

Record of Service – Rev Wendy Prior

I was born in Mildura as the eldest of four children in a family loosely connected with Churches of Christ and Baptist churches.

I have been a Christian for as long as I can remember. Attending a Vacation Bible School at around 10 years of age, I remember during altar calls thinking, “I’ve always been a Christian.”

Part way through my teaching diploma in 1975, I felt a strong call to be baptised. For reasons unknown, my family disapproved of this choice, and I was kicked out of home – left on the street with only the clothes I was wearing. My baptism was a pivotal point in my faith journey - needing to trust God for everything and valuing the support of the Christian community that continued to uphold me.

My experience of God's constant presence and empowering love has continued to uphold my faith through times of both joy and trauma.

My first teaching appointment was at Ernabella Aboriginal School. During my five and a half years in Ernabella I met and married Andrea Prior, and besides teaching, worked in many roles across the community – from bookkeeper for Kenmore Park station, to school admin person, and shop assistant as needed.

Becoming involved in the Uniting Church, which I met while at Ernabella, I found a place where the freedom of Jesus' life, death and resurrection was more real than I had experienced before.

Living and working in a community of indigenous and non-indigenous Christians was another pivotal time in my faith journey, needing to let go of narrow early Christian teachings and learning to value diverse cultures and theologies. I discovered an affinity for people on the edges of society and worked with multiple support groups wherever I went.

In 1983 our family, with newborn Deborah moved to PWC where Andrea commenced their ministry training. Soon after I commenced some study which might be helpful for a ministry spouse.

In early 1986 during a Parkin Wesley spouses' communion service, I heard a clear call to ordained ministry myself, reinforcing what others had previously said. I was reluctant to accept this call, but was finally able to say, “Yes God, but you will need to convince me!” I soon discovered God's sense of humour – it seemed everywhere I went this call was reinforced – even in the most unlikely places!

Chris was born the same year so part-time study and shared parenting roles with Andrea took priority until my call was affirmed in 1989 when I was accepted as a Candidate.

Ministry training took 10 years to complete – in a combination of part-time and full-time study. Some highlights of my theological study years were having my faith and theological understandings expanded; learning ecumenically; attending the WCC Assembly in Canberra as a visitor, inspiring me to establish a Churches and Women Task Group of the SACC; being part of the planning committee

for the Women Re-Membering the Future Conference January 1994; and beginning my 20 year membership of the Roman Catholic Uniting Church Dialogue Group in SA.

I was ordained as a Minister of the Word at St Andrew's by the Sea, Glenelg on 18 December 1993. Over the following 31 years of ordained ministry, I worked in diverse ministry situations.

1994 saw us move to Whyalla for three years where Andrea and I shared a joint 1.5 FTE placement. During this time rich relationships were formed with the community as people valued a clergy couple working together, and many young families joined the church. It was also a challenging time as many in the congregation struggled with a clergy couple who worked hard to share roles equally and could not be squeezed into more traditional roles.

1997 and 1998 were years of transition, when I worked in interim ministry roles as chaplain at Memorial Hospital, in St Andrew's by the Sea, and then a twelve-month Intentional Interim role at Seaford Ecumenical Mission.

In 1999 I commenced my only full-time placement in the then Gawler Parish, working as part of a three-minister team across seven congregations. So began ten years of constant change in the parish and linked congregations (from seven down to three), and from a three-person team down to solo ministry, then back to working with one colleague again.

In Gawler, I undertook study in Narrative Therapy and found it exceedingly insightful for the personal counselling that was a characteristic of all my placements. A necessary hypervigilance in childhood enabled me to be very pastorally sensitive through all my ministry roles.

From 2009 until 2015 I worked part-time at Prospect Road Uniting Church, once again working with members of the congregation through many changes. As in other placements I provided relevant resources to enable people and the congregation to more effectively live out their faith.

In all these placements I worked to help congregations understand who they were as God's people and affirm their strengths. But I also encouraged diverse and creative worship styles to expand our boundaries and lead us outside of our safe places to embrace people outside the church who are also God's people. Silence, music, visuals, inclusive language, banners and fabric art all enabled this.

In 2015 I commenced a 5-year part-time role as Mental Health Chaplain at Lyell McEwin Health Service, which included supporting the Club Church Faith Community. This placement was both exceedingly challenging and rewarding, particularly through organisational changes within the hospital, and the onset of Covid 19. It provided the opportunity for me to acknowledge my skills in organisation and supporting others.

From 2020 until retirement February 2025, I was the Synod Chaplaincy and Supervision Manager. This was a role that combined all my gifts and skills used throughout my years of ministry – pastoral, working with others, ecumenical sensitivity, intuitive wisdom, organisation, and love of people.

In the latter years of my ministry I have been on the Urban Mission Network Reference Group, a member of the Wimala Presbytery PRC and provided Pastoral Supervision.

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29 May 2026