

VIEWPOINT

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Chaplaincy

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WELCOME to our second issue of *Viewpoint* magazine for 2021. Our theme for this issue is Chaplaincy, recognising and celebrating the remarkable work that Uniting Church chaplains across Canberra Region Presbytery do to care for people in hospitals, aged care, defence, universities, prison, disaster and community settings. Articles in this issue come from chaplains in all these areas.

Please remember our chaplains in your prayers.

Please let me know any thoughts you might have on this issue of Viewpoint. Your input to future issues of Viewpoint would be greatly appreciated, including suggestions for themes and content.

The Presbytery meeting online on Saturday 20 November will reflect on the themes discussed here.

In Christ

Robbie Tulip
CRP Secretary and Viewpoint Editor
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Indigenous Acknowledgement

***Canberra Region Presbytery acknowledges the
Traditional Owners of the land where we live. We pay
our respects to elders, past, present and emerging.***

We support the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#).

Voice. Treaty. Truth.

Rev Jean Shannon, Listening to God – The Butterfly effect

A Chaplain's Theology

From the moment Adam and Eve listened to God walking through the garden, Chaplains were born to walk in strange places and listen for God.

There are hundreds of theological treatises on Chaplaincy theology but to those of us in practice, it is really quite simple.

“Chaplaincy is no longer a simple state of presence. We don't necessarily start with a theology of pastoral care but with a theological reflection on mission. Chaplaincy is an expression of mission expressed in particular social and geographical locations.” (Rev Dr Adam McIntosh)

It is 'outside' the gathered church but 'inside' the *missio Dei*.

Archbishop Rowan Williams said “It is not the church of God that has a mission. It's the God of mission that has a church.”

The call to chaplaincy is expressed many times in scripture. For example, in Matthew 9:11-13

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

It is a very different perspective, very grounded within the grittiness of life itself. It is like the starfish story, about an old man walking along a beach as the tide is going out. The beach is covered with starfish stranded on the sand. As he walks along, he sees a young child picking up starfish one at a time, throwing them into the ocean.... Like this child, chaplains are drawn to making things 'right' with the world, knowing they can't change the world but they can make a difference to one person, and another and another.

God puts us in a particular place at a particular time for a purpose.

The reason why chaplaincy is so closely related to the Ministry of Deacon is that chaplains are not looking after the healthy in congregations but instead are listening to God in the wilderness, in the unconnected community. You could say, we all take the 'South Road'.

In [Acts 8:26](#), an angel of God told Saint Philip the Apostle to go to the South Road leading to Gaza, with no further instructions. Philip must have known he was on a mission but had no idea where it would lead. This was not a temple. It was the beginning of the wilderness. Along comes a wealthy, educated man in his own fancy carriage, an Ethiopian eunuch. A literate and faith-filled man returning from the temple in Jerusalem: a temple he would not have been allowed to enter because of his 'condition'. The man is reading and eager to learn more. Phillip is invited into the carriage. The power lay entirely with the eunuch. Phillip was the guest. He listened. He answered questions, blessed and left when it was time, with no expectation of an on-going relationship. The outstanding part of this story is the 'otherness', the outsider, respected and taken seriously and accepted as he was. We are left with the story that the first convert attributed to Phillip is a foreigner, a man of colour and a eunuch.

Chaplains are the open arms of the church to people now so often outside the buildings and communities. They hold people with care without hesitation. They are the safe one for the blind, the broken, the curious, the distressed and the lost. Chaplains (and Deacons) break down the walls of people's perceptions of 'church', throw open the windows and let the breath of God flow freely in the life around us.

One of the vitalities that powers chaplaincy is to 'see' people as they are: to really know them by looking deeply in their hearts and not flinching. Much like Jesus with the woman at the well,

people's pasts or addictions, mental health or convictions are facts but not who they are. To simply see them as individuals, valid and loved humans is an incredible offering.

Chaplains stand as a beacon of light so that others are drawn to safety and peace. Like the Centurion in [Luke 7](#), people may appear by stealth, embarrassed and afraid. They are often confused about the mixed messages they have heard from the churches of their youth but they feel safe enough to tentatively reach out. The response is what changes them.

Chaplains provide spiritual oil to fill their lamps and keep them burning. Like the bridesmaids, they may be travelling through the darkest night but if they have spiritual support, they can face whatever comes with resilience. Oil for the soul, keeps them prepared.

We are the [Sowers](#), scattering seeds on gravel and earth. We move through the fields that are the spheres of workplaces and hospitals; relief centres and communities and what takes, is God's work.

Chaplaincy is based on the belief that God is already there; in the hospital room and in the evacuation centre and in the wounded person before us.

Chaplains are crouched with the woman who knows the scraps off a table – and we squat with her.

Our job is to make space for the holy presence and listen, listen carefully. As a companion, we reflect and enhance the spirituality found in those lonely, searching, healing, divine humans.

Chaplains are there at the worst of times; open, helpful and hopeful. They are sometimes the lamp that lights the path before another's journey and other times the beacon that draws people back to God. Recent research shows that many people return to church late in life. The ACLS data shows that after decades away, an interaction with a chaplain has opened a door. It isn't proselytising that gets them there but gentle companionship and a hand to hold when in need. In their actions, not words, Chaplains have a way of reminding people there is another hand to hold, one they may have forgotten.

The theology of chaplaincy is simple but not simplistic.

We believe that God is here and that a chaplain's actions may have a butterfly effect.

In chaos theory, the [butterfly effect](#) is a property of chaotic systems (such as the atmosphere) by which small changes in initial conditions can lead to large-scale and unpredictable variation in the future state of the system. That is, small actions ripple through a



place or situation and while we can never know the ultimate effect, or its size, we have faith that change happens. Sometimes, just sometimes, something happens that makes the divine 'visible' or at least, the sense of presence felt. A chaplain's life is full of awe and wonder.

Rev Charles Vesely, Training Chaplains for Defence

Many would be familiar with the loveable M*A*S*H fictional character, “Father Mulcahy” portrayed wonderfully by actor, the late William Christopher as the chaplain to the 4077th M*A*S*H. Whilst fictional, the Fr Mulcahy character is a great example of military chaplaincy, especially for the period in which the M*A*S*H television series is set. The present-day military chaplain, however, is much more than the wise, faithful and loveable Fr Mulcahy character.



