dr Tom Atherton took up the appointment. Because Woomera as a defence facility was very much in decline, Tom undertook the placement in the full knowledge he would be ministering inevitably to a shrinking congregation. With the final departure of US Air Force from the area that decline has been accelerated and Tom will conclude his ministry there this year. However, an unusual development has been the establishment of a centre for illegal refugees ("boat people) and he has found himself ministering on a regular basis together with the local Roman Catholic priest to a congregation within the centre of some 130 Iraqi Christians. They had sought out this ministry and after some initial difficulties, it has proceeded and has been deeply appreciated.

## 8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The requirements of chaplaincy in the Defence Force will continue to call forth the very best we can offer in ministry. A person considering a call to this particular service will need a very strong sense of vocation coupled with a strong education and much common sense, good humour and a love of all sorts and conditions of men and women. Given those qualifications, it is likely such a minister will find a unique area of service with its own special rewards.
- 8.2 It is my privilege to serve the Assembly as Convenor of its Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee, its representative on RACS and to be the personal presence of the Assembly to our chaplains.

**Neale Michael  
Convenor  
Assembly Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee**