



Hi,

I am Albert Patrizi, a Deacon in the Uniting Church in placement as a Prison Chaplain. I have been producing newsletters twice a year as an ongoing endeavour to provide insight into my work as a prison chaplain. This third newsletter includes a new initiative, some reflection and an update, and of course shared moments with prisoners.

For those who are encountering me for the first time, here is my brief story. I started using drugs at a very young age which led to a life of crime and incarceration. After losing my close friends to overdose or suicide, I found myself in gaol once again, but this time I was calling out to God. I had had enough. All my life I had done it my way and it was time to give God a go.

My life changed, but I lacked the support to sustain those changes, and eventually found my way back to gaol. While there, I was impacted by Kairos Prison Ministry and one particular team member who invited me to attend his Men's Group once I was released. This was the support I needed and I haven't looked back since this time.

God has been incredibly gracious with me; I was ordained as a Deacon in the Uniting Church in September 2013 and have been working as a Prison Chaplain since 2011 as a volunteer, and professionally since the beginning of 2013.

These are the stories since I last shared.....

“David”

David is a man in his mid 30's who has spent most of his adult life in custody. At present he is serving a minimum 10 year sentence. I went to visit him after I was informed that he wanted to receive a bible. Upon my first meeting with David I was confused by the man I saw.

I don't know how to explain the appearance of David. I'm not talking about his cosmetic appearance, the way he dressed, or his hair style, or even his shaven or unshaven appearance. It had to do with his emotional appearance or, should I say, the lack of it. There was no expression even to the point that when he spoke, although his features moved, they shared no insight into the person inside.

I have been with those in shock before, where there is an obvious sense of numbness in their appearance.

But with David it appeared to be more than that. Something tragic had happened that had brought him to a place which I can only describe as where something inside him had died.

However, after spending some time talking with him, I sensed that this condition was self imposed. David had placed himself in the position where he was unwilling to experience any emotion, because he felt he was not entitled to experience any positive emotions – especially joy.

I sensed that he was feeling deep guilt with no possibility for this to be annulled. He was beside himself with fear and loathing, consumed by the thought that he may now (by example) have set a path that could place his son on the same downward spiral that his life had taken.

He confessed to me that the bible he had requested was not for himself (he already had one), but that it was to be his gift to his son for his 7th birthday. He asked whether that would be possible, so he could send it to him.

He then began to share his life and the importance that his son, who also bears his first name, comes to know God early in life, to avoid the mistakes that have befallen him. I must admit that those are similar fears I had myself for my own children. My heart felt his despair. He wasn't coming home soon. His son would be well into his teens by the time he is released, making it difficult for him to ensure a righteous path ahead.

However, his son is loved, not just by David, but by his grandmother who cares for him. I managed to have a beautiful illustrated bible made available for his son, and ensured its delivery. I'm told his grandmother reads it to him nightly. My eyes welled up with tears as I heard those words. There is hope!

So often the sins of the father are repeated by their children. We can only hope that the grace of our Father in Heaven will be upon David's child and all our children. Amen!

Hope – for “Andrew”

As I have shared with you before, I see my role as not just to the prisoner within the four walls of our prisons, but also to the released prisoner. This has proven to be a major focus of concern, as well as hope, for some prisoners. A week would not go by

without a prisoner asking me if it would be alright to keep in touch.

At times, I am overwhelmed by emotion that they seek me as a source of hope for their future. Andrew, and then the staff concerned, recently mentioned to me that during his self development course he was asked, "Do you have anyone to support you when you get out?" Andrew went silent; he had no thought of whom he could turn to. Then a couple of inmates said to him, "What about Albert, the chaplain." I find it difficult, even now as I write this, to explain what those words meant to me and what they might mean for the prisoner. I am overwhelmed by mixed emotions of gratitude, fear and responsibility. Andrew did indeed see me and ask if he could call on me for support. What a privilege it is to be doing God's work. I feel so fortunate that God has chosen me, with all my faults and history, to care for his lost. I thank you for helping me to fulfil God's intention for my life.

A Reflection – God's Confirmation

There have been times in my ministry, and I'm sure I'm not alone, when I have questioned my effectiveness. You question whether or not you are making a difference. Thankfully, this hasn't occurred often to me.

Now, to make sense of this story you need to be aware that my clothing as a prison chaplain includes a beautiful purple shirt. You can imagine how this really stands out in the prison environment; it's quite recognisable from a distance. As you know, I have walked in the shoes that prisoners walk. But, even so, I never really realised the effect I have in this environment until two encounters, both of which occurred when I had been questioning my effectiveness. You wouldn't believe it - just as I was standing there, wondering my worth, a prisoner appeared from nowhere, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You know, just seeing you here walking around the prison, gives me hope."

Wow! How did he know what I was thinking? And this didn't happen once; it has happened twice under similar circumstances. I can hear God saying to me, "Don't worry, you are effective by just turning up; by being present; by being available." Do you know what I realised then as well? The purple shirt doesn't just represent the chaplain, but the prisoners now see this purple shirt as a sign of Hope. I tell you, I am still learning!

Positive Lifestyle Program – PLP

Turning up is an important first step, but we have recently made efforts to be more intentional.

I have just undergone a training program to deliver a 'one on one' initiative called, Positive Lifestyle Program (PLP). It was developed by The Salvation Army to help prisoners take charge of their lives and become more positive. The program has been operating in the Eastern States for some time, where it has achieved such good results that the Courts have made the completion of the program a requirement for some prisoners. I feel privileged to be one of the

first chaplains to deliver this program in South Australia.

It consists of 10 sessions including *Self-awareness, Anger, Stress*, leading to *Creative Problem Solving and Goal Setting*. So far the guys have responded extremely well to the program. They appreciate the one on one because it gives them the opportunity to talk openly about their fears, concerns and life in general, without any hesitation. Secondly, by talking through their issues they are able to make the preparatory changes needed to become, upon release, happier and responsible members of their community.

Fred – An Update

I would like to include a small update about Fred. Remember Fred? He was fearful that his presence in a place of worship would cause the place to burst into flames. No, I haven't got him to test his theory, but he is still free to prove me wrong. Fred is now almost at the 12 month mark since his release. This is the longest he has been out of prison in his last 3 attempts following release which spans, I think, some 15 years. Fred still volunteers his services at the Christian second-hand furniture place which he has grown to love and where he continues to receive God's blessings in friendship and wisdom. This is surely compelling evidence for the truth that if we continue to share our time with those who struggle, they will eventually become constructive and active members of their community.

A Final Word

It is a joy recalling my activities for you in this my third newsletter. I hope this update has continued to open your eyes and heart to the wonderful work God is doing in our prisons. I cannot thank you enough for your support which allows me the privilege to continue to work with God's chosen few.

I am always willing to visit your congregation, to share with you more about this ministry. To make arrangements, please contact me on 0422 653 143 or email patrizis@bigpond.com

To ensure this important ministry can be sustained, on-going support through your generous donations is needed. As evident in just a couple (of the many) stories, God is blessing this work amongst some of the most marginalised and isolated in our society.

To support this work, you can make a tax deductible donation:

1. By credit card, by going online to sa.uca.org.au/prisonchaplaincy and clicking on the "Donate to Prison Chaplaincy" button; or
2. By cheque, payable to "UCSA Relief Fund – Prison Chaplaincy" and forwarding it to GPO Box 2145, Adelaide SA 5001.

Thank you for your continued prayerful and financial support. Blessings,

Rev Albert Patrizi

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

James 2:15,16