

Record of Service – Rev Prof Andrew Dutney

I was born on Bidjara country, in Charleville in 1958. I was the third of what would be the five children of Beth and Neil Dutney. My parents were active in leadership in the Presbyterian Church there. When the family moved to Brisbane in 1966, to Turrbal and Jagera country, the Toowong Presbyterian congregation was central to our family's life. I came to faith and eventually discerned a call to the ministry through the nurture and example of those congregations, as well as that of the extensive network of friends and mentors provided by the Presbyterian Church's children's and youth camping program, centred on Alexandra Park on the Sunshine Coast, Kabi Kabi country. I was confirmed as a member of the Toowong Presbyterian Church in 1976 and asked the Kirk Session to support my application to candidate for the ministry early in 1977. When they met with me, they expressed their support with a warmth that I have never forgotten.

I was accepted as a candidate for the Ministry of the Word in 1977, shortly after the formation of the Uniting Church. I married Heather later that same year. Heather has accompanied me throughout my ministry with unwavering love and support. I began the ordinand course at Trinity College in 1978. The words of Redgum come to mind: "God help me, I was only nineteen". Nonetheless I loved theological college – the way it opened the possibilities of an informed faith and gave me tools to begin to properly understand and communicate the witness of Scripture. During the three-year course I served as the student minister in the parishes of Inala, Kedron-Chermside, and Aspley-Albany Creek. I had been a Christian musician for some years already and released my first album in 1978 and a second in 1980. By the end of the ordinand course I had also completed a BA, majoring in philosophy and religious studies.

At the end of 1980 I was confirmed as a Certificated Candidate for ordination, but I was "directed into secular employment". It was a painful, life-changing event that I describe in the introduction to the second edition of my book *Manifesto For Renewal* (2016). Strangely, it began my lifelong passion for the Basis of Union and what it can mean in today's Uniting Church. I then worked as a clerk in a law firm for nine months.

We moved to Scotland in 1981, to Fife, and began the four happiest years of our life. I was twenty-three. I completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Ecumenical Studies and a PhD at the University of St Andrews. As well as studying, from 1982 to 1985 I tutored at the University in practical theology and ethics. I was also the assistant minister in a Church of Scotland parish in Leven, Fife. I was ordained there in 1984 by the Presbytery of Brisbane, with the support of the Church of Scotland Presbyteries of Kirkcaldy and St Andrews.

We then moved to Sydney, to the country of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I was the Uniting Church's chaplain to Sydney University, Wesley College chaplain, and the minister of the Wesley College Chapel Parish. I was twenty-seven. I recorded a third album in Sydney. I also taught in the Sydney University BD and MTh courses, and at the United Theological College.

In 1989 we moved to South Australia, to Kurna country, for me to take up a placement as Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Parkin-Wesley College, teaching the theology courses of the Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University. I was thirty. I learned later, that one of my referees for that position had said that I “was born to teach”. I think that was true. It was everything I wanted to do. I had loved the privilege of pastoral ministry too – both in Scotland and in Sydney. One of the greatest complements I ever received was when a young member of my Sydney congregation learned of my appointment to a teaching role, she simply said, “What a waste”. I have so many wonderful memories of teaching at Parkin-Wesley College – of students, colleagues and the exciting community of learning and formation that I was part of.

In 1991 Heather and I had our first and only child, Frazer. Tragically he died at only nineteen days old. That was a life-defining loss that coloured my life and ministry thereafter. If anything, I think it helped me become a more mature, better person and teacher, with more obvious vulnerabilities.

But good teachers get promoted out of teaching. I was appointed Principal of Parkin-Wesley College in 2001. I was forty-three.

Over time, I became well known as a teacher of systematic theology and church history. I was widely published and recognised as an expert in ethics, theology, theological education and, especially, the history, theology and polity of the Uniting Church.

A significant part of my ministry was in the public sphere. I was appointed to the SA Council on Reproductive Technology in 1990 and was its chairperson from 1996 until 2005. I was a member of the Advisory Board of the Ethics Centre of South Australia, and the Human Research Ethics Committees of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (Sydney) and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Adelaide). I was a regular guest on ABC Local Radio and was a columnist for The Adelaide Independent and Australian Leadership, focussing on questions of public and practical theology that emerged through my involvement with the wider South Australian community. As a member of the Theology faculty of Flinders University I was involved in committees, working groups and networks within the University. I was deputy Head of School for several years, acting as Head whenever necessary. I was the elected faculty representative on the University’s Academic Council for three years. I was a visiting lecturer in ethics in the School of Biology and the School of Medicine. I was the founding Director of the ACD/Flinders University Centre for Theology, Science and Culture from 1999 until 2005.

The University promoted me to Associate Professor in 2003, and then to Professor in 2010. I was the only member of the Theology faculty to have been made a full Professor by Flinders University.

To enhance my ministry as an educator, I completed a Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education in 1998, and the Doctor of Education program in 2008. This background gave me resources to lead the major reform of theological education and formation in South Australia that has become the benchmark for theological colleges and formation programs across Australia and around the world. A key element of that reform was the establishment of Uniting College for Leadership & Theology. It was my privilege to be its first Principal and to lead the remarkable community of teachers, staff, students and practitioners who formed Uniting College.

In July 2009 I was chosen to be the President-elect of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, committing me to nine years in a national role. I was fifty-one. I was installed as the thirteenth President in July 2012 and served full-time for three years. This was a privilege and an extraordinary opportunity to get to know the church at depth and in all its diversity throughout Australia and around the world. At the end of that time I felt I had discerned the kind of church God was calling the Uniting Church to be. I was glad to feed that back to the Assembly in my Retiring President's Report and was excited to work out how it applied to the future of theological education.

In 2016, I returned to the role of Principal of Uniting College, while also serving three more years as Ex-President. Soon after, I was appointed to the additional role of founding Executive Officer, Mission and Leadership Development. My ministry came to be located within a complex but very warm community comprising Uniting College, Mission Resourcing, the ACD, the Adelaide Theological Library, and the UAICC. At the same time, I continued to teach, supervise research students, and maintain my own research and writing. It was a joyful and productive season that I remember with gratitude.

I burnt out late in 2020 and, over the next twelve months it became clear that I would never be well enough to return to ministry or even risk any involvement in the Uniting Church. I resigned from my placement at the end of 2021. I was sixty-three. I gave up my expectation of having a long-term future as an elder of the church. I had intended to be available in retirement to teach, supervise, mentor and participate in the councils of the church when I was needed. I had hoped that in this way I would be able to continue to share with the church the knowledge, skills, experience and relationships built up over a lifetime of ministry. I grieved the loss of that hope.

There was little left of me after I burnt out. It was Heather who took back my broken self and lovingly cared for me and managed me as I took the long journey of recovery. At the conclusion of my last book I thanked Heather, "Your generosity, forgiveness, consistent love for me, and determination that our "real life" will always be the life we share together, sustains me through every challenge". My words were prescient. Nearly six years into my recovery I am truly enjoying life, this "real life" on Kaurana country, with my extraordinary partner and friend, Heather.

In a world dominated by tyrants and bullies, where the words of the Bible are perverted to justify hatred, violence, war and genocide, I'm deeply grateful to have been given the responsibility to spend my life studying and teaching theology, in the name of Christ and in the service of God's mission of justice, peace and reconciliation.

Rev Prof Andrew Dutney

Record of Service

29 April 2026