For the Uniting Church (as for other faith groups), our chaplains serve in all three of the services, at various levels and in a variety of roles. The starting point for Uniting Church chaplains in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is that they are trained ministers or deacons meeting all the requirements for ordination and have completed at least two years of pastoral ministry in regular Uniting Church placements. From that point the prospective chaplain will undergo the rigorous Defence recruitment process. This process includes endorsement by the Uniting Church. Upon successful completion the minister will be appointed to Navy, Army or Air Force. ADF Chaplaincy placements for Uniting Church ministers are Assembly placements, as chaplains are required to serve anywhere in Australia or overseas. Chaplains may serve fulltime or in part-time (Reserve) roles. Presently there are 50 Uniting Church ministers serving in the ADF as chaplains or preparing to be appointed as chaplains.

ADF Chaplains must successfully complete the required officer training of their appointed service. Upon the successful completion of officer training, chaplains will undergo further training and education leading to a *Diploma of Institutional and Operational Chaplaincy*. This training is conducted at the Defence Force Chaplains College (DFCC) here in Canberra, at the ADFA/UNSW campus.

For the modern-day defence chaplain, whilst pastoral and religious skills are still paramount, knowledge and abilities in ethics, military law, mental health and governmental administration all make the chaplaincy a very specialised ministry. Defence Chaplaincy is an ecumenical and multifaith ministry, reflecting the diversity of faith (and lack of faith) found in the general population of the Australian community. Therefore, ADF chaplains need to be well versed in providing ministry, and possibly facilitating the availability of certain rituals for the various belief backgrounds represented in the Defence Community. The recently released “*ADF at Worship*” acts as a guide to not only chaplains, but other Defence personnel for such facilitation. *ADF at Worship* covers the key faith groups represented in Defence including, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, and Sikh faiths. An important principle for all ADF Chaplains is to serve one’s own and facilitate for others.

ADF Chaplains are required to give advice to commanders on matters of religion, culture, ethics and member welfare. Well trained chaplains are the key to this capability. It is at DFCC where the highly professional and experienced team of chaplain and other instructors deliver initial and ongoing training to chaplains in the ADF. The advisory ministry is valued in the ADF and viewed as an important capability for the ADF to operate wherever the Government of Australia may deploy Australian personnel. Chaplains are placed as a member of the command advisory group, thereby giving the chaplains free access to all levels of personnel without the restrictions of rank or status.

In recent times many of our UCA chaplains have worked both overseas and in Australia on peace keeping, humanitarian and nation stabilising missions. Chaplaincy is a unique mission field for the

UCA, where many of our chaplains have served with great distinction. Countless sailors, soldiers, aviators, along with their families over the decades have been faithfully assisted by one of our UCA Chaplains.

Charles Vesely is originally from NSW (trained at United Theological College and postgraduate at St Mark's Theological College), and was posted into the role of Chief Instructor DFCC in January 2021, from Brisbane. Charles is Chair of the Uniting Church in Australia Defence Chaplains Committee, and a member of the UCA Queensland Synod Chaplaincy Commission.

Defence Force Chaplains College Staff



16 June 2021

ADF Chaplains Kate Lord (Course Chaplain), Ricky Tilden (Senior Instructor-Army), Colin Tett (Senior Instructor -Navy), Wayne Ross (Senior Instructor -Air Force), Charles Vesely (Chief Instructor), Petty Officer Gean Ellis (Operations Manager)

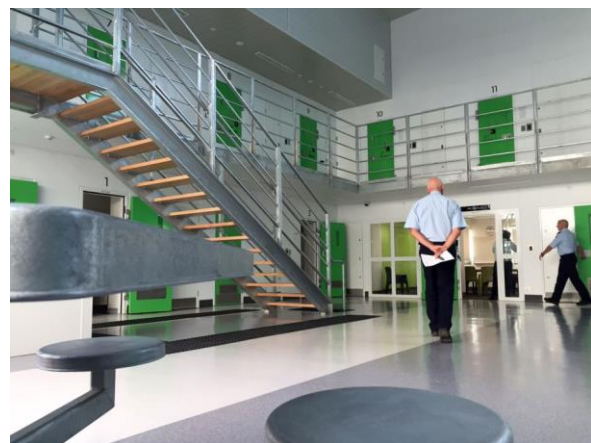
Richard Scott, Chaplaincy at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (ACT Prison)

AMC is probably different from chaplaincy in other places. Visitors are met by an iris recognition machine which says “Thank you, you have been identified” and then you pass through layers of security. You learn to become comfortable with the rules, routes and electronic doors. You are subject to the correction officers’ instructions and there is a considerable deal of time spent waiting.

Alexander Maconochie (1787–1860) was a Scottish naval officer, geographer, and penal reformer. In 1840, Maconochie became

the Governor of Norfolk Island, a prison island where convicts were treated with severe brutality and were seen as lost causes. Upon reaching the island, Maconochie immediately instituted policies that restored dignity to prisoners, achieving remarkable success in prisoner rehabilitation.

AMC is Canberra’s jail and was opened in 2008. It was built to provide adult correctional services in the ACT and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into the community. The AMC



has a central area, with administration, education, kitchen and laundry facilities and a visits area around a large open square. It has cell blocks with permanently stationed correction officers, less supervised rooms called 'cottages', and high security buildings with the women in one area and the men in a number of others including remand, sentenced, and another where people are separated for their own safety. The number of detainees has increased to such an extent that the accommodation is overcrowded and no longer conforms to the original principles. This overcrowding, with the fact that Canberra is a relatively small place with detainees who know each other requiring some segregation due to rivalries, and the limited visitor access due to Covid-19, has contributed to considerable mental and physical pressures on the staff and detainees.

There is a full-time chaplain who provides Christian services, counselling and religious publications such as the Bible, study guides and the Quran. She is highly regarded by the detainees and the staff. The Anglican, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Uniting Churches take services on a roster basis, involving taking a service on the Friday morning in the women's section and then three in the men's sections on the three Sunday afternoons. The service lasts about 30 minutes and the UC service includes conversation, Bible reading, discussion, communion and prayer. The denomination's services vary. Uniting Church services focus on fellowship, encouraging the golden rule. It's important that relationships are built between the detainees and service leaders. Our connections with outreach such as the [Early Morning Centre](#) greatly assists.

