

Record of Service – Rev David Prior

Being born into a Christian family at Port Lincoln had a great influence on my early life, shaping me with God's love. Which was important moving regularly between the country and city, finally returning to Adelaide for Highschool. After completing yr 11, the following 7 years I spent working as a cabinet maker. As a tradesman I learned to love a challenge.

Two spiritual events stand out during these years. The first, at the age of ten I responded to an altar call and gave my life to Jesus, not realising it was also a call for missionaries to India. The second event occurred when I was struggling to make sense of life as a nineteen-year-old. Stuck at the traffic lights, returning from a night out I said to my friend, "There must be more to life than this." In the silence I added, "when I was young there was God." This simple comment was the catalyst for rediscovering God's love and purpose for my life. Joining Blackwood Uniting Church in 1985 led to following Jesus, and becoming a candidate. By 1987 I had commenced training at Parkin Wesley College (PWC) as a "live in" student, enjoying being a part of a community.

Going to India, not as a missionary, but rather on a student exchange was a full-on experience. United Theological College in Bangalore (1990 / 91) was a time rich with friendships and insights. A new awareness of the "Crucified God" present with us in suffering, compassionately reshaped my theology and pastoral practice. During my final three years of college, I married Ellie and in 1993 Micah was born, providing the catalyst for some of my best essay writing at 2 am. As a family we spent the last 18 months at college as caretakers and cleaners at Payneham UC and in my last year at PWC (1994), I worked as a youth worker at Maughan UC.

MINISTRY

Following my ordination in November 1994, I was appointed as a Minister of the Word at Enfield UC, 1995. My focus was building pathways to community through the existing Thursday craft group and by establishing new initiatives. A Kids club and a January Scripture Union Holiday Happening event for over 150 children were lively additions. We also welcomed Isaac and Isabelle into our lives, making our first placement a vibrant time of learning and growth.

During 2001, I commenced as the UC Chaplain at The Royal Adelaide Hospital. The shift into chaplaincy was dynamic and rewarding, with multiple pastoral encounters with staff and patients on a daily basis. After hour call outs were also a feature. My return to congregational ministry late in 2003 was with Dernancourt UC, a strong lay driven congregation. Our focus on being "A Heart for All Ages", built on existing outreach and with the creation of an intergenerational courtyard added further opportunities. From a family perspective we made a number of lifelong friends. With my move into full time army chaplaincy in 2009, our family joined Hope Valley UC as part of the congregation, during a dynamic time of growth.

FULL TIME ARMY CHAPLAINCY

While I joined the Army Reserve in 2002 (Tuesday nights), my first two years full time were at the 16th Air Defence Regiment. From here I was posted to Edinburgh RAAF Base, joining the 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) and other 1st Brigade elements who had moved from Darwin in 2011. My pastoral responsibility included 1000 soldiers plus their families. Army life involved daily physical training, months out bush, laughter and tears supporting soldiers and families through grief and loss. Due to the ongoing war, one of my tasks was to notify families of the death of a soldier, regardless of the time of day or night. As you can imagine the reactions were often heart wrenching. My own deployment occurred in 2015/16, going to Kabul, Afghanistan with 8/9 RAR. The relentless daily rhythm saw me register 113 helicopter flights across the Area of Operation, responding to critical incidents or providing ongoing support. Even in the harshest of environments, I experienced the peace of God. The most memorable was in a small garden surrounded by 5-meter-high concrete barriers. Supporting Australian soldiers over the 6 months was empowering.

The Army Recruit Training Centre based in WAGGA, known as Kapooka (2018) was my last year in the full-time army. Providing support for thousands of recruits during that year, including my own daughter, was very rewarding. A number of highlights were leading full day character training sessions, individual support and weekly chapel services with up to 200 soldiers attending. Reset Sunday, was what I called these services, providing an opportunity for soldiers to put the mistakes of the past week behind them and start afresh. It was exhilarating to help grow hope into their lives.

MY LAST PLACEMENT

Joining The Vines UC, was a time of continuing to build outreach opportunities into the community. The energetic congregation were involved with fairs, fetes, food parcels, coffee mornings and a strongly lay led worship service. Some key moments included a six-week National Bushfire Call Out of the Army Reserve in January 2020, my role was to coordinate a tri service (Army, Navy and Airforce) chaplaincy response in the Adelaide Hills and on Kangaroo Island. These skills proved helpful later in the year when COVID hit as we were also forced to adapt on a weekly basis. The following year the Vines congregation partnered with Prince Alfred College, as I worked 0.4 as a chaplain. Using my intergenerational skills to explore faith with Reception to year 12 students and The Vines congregation each week was invigorating. In my 5th year at The Vines my life took a dramatic shift and led to my early retirement.

CHANGE OF PLANS

What I mistook for general fatigue the week after Easter 2023, turned into a diagnosis of Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS), with a Miller Fisher variant. My immune systems attack on my own body had catastrophic effects: unable to breathe, talk, eat or close my eye lids. Resulting in 155 days in ICU on a ventilator. Hallucinations driven by ketamine, infections and lingering GBS complications added to my struggle. After five months in ICU at Lyle Mac, I finally recommenced breathing on my own. Transferring to Modbury Hospital was the start of my rehabilitation. It was a further 91 days before I was able to return home for Christmas in a wheelchair. Getting out of hospital was like reaching the summit of Mt Everest, the job was only half done. The subsequent years have focussed on the treacherous descent, bringing life to my atrophied body. Despite some residual disability, I am now

able to walk, drive, eat and talk. Joining Athelstone UC has allowed me to continue to heal and enjoy the care and friendship of others in my retirement.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Each ministry placement was an opportunity to discover more about myself through the process of caring for others. Professional development was vital, with extra Clinical Pastoral Education adding further depth and insight into the why and how of my caring. Narrative Therapy training became the foundation for my pastoral practice, by focussing on a person's own story to generate self-agency. Undertaking a Master's Thesis (2009 – 2013), entitled "Discovering New Life Amidst Grief Chaos" integrated my experiences and knowledge into a coherent framework. Shaping my inner man in a robust manner, so I could care for myself and others in diverse environments: from suburbia, to war zones and the loneliness of an ICU bed.

BONUS TIME

As a UC Minister I am most grateful for the relationships and connections I've had with others throughout my diverse placements. Relationships have made serving God and the church a meaningful and rich experience. My family have added a depth and blessing to my life. Being retired means I can enjoy my "bonus time" with friends and particularly my wife Ellie, Micah and Amelia, Isaac and Abigail, and Isabelle. Having extra "Apa" (grandpa) time with Benny 3.5 yrs old and now Daisy 3 months is a delight. So many things to be grateful for. Love and peace. David

Rev David Prior

Record of Service

12 May 2026