Richard Scott leads the Uniting Church's services. He visits on his own in 2021 as visitors are discouraged during the pandemic. Richard's recent rotation was cancelled. Before that, services in some blocks were missed as detainees had misbehaved and security was not guaranteed. Joan and George Pratt, amongst others, have previously provided considerable support, including Joan leading in the women's section. Each visit is a challenge. Will the correction officers allow the visit? Are there new frightened detainees? Will known attendees attend, or have they been moved or released? Can a participant read? Can one ignore the detainee's crime? Do you know enough to answer the challenging theological questions (pass those to the chaplain)?

The aim is to encourage the Christian detainees in each area to hold a regular small group, study the Word, pray together, and to look after others without expecting something in return. Other detainees will see, want the peace that the group is experiencing and hopefully join, resulting in a more harmonious jail. It's often stony ground but there are successes. We definitely feel that the detainees welcome our presence, the message of the gospel which we bring and our care and concern for them.

[Kairos Prison Ministry Australia](#) is an interdenominational Christian ministry reaching out to incarcerated individuals, their families and those who work with them to bring sustainable meaning and hope in the place of loneliness, isolation and despair. *Kairos Inside* is a program for male and female inmates, saying "You have a choice". *Kairos Outside* is for family and friends of those inmates, saying "You are not alone". *Kairos Torch* is for juvenile offenders, saying "There's a better way ahead". Richard Scott has participated in or led three *Kairos Inside* programs for men in AMC, each lasting four days, although the program has been suspended for the last two years.

Richard's Kairos ministry enables him to have personal connections with the participants, the chaplain and the correction officers. Although this increases his workload it is a blessing as the participants will open up to him. On the first day of *Kairos Inside* the team and participants get to know one another in team-building exercises. On the second day, participants learn about the love of Christ (which can be powerful if you haven't experienced love before). The third day concentrates on forgiving others and ourselves. On the last day the team encourages the participants to lead. There are prayers, meditations and talks on the need to stop hanging onto guilt after receiving God's forgiveness, and on persevering in God's grace. In a 'Cross' ceremony each participant is given a leather cross to wear and upon receiving the Cross, the participants respond with "I am counting on Christ." In the closing ceremony, the participants receive graduation certificates and share what they

learned. The forgiveness, ‘Cross’ and closing ceremonies can be very powerful and you are confident of being in the presence of the Holy Spirit as hard men weep as they receive the grace of Jesus Christ for the first time in their lives and understand that they can be forgiven and be loved.

Pastoral Letter from CRP Co-Chairs and Presbytery Ministers

Ross Kingham, Judy McKinlay, Andrew Smith, John Squires

As we return to in-person worship and fellowship, let us encourage one another.

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ([Heb 10:25](#)).

This verse from the Epistle to the Hebrews has often been quoted when discussing the importance of worship—and, in the past 20 months, when thinking about whether we can worship together in the church building.

As we consider a return to in-person worship and fellowship, let us hold the exhortation to *encourage one another* alongside the importance of *meeting together*. There are a few guiding principles that would be good for us to hold in mind.

1. We have all experienced stress and anxiety for the past few months—indeed, for the past 20 months. *Let us be gentle with each other*. Let us remember, in each interaction that we have, that we are all bruised. Some might feel close to being broken. Some might feel traumatised by news from the past period of time. Some might feel that they have been very lonely for some time now. Some might have been ill, or known people that became very ill, during the lockdown. Some might be grieving or remembering past losses. *Let’s try to bear all of this in mind*, with each conversation that we have with others, as we seek to encourage one another.
2. Each person returns to in-person worship and fellowship with different expectations. Some might be incredibly excited. Some might be cautious and hopeful. Some might be wary, very worried about being back in a larger group of people. Some might be resenting the decision to return while there is still significant community transmission of the virus. Some might be angry about not having been able to see their friends for the past few months. *Let’s try to bear all of this in mind*, with each conversation we have, with each step that we take to ensure that we can worship together safely.
3. Not everybody will be returning to in-person worship and fellowship. Just as we have found ways to remain connected online while in lockdown, so we need to remember such people and continue practices that ensure that they know that they are still an integral part of the community of faith within your Congregation. Make sure that in leading worship, *people online are acknowledged and encouraged* as well as people gathering in the building.
4. If you have a Minister or a Pastor who leads your community, please remember that they have been working incredibly hard in the most recent lockdown, and indeed over the whole of the past 20 months. Holding a community together, providing clear-headed leadership, offering inspiration and encouragement in the regular weekly sermons, all in a different situation that none of us have experienced before—this is testing, draining, exhausting. *Let’s be patient with our ministry leaders*, pray for them, care for them, and hold them in supportive ways.
5. For each person who serves on Church Council—and especially for the Chairperson and Secretary of your Church Council and the Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer of your Congregation—this has been an equally difficult and challenging period. Making decisions about when to regather in person, completing the COVID Safety Plans, explaining the decisions to members of the Congregation, all of this is difficult. *Let’s continue to hold our lay leaders and office bearers in prayer*, and let’s remember to thank them for all the difficult discussions they

have had and all the hard decisions that they have made during this pandemic. They, too, need encouragement.

6. Remember that your community of faith is more than just the people that you would see, most weeks, on a Sunday morning. There are people “on the fringes” and people “in the community” who look to your Congregation and identify that as the church for them. You may not have seen them for many months. They are most likely still around. *Let’s remember such people* and work on rekindling contact with them, developing deeper relationships with them, showing them that the way that we “love each other” is exactly how we really do “love them” as well.
7. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking, or saying, something like, “it’s great to be back to normal now”. For a start, we can never “go back”; we always are “moving on”. And then, we have adapted our routines and adopted new practices over the past 20 months, and we shouldn’t—and cannot—simply drop all of them, all of a sudden. We have taken up some new things that will stand us in good stead into the future. We don’t yet know that the pandemic is over; we may well have more lockdowns, there may well be drastic rises in infections and hospitalisations, and even deaths. We all hope not. But we do not know. *So let us hold on to hope for the future, without throwing away the lessons and learnings of the recent past. That’s the encouragement we need to give each other.*

Andrew Smith, Community Chaplaincy in the Aftermath of the 2019–2020 Bushfires

CRP Minister for Congregational Futures

Our Presbytery has established a Community Chaplain position, based on the south coast of NSW, to serve within the Presbytery’s overall framework of responding to community needs which have been identified in the aftermath of the 2019–2020 bushfires.

The position will build capacity for communities which have been heavily impacted by a series of significant events: first, the profoundly serious drought conditions leading into 2019; second, the devastating 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires on the east coast of Australia; and third, the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has had specific regional impacts.



Cobargo, 31 December 2019, photo from ABC

The Community Chaplain will be based with the Uniting Church, to work across the region, engaging with communities, organisations, and individuals. The focus of this position is to work with individuals and groups in the communities as they transition into a “reconstruction” phase of recovery.

Context for the Community Chaplaincy

The drought and bushfires experienced in the south-eastern area of Australia have had a serious impact on people and communities in multiple ways: economic, environmental, emotional, and psychological. The Black Summer Bushfires of 2019–2020 came hard on the heels of a period of prolonged drought. Both events had significant economic impacts, as well as emotional and environmental. The fires were swiftly followed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with its highly

significant economic impact. The effects of the pandemic have continued into 2021, leading to further reduction in economic activity as a consequence of restrictions in place to respond to COVID-19. Mental health and emotional resilience continue to be a challenge.

Despite the passing of more than a year since the Black Summer bushfires in these regions, the recovery of communities has been slow, with the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating this. Communities have large numbers of disaster-affected people and much work remains in recovery and re-establishment of focus and building of foundations for the future.

[COORDINARE](#), the South-Eastern NSW Public Health Network, an Australian Government initiative with the NSW Government, has consulted with bushfire and COVID-19 impacted communities across the region to understand the local requirements for non-clinical mental health supports over the next two years. This consultation has highlighted significant opportunities to support community members residing in rural areas who are male, elderly, living with disabilities and experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, as well as those under the age of 12.

Overview of the Community Chaplain Position

- The primary focus of pastoral care will be to offer support and encouragement to residents and their families in the various communities within the area. Such pastoral care might include personal conversations with community members as well as referrals to specialised agencies where appropriate.
- Providing appropriate psychological and spiritual resources from reputable sources to people in need will be essential, with attention to what specific resources fit with the needs observed, liaising with Lifeline South Coast, COORDINARE and other agencies active in the area.
- Liaising with congregation leaders and members of the Mount Dromedary Uniting Church, and UCA agencies (particularly Uniting), to further engage Uniting Church people in the provision of pastoral care to the local communities and in working collaboratively with community agencies.
- Liaising with other Chaplains who may be appointed in the South Coast region, to establish links, boundaries, networks, resources etc.
- Liaising with other community organisations and people to develop networks and referrals as appropriate (eg COORDINARE, Lifeline South Coast, The Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP), Mental Health Matters, etc).
- Accessing support and resources of the Synod Disaster Recovery Committee through the Synod Disaster Recovery Coordinator. The Synod Disaster Recovery Coordinator will be available for consultation on best practice as required.

The Community Chaplain position will assist congregations to work together, promote the sharing of assets and resources to meet community need, to strengthen their current community engagement, missional activity and witness, and give space for recovery and refocus. The Church will provide new ways for the community to develop engagement, to strengthen or restrengthen those individuals and communities battered by the recent and ongoing harsh events by building capacity (faith, hope, and love) across and between communities and congregations stretching from Bodalla and Narooma to Bermagui and Cobargo within the Bega Valley and Eurobodalla Shires.

Financing the Community Chaplaincy

The duration of the position is 2 years full-time or 4 years part-time, subject to needs and funding. The position is weighted as approximately 75% Community Chaplaincy role within the communities of the South Coast region, and approximately 25% Congregational Leadership within the Mount Dromedary Parish. The proportion of funding sources does, to some degree, reflect this.

Mount Dromedary Parish is contributing from its regular income stream.

Canberra Region Presbytery is contributing funds set aside in its budgets for 2020—2021 and 2021—2022 for bushfire relief.

The Moderator's Disaster Appeal Fund has allocated \$60,000 per annum for two years.

Further financial contributions from two Uniting Church Congregations in the Presbytery and a church couple from Canberra are key to helping make the position happen.

It is wonderful to see how the wider Uniting Church across our Presbytery and Synod is partnering to fund this position. If you or your Congregation would like to contribute toward extending this role, please contact Rev Andrew Smith, Presbytery Minister – Congregation Futures.

Andrew Mead, Hospital Chaplaincy

When I started as hospital chaplain in Canberra a few years ago, I was horrified to learn about a memorial service the pastoral care team conducted for babies that included tiny coffins. I thought that was one of the cruellest things I had ever heard of. As if these families weren't going through enough without being confronted with tiny coffins as well. When I attended my first Baby Memorial Service, I was relieved to see how tastefully and respectfully the coffins were displayed, each with a bouquet of fresh flowers, and was surprised to discover how powerful and meaningful the service was to the grieving families who attended.

Four times a year, the pastoral care service of The Canberra Hospital conducts the Baby Memorial Service for babies who have been lost under 21 weeks. Generally, our culture doesn't acknowledge the loss of such babies, and families are expected to just get on with it, enveloped in silence and shame. This service offers the exact opposite – the pain and loss are named, the reality of the baby's life and the love for the baby are affirmed, and the impact on mothers, fathers, siblings and grandparents is acknowledged.

The service is very gentle, careful, and spiritual without being very religious. In the four years I've been involved with the service, I've been amazed at the feedback from families who often arrive visibly bereft and grief-stricken, but who leave with a completely changed demeanour, telling us that the service has been profoundly meaningful and has offered a sense of validation and closure.

I studied loss and grief at uni this year, and was introduced to a concept that resonates with these families: *disenfranchised grief*. Disenfranchised grief is the grief experienced by a loss that isn't openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially sanctioned by others. Creating isolation, it can make mourning and grieving much more difficult and create ongoing difficulties. This is exactly what these families go through, and the Baby Memorial Service helps alleviate some of the issues associated with what would otherwise become disenfranchised grief. The feedback we are repeatedly offered is that it's the public naming and acknowledgement of both the reality of the baby's existence and of the family's love and grief that mean so much. During the service, after the parent(s) light an individual pillar candle for their baby, others attending are invited to light a tealight candle. Over the past four years, I've had three separate grandmothers tell me through tears that they lit a tealight candle for a baby that they lost many years ago, and which up to that moment was never offered acknowledgement. This is all powerful stuff indeed.

I've come to learn that the coffins play a critical role in the grieving of the families. The coffins are a validation and recognition, a formal statement of the reality and value and personhood of each tiny life. Some families need to touch the coffin, and nearly every family will have a photo taken of the coffin, often with themselves beside it. What I thought was cruel, is one of the most healing and

meaningful part of the service. I now count myself to be very privileged as a chaplain to serve these families in this way. Below are two emails I received this year. Thank you.

Dear Andrew

I just wanted to write to thank you again for putting on the funeral service last month. It meant so much to us to have that acknowledgement of the importance of our little girl's life, although it was short, and of how much we loved her and miss her.

It was a beautiful service that will always be an important moment for us and has been a key part of our healing process. We would not have organised a service ourselves, and we are so grateful to you for giving us the chance to recognise her importance and say goodbye in that way. Being with other parents who had also recently lost a baby made us feel less alone in our pain.

Thank you, I can't tell you how important the service was to us, and I hope you are able to continue to hold them for parents and families into the future, it's really important work you're doing.

Hi Andrew,

We just wanted to send you a short email to say thank you for the memorial service earlier this week. We didn't realise till we attended how important it was for us to have a formalised occasion in which to say goodbye to our baby daughter, and we were both really impressed by how sensitive and heartfelt the event was. We'll treasure the candle and the little bear that we've kept.

Thank you for offering us the opportunity to be part of it.



Ross Kingham, Poems

FOR CARERS

No, it is not arrogance
but relief
to see
in me
the Christ pain-bearer.

'Have you ever thought',
he said
to me in my crucifixion,
'You represent to me the
Suffering One?'

Compounding my pain,
I never had.

It is not only my own self
that bears this weight
but the One in whom
my being was formed,
is held
in-breathed by the Creator.

Not my tears and curses
only
but borne
by Another,
refracting hope and healing
through many lenses -
in silence candlelit,
and knowing glances
of a thousand Christs
who draw me to
that Source,
that Bread,
that Wine.

*'From now on, let no one cause
me trouble, for I bear on my body
the marks of Jesus.'*

[Galatians 6:17](#)

FEAR

Fear,
not strength,
afflicts the solitary care-
giver,
quivering lip,
swallowing hard the pain,
in loneliness.

Dull of eyes,
quietly,
the anguish and pain
are buried
deeper than any grave
so others,
it is said,
may be protected,
their model untarnished,
the image intact.

While all around glistening
eyes
that see
weep
for the courage
squandered,
the pain not shared,
the trust denied
that would hold, bless, wait
and heal.

*'Some friends play at friendship,
but a true friend sticks closer than
one's nearest kin'. [Proverbs 18:24](#)*

FOOTPRINTS UNSEEN

Sometimes the way has
been across uncharted
waters.
No maps, none at all:
the only thing sure
being the call to risk
everything on wind and
wave.

Or so it seemed
with smarting eyes,
blistered hands,
aching limbs.

But later,
in the stillness of evening,
with sweat's saltiness a
memory,
the conviction grows
that another hand had
gripped the tiller,
helped plot the course,
set the sails,
shown the way
in the stinging, crashing sea.

The waters cannot hold,
display,
after all,
footprints.

*'Your way was through the sea,
Your path, through the mighty
waters; yet Your footprints were
unseen.' [Psalm 77:19](#)*

20 August 2021

Shirley Campbell, Pastoral Care in Aged Care

*'Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love the way you love,
and do what you would do.'*

Edwin Hatch 1835 – 1889

In aged care pastoral practice, there can be a lot of coming and going. Elders arrive from home or hospital after considered thought or as a result of crisis. And inevitably there's the going part, the concluding chapter of life. In the meantime, as one elder said recently to me, 'there's a lot of hurry up and wait'.



'Remember to breathe...' I hear myself saying and I muse on the various ways this most basic biological function supports us. When stress levels climb, often we unconsciously hold our breath, bracing for the heavy emotional lifting that may (or may not) be about to happen. What to do next? I smile, remembering the old adage 'if in doubt, breathe out'.

We pay homage to first and last things...first car, last exam, first love, the last straw. A baby's first breath requires enormous effort for the lungs to inflate and is part of the labouring of being born. At our own birth at least our mother is present and most likely others too. At the end, in the labouring of our last breath, many will die alone.

In the last month, all of which we've been in lock down, I've celebrated the anniversary of my first ever breath and I've mourned my mother's final breath. Sadly I was unable to be physically present for the latter due to border closures. But as part of my job I have the privilege of sitting with elders who are in the sacred space of leaving this life. Being present, in peace and steadiness, an anchor, simply breathing, being with.

Sometimes in this space of end of life I sing quietly, perhaps with the lyrics of favourite hymns like the one above, or maybe a Gaelic blessing 'Deep peace of the running wave/ flowing air/ quiet earth/ shining stars...' Or maybe I chant a mantra, which I've learnt regulates my own breath. Many of the ancient mantras from different traditions help slow our breathing and regulate internal rhythms including reciting the Rosary, the Buddhist mantra Om Mani Padme Hum, or simply counting seconds to equalise in-breath and out-breath. My personal practice is silent meditation with the interior repetition of the phrase 'Maranatha' - as taught by the World Community for Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org) and locally at Benedictus Contemplative Church (www.Benedictus.com.au). For me it's a way to bypass my monkey mind's wrestle with the in-articulate, to broaden my viewpoint, or like the prayer of St Francis to simply be '...a channel of your Peace'.

And so, as we navigate these unprecedented times, and breathe our many millions of breaths over a lifetime, take comfort in the caring and sharing of companionship. Perhaps it's the rituals of walking the dog or a daily run, the humming of a ditty or the sigh of pleasure in the giving of a small gift. Behind our masks, let's soften the edges, soften our eyes and be confident that before you even open your mouth, your presence is enough. In the words of Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh "Breathing in, I calm body and mind. Breathing out, I smile. Dwelling in the present moment I know this is the only moment".

Pastor Heather Potter, Chaplaincy - An Essential for Uniting

Canberra Region and Far South Coast Chaplain

*Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but **when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.**" [John 21.18](#)*

Jesus understood people and human systems, including family systems. Here, as he restores Peter to ministry, the risen Christ captures a most distressing aspect of ageing, the loss of independence. Ageing encounters other distressing elements too. Loss of friends and family, loss of meaningful work, hobbies and activities, even the loss of memories. And for those who need to move into supported care, it also requires for many the loss of familiar surroundings and a sense of belonging.

To address many of these challenging aspects of ageing, Uniting has developed what is called the "Household Model." This creates smaller family-type groups of residents to break down institutional approaches to the provision of care. Alongside this, the Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care program seeks to assist the whole Uniting staff team to address effectively the spiritual aspects of ageing and moving into care. The three big spiritual questions of life: Who will Love me? What is my Purpose? Where can I find a sense of Meaning?

As Regional Hub Chaplain for Uniting in Canberra and the Far South Coast NSW, I lead a team of Pastoral Practitioners and pastoral volunteers committed to keeping the focus on the spiritual needs of residents and staff. This requires our team, particularly with new residents, to be present for the other with integrity, and assist them to transition, to discover, or recover meaning and purpose as they move into a whole new way of living. Aged care may be looked upon (wrongly) by some as a place of waiting to die. Uniting, the Pastoral Care Team and all staff are called upon to see it rather as an opportunity for meaningful living.

One of the great challenges for many people as they age is the loss of memory. Along with changes in physical capacities, memory loss is today a major factor requiring the move into care. But failing memory and dementia does not necessarily spell the end for quality life with meaning, connection and a sense of place. One gift fostered and modelled by our pastoral care team is the capacity to enter into the reality of each person, no matter what that reality may be, in order to facilitate a connection. This more fully respects the humanity of the person experiencing memory loss, no matter how confusing and distressing it may be for them. Often that simple connection offers reassurance and restores a sense of peace and contentment.

Death is still something of a taboo subject in Australian society. This results in many of us being ill-prepared when this becomes a reality. But in an aged care facility death quickly becomes a norm. How we prepare for it matters at every level, perhaps most importantly spiritually. Chaplaincy and pastoral staff in particular assist residents and families in this most important phase of life. Of course, as in all significant life transitions, the use of symbol and ceremony assists, especially at the spiritual level. In our facilities we celebrate and honour the person who has died with the "Walkout" (a short ceremony tailored to family wishes where the person's body is respectfully taken from their room), memorial and funeral services and a bi-annual service where families are invited back to celebrate and remember all those who have passed from this life in the previous six months.

Chaplaincy is also listening for the inner voice of God, spending time in the quiet spaces in the day to listen and be present to hear from him. We learn to relate to others through God's love for us. Human love is limited but God's love is unending.

All chaplaincy and pastoral care services are offered to residents and staff of all faiths, as well as to those with none. Our services are given in a context of suspended judgement, for, in the words of Henri Nouwen, "Compassion can never coexist with judgment because judgment creates the distance, the distinction, which prevents us from really being with the other." (Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*)

Pat Coates, Aged Care Chaplaincy

Activities/Pastoral Care Eden

When I retired from teaching, I anticipated serving my new community in a capacity that didn't involve a workload that was beyond my capacity to fulfil to my satisfaction. (I won't tell you what happened to that plan!) I began volunteering at the Community Access Centre, and there one of my Computer Studies students encouraged me to volunteer at the Eden Aged Care facility run at the time by B.U.P.A. Six years ago I followed her advice.

There are still residents who have been in the residential home from that time on and have weathered some very challenging circumstances. The first was a major flood that left the facility awash with sewerage. Those residents suffering from severe dementia were housed in aged care facilities in Eden and Merimbula; some patients returned home for the time-being and others were housed in local motels. One blind and almost deaf centenarian, who I loved dearly, shouted pink champagne to all her fellow evacuees staying at her motel. I'll never forget her graciousness, nor the resilience of so many who faced this crisis with calm and patience. I'll never forget the staff who acted with compassion and professionalism, soothing confused residents (made worse because the beginning of the evacuation occurred at night), saving all they could but removing all that could not be salvaged and hygienically cleaned.

After all that came lengthy processes involving renovation (the smell of paint all pervasive), the royal commission, meeting quality care standards, and the revoking of Eden's B.U.P.A. Aged Care accreditation in 2019. I must commend many of the staff who continued to work as best they could with staffing shortages and under much duress. The residents were amazing in their endurance of the changes going on around them. Staff and more able residents shielded them where possible.

Next came the fires of 1999/2000 and the evacuation order for January 3rd 2020 for Eden Aged Care. The logistics of such an operation was enormous but the facility was now fortunate to be managed by Annette Guilfoyle, a dedicated and skilled manager. Perhaps Annette didn't view it as lucky! She had been at the home such a short time before she was not just dealing with accreditation, but with evacuation and then CoVid19.

The Covid shutdowns have been very trying for anxious friends and family and for the residents. One family member established an easy to operate [Facebook Portal](#) device that allowed his father video conferencing. Because of the knowledge that came with his involvement in the home, he saw the need and donated two more devices for others to use.

And that is the key to supporting vulnerable people in aged care. If you care and volunteer your time and are present in their space, you are able to perceive resident needs.

During my years of visitation, I have taken courses to learn about Pastoral Care and dementia. I have read or watched programs designed to further my understanding. Sometimes I am overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness and indeed fear that my turn will be next. But I am also overwhelmed with love for those I have had the privilege to know. They belong to a generation who have lived through depression and World War, have collectively experienced every kind of political "ism" that can be experienced, and have endured. They are still learning but in an entirely new context, that of communal living, and learning to respect people they would never have chosen to associate with, and learning to understand and help each other when one is lost and confused. Learning also to deal with what at times is almost overwhelming fear.

What a privilege to share time and conversation with these people.

Miriam Parker-Lacey, Listening to God through people and being the holder of stories

Uniting Church Chaplain, ANU

I have been in chaplaincy ministry first in a hospital setting for thirteen years and now in a university setting for the last four. I find it a privileged, missional space, where I listen to people's stories and see God's presence in their lives.

In the lectionary readings recently, there was the story of blind Bartimaeus. (Mark 10:46-52) The part that always impresses me is Jesus' question to Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?" There is no assumption made and there is no telling this blind man what he needs. Jesus asks the question because he wants to listen, he wants to engage. One of the things I learnt early on in chaplaincy is the importance of listening – of deep listening. We listen not just to the words the person is saying but how they are saying them, and the meaning that they are placing on what they are saying.

In mental health chaplaincy this is vital to understand. The words being expressed aren't always expressing the meaning that is important to the person. Sometimes in chaplaincy you are listening to a person talk about a topic you may not understand yourself, so it is even more important to ask questions that seek understanding. Then, it is also important to listen beyond the topic to the person.

In my role at ANU, a constant influx of students impacts chaplaincy and brings constant change. Likewise, the many changes in staff positions also brings change. This is to be expected. However, the pandemic has in many ways demonstrated that ANU chaplaincy is not very visible to the university community. And yet, it has given us opportunities to connect with different aspects of the university life.

Meeting with staff and students takes place in multiple ways and settings. I have met with groups of students in different parts of the campus, I have met with individual students in the chaplaincy space in the new Kambri precinct and I have met many a student for coffee at the cafés on-campus. I have met staff, while my children are going to the same swimming lessons as their children, and I have had conversations with people sitting on the lawns having lunch. I have participated in market days and other events on campus relating to both staff and students. Another more active connection was handing out hundreds of rosemary twigs on Remembrance Day and inviting all to walk the labyrinth on Kambri lawn, or in the Chaplaincy space.

Most recently I put some video chats up on social media, participated in online events, and conducted online mental health training for students. Pastoral conversations have happened with students in the local park where we have walked and talked. There I have been able to listen, not just to the wanderings of their mind but also to what was heavy on their heart. Being able to hold their story for a while and then give it back to them enables time for them to reflect on it, until they are ready to hold it again for themselves.

Chaplaincy is about being able to be there for all people no matter if they hold to the same values, or think quite differently, or are on a different spiritual path. For example, there was one occasion during exam time when I set up a listening space as an overflow for counselling who get very busy in this time. Chaplaincy was able to provide that sounding board, that listening space, until people could access the help they needed through counselling or psychology.

University can be a challenging time of transition and transformation as people learn new ways of thinking about things, as people begin to reflect on who they are as a person, what sort of career is the right one for them and often at a time when they are away from their usual supportive community of family and friends. It is a privilege to be there alongside people during this time and being able to offer guidance and spiritual direction.

Justin Murray, Humanist Chaplaincy at ANU and Beyond

Humanist Chaplain at the ANU and Canberra Hospital

“For small creatures such as we, the vastness (of the cosmos) is bearable only through love.”
— Carl Sagan

In times that may test our resilience, it is important to recognise the desire to make our lives meaningful and possess the ability to hold onto hope. Making and sustaining positive, healthy relationships is a key element of resilience, hope and meaning, whether those contacts are with other people, our animal companions or an awe-filled sense of our place in the cosmos. We develop hope and meaning in ways that match our ability and preferences for living the one life that we surely possess.

The need for such desires, relationships and senses is the recipe for deep fulfillment for all humans. These needs are universal, and are not limited to those who hold supernatural beliefs or belong to a religion. Deeply meaningful and hopeful relationships can be the basis for a well lived life that enriches others and ourselves.

We can also ponder how the need for a calm and selfless spirit of assistance (and guidance, where it is requested) is a key to such thriving. Chaplains at universities have for a long time been able to provide such assistance. Their contributions should be celebrated and recognised. When at our best, chaplains also offer a role model for living. We can be a clarion example of how, with our best efforts, to represent our belief systems.

Positive and socially productive relationships drive the making of meaning and foster hope, and are available in many forms like meditation, volunteering, sport, political alliances and a sense of pride in our abilities and achievements. We remain eusocial animals – we do better when we work together. Together we can create, explore and strengthen our bonds to nature, knowledge, and each other. With a decline in organised religions and a lowered attachment to faith among the young and those in university, Humanist chaplains like myself are well placed to continue the legacy of chaplaincy.

We can continue the service of the chaplains who went before us, remembering that our faith in humanity is brought alive by such good works.

Humanist chaplains approach people where we find them, as they understand themselves and make sense of their world. We may have our preferences for making meaning and holding hope, but we can leave them at the door and be guided by the person in front of us.

As a humanist chaplain at the Australian National University, I am happy to interact with people of faith and those without. There have been opportunities to talk ethics and morality, and present alternative ways of approaching both without dogma. I attend with reverence and respect at crucial moments in the lives of students, faculty. All these things are done with the wellbeing of the person or people in front of me being the only thing in my mind and of concern to me. If I have the ability and comfort to do something that brings hope and meaning to people, I will.

We all can help those around us to thrive. We have that opportunity every day, even in the smallest of ways. Let us be the people who bring hope and meaning to the lives of others. Live long and prosper.

Robbie Tulip, Australian Student Christian Movement

CRP Secretary & ANU Chaplaincy Coordinator

This year I had the honour to be appointed as one of two national coordinators of the Australian Student Christian Movement ([ASCM](#)). Older members of the church may remember the Student Christian Movement of earlier days, as an active, open, critical and ecumenical voice for Christian faith on Australian universities. The ASCM, and its international counterparts in the World Student Christian Federation, had a reputation as founders of the ecumenical movement. Those were very different days. The ecumenical approach to Christian faith now faces severe constraints, and the ASCM now only has a minimal university presence, that we are trying to rebuild.

Rev David Gill recently reflected on the serious heritage of ASCM in a [conversation](#) recorded on the ASCM YouTube channel, and summarised in the new [ASCM Magazine](#). David comments “ASCM in the 1960s blessed the churches with people who had developed enduring relationships of friendship, understanding and trust. As the [“church ahead of the church”](#), in Robin Boyd’s memorable phrase, ASCM has freedom to pioneer onto faiths’ risky frontiers.”

In my work managing the [ANU Chaplaincy](#), and in broader discussions with young people, I have encountered suspicion and scepticism toward Christianity. Factors include the widespread view that faith is incompatible with modern knowledge, and the loss of trust arising from the recent [Royal Commission](#). The trends are toward an ever more secular outlook, excluding shared faith as a basis for building community. As people lose interest in belonging to the church, they lose the opportunity to engage with the powerful wisdom of the Bible, with its rich central place in our cultural and moral heritage.

Effective university chaplaincy needs to find ways to overcome these barriers to discussion of faith. There is a need to show that worship and Bible Study have capacity to engage people with profound ideas that foster shared understanding of the deep questions of life. In this context, a challenge for churches is to open up conversations about theology, to once again find the excitement of becoming the church ahead of the church, to explore these ‘risky frontiers of faith’.

As the church recognises the need for a humbler perspective about its teachings, a key problem is the paradigm shift away from the conventional model of Christendom that dominated the church until last century, and to some extent still does. Rather than proselytising the truth of dogmatic claims based on traditional authority, the new approach accepts the scientific ethic of humility that demands strong evidence before accepting any assertion.

In reading the Bible, that method of humility means we should ask what the text means for us today, rather than insist it reveals historical events that are otherwise improbable. With this more open method the stories come truly alive as symbol and metaphor, prompting our sense of wonder and mystery. Jesus told his disciples at Mark 4:11, “The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to those on the outside everything is expressed in parables.” If that means the entire Gospel story may be parabolic, it calls us to understand the essence of Christianity in our connection to God today, in ways that fully respect scientific scepticism about Biblical stories.

These are questions that have fascinated me all my life, in studying the connections between philosophy and theology, looking to reconcile faith and reason, religion and science. My own [research](#) on these topics has focused on the role of astronomy within Christian origins, which is much more extensive than is generally realised. It seems the authors of the Gospels had a profound cosmology, grounded in very ancient observations of celestial order. These perspectives were unfortunately largely lost as the church came to insist only on the literal interpretation of the texts.

A humbler approach to theology, open to views that challenge traditional assumptions, can invite Christian chaplaincy in the university context to follow the ASCM model of an active, open, critical and ecumenical faith. Encouraging Bible study that fully respects modern knowledge and scientific

method can provide a basis to introduce new generations of students to the rich depths of wisdom and moral teaching in our sacred texts. Such an approach can help to create relationships of trust and dialogue, supporting the open questioning freedom needed to explore new visions and dream new dreams.

Dennis Martin, ANU Chaplaincy with Christian Students Uniting

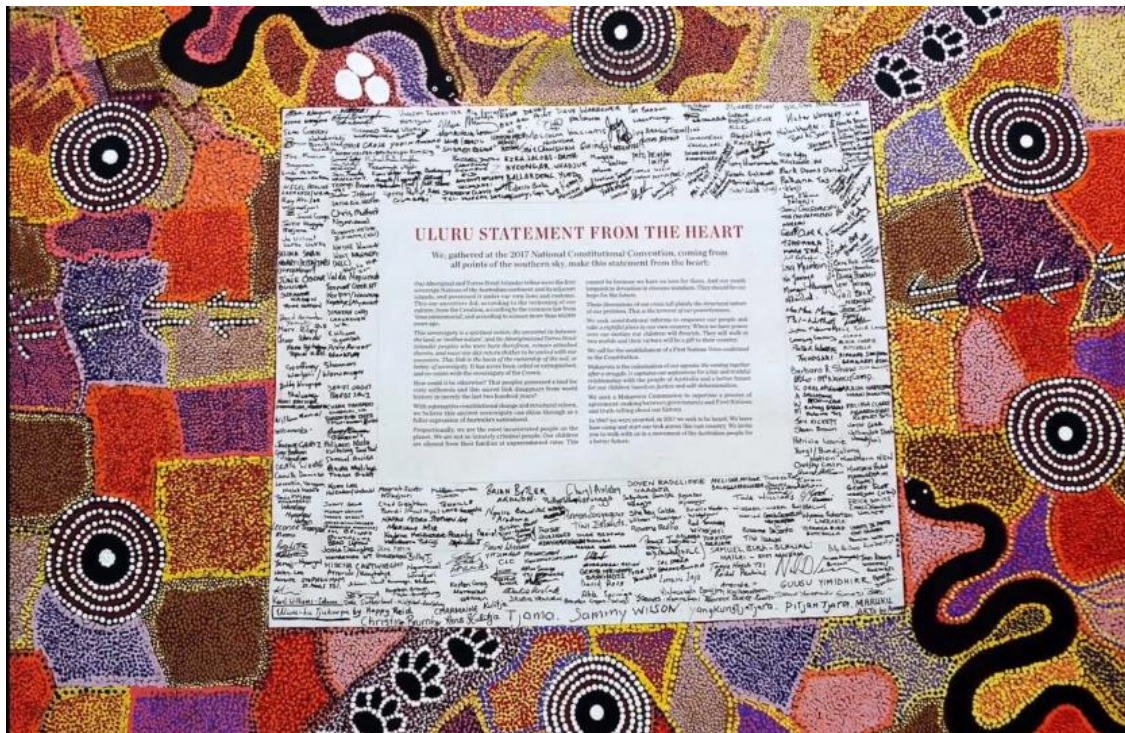
I am a member of Canberra City Uniting Church. I am an Elder, Lay Preacher and Lay Presider.

For the past five years I have been engaged in student ministry at ANU, as Convenor for Christian Students Uniting (CSU), which our church supports. CSU is a university club affiliated to the ANU Students Association.

My wife and I are New Zealanders. We shifted to Canberra because our grandchildren are here. My background is in education. We have been fortunate to travel widely including six years living in Thailand. Student ministry is a wonderful opportunity to meet and support students from all over the world.

In our CSU group we have been holding regular weekly zoom meetings in order to keep together and combat the loneliness and isolation issues that covid-19 has brought upon us. I understand the stresses and strains that can contribute to the mental health issues that most people are experiencing.

I am available to meet and talk with individuals or groups of students. For people of all faiths or of no faith. My primary goal is to help and assist people through this very difficult time. I am a good listener. Everyone is welcome! Please contact me or other university chaplains through [ANU Chaplaincy](#).



Chaplains in Canberra Region Presbytery

Canberra Hospitals Chaplaincy	Rev. Andrew Mead
Uniting Aged Care Chaplaincies	Pastor Heather Potter, Chaplain
	Shirley Campbell, Pastoral Care Worker
	Irene Lund of Weston Creek, volunteer visitor
	Anne Vorobieff of Tuggeranong, volunteer visitor
	Patricia Coates of Eden, volunteer visitor
	Pastoral Care Worker at Eden soon to be appointed
Defence Force Chaplaincy	Rev. Noel Williams, Regional Chaplaincy Co-Ordinator
	Rev. Dr Nikki Coleman, Air Force Chaplain and Ethic Centre
	Rev. Charles Vesely, Principal of the Chaplains Training College at ADFA
University Chaplaincy	Robbie Tulip of Kippax, Chaplaincy Co-ordinator
	Dennis Martin of Canberra City, ANU overseas students
	Rev. Miriam Parker-Lacey of Canberra City/St Columba's, ANU chaplain
KAIROS visiting program at Alexander Maconochie Centre	Richard Scott of Canberra City
	George and Joan Pratt of Woden Valley
Rural Chaplaincy	Rev. Duncan McDiarmid of Eurobodalla, 20% community chaplaincy alongside congregational placement
	Rev. Michael Palmer of Eden, 60% community chaplaincy alongside congregational placement
	South Coast Community Chaplain (bushfire recovery role) at Narooma, hopefully to be filled in 2022

VIEWPOINT