

Synod '24



Record of Service – Rev Gary Stuckey

Apart from a period in my teenage years, I have always been involved in the life of the Church. With my father's work we moved often, from Mt. Gambier where I was born, to several towns in country Victoria, until arriving in Adelaide as I was about to start high school. Wherever we lived we were always involved with the local Methodist Church. It is to, mainly, the Sunday School teachers in each place that I am grateful for my early introduction to the Christian journey.

Our family arrived in Adelaide at the beginning of my teenage years where we, again, attended the local Methodist Church at Magill. However, a few years later saw my exit from the life of the Church for a few years.

It was near the end of high school that a friend invited me to go to his church, the Flinders St. Baptist Church. This is a place and a community which would become significant in my life journey. After I had been attending for a couple of years I had, what was to me, a significant and profound experience of God, which led me to embrace the Christian faith and to my being baptised as an adult. It was here that I met Marilyn, and we were married at Flinders St. in 1977. It was also around this time that I was employed as a Youth Leader. Feeling uncertain of my future, I commenced theological studies at the Baptist College, not with any thought of entering the ministry, but simply to learn and grow. It was while I was studying, however, that I began to feel that God may have had other reasons for my being there. I responded to that prompting, which led to my ordination in 1982. During my time at college our son, Matthew, was born in 1979.

On completion of my academic studies, I was called to the Port Pirie Baptist Church from the beginning of 1981. It was while we were living in Port Pirie that our daughter, Naomi, was born in 1982. Being my first appointment, it was a time of learning. The church, having had a number of 'new' ministers, was very tolerant and gracious in their acceptance. Being a rural city also provided opportunities perhaps not as readily available in other places. Here I became involved in the wider community, usually through participation in musicals that were being performed. There was also a strong ecumenical sense in the city which not only provided collegial support but also opportunities to be involved in events like Christian Option programmes in the schools. During this time, I also trained and volunteered as a Lifeline counsellor.

In 1984, I accepted the call to be an associate minister in the Claremont Baptist Church in WA. In addition to the usual ministerial tasks, I was also responsible for the youth program. As Claremont is located not far from the University of WA there were many students from various parts of Asia in the congregation. Forming relationships with them led to my involvement on occasion with the Overseas Christian Fellowship, and it was a delight to be able to offer some homestyle hospitality to many.

A call to the Byford Baptist Church came in 1986 which meant a relocation to this semi-rural environment. Again, community connection was an important aspect of ministry in this placement. I was able to express this mainly through the primary school community where I served on the school council. Being an area where there was a large percentage of young families, the church began to offer a school holiday program.

This period was a time of spiritual ferment for me. In the early 1980's I had been exposed to the monastic/contemplative side of Christian spirituality and felt deeply drawn to the path of discipleship offered from this segment of the Church. As I continued to explore this path, and learn and grow through it, I began to question where the future of my ministry lay. With the guidance of some wise counsellors, I began the process of seeking to transfer to the Uniting Church in 1988, which saw us move back to SA at the end of that year.

From the beginning of 1989 I was called to the Lefevre Peninsula Parish, which comprised five congregations: Taperoo, Largs Bay, Birkenhead, Semaphore and Peterhead. My primary responsibilities lay with the Taperoo and Largs congregations. At this time the Parish was in the process and rationalising congregations which led to the closure of Largs and Birkenhead. Although there were two minsters in the Parish, the number of congregations meant there was not as much time available for significant involvement in the wider community. One area that was particularly fruitful was the work with children through the Taperoo Church. Whilst this was led by others I was involved mainly through offering music for the program. During my time there I instigated the congregation's involvement on one morning a week in the breakfast program at the local primary school. Servicing the worship needs of several aged care facilities was another significant area of involvement.

Around this time, Ann Siddall was employed by Synod to work in the area of Christian Spirituality. I joined the team that was seeking to promote this ministry (the Ministry in Christian Spirituality- MiCS) and also offer various programs, retreats and spiritual direction. I served for a time as chair of the group. Through the 1990's I trained as spiritual director and retreat leader, and together with teaching Christian meditation, found a path through which I felt I could offer myself and gifts to the wider church. It was also in this period that I was led to explore the monastic arm of the Church more intently. From 1994 to 2001 I undertook a seven-year formation program with the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, a monastic community based in Arkansas, USA. I made two visits to the community before becoming a life professed brother, living domestically (i.e. living a monastic lifestyle in my own home), in 2001. In 2015 I transferred my vows to the Community of the Transfiguration in Victoria. The support from both monastic communities has been a profound source of support and encouragement in my Christian journey, and I pray also for others where our paths have crossed.

In 1994 I responded to a call to join the ministry team of the Marion-Warradale UC. The team comprised myself in Ministry of the Word, Ministry of Deacon, a Youth Worker and Admin assistant. With attractive church grounds at Marion we joined the Quiet Garden Movement, offering quiet days, retreats and I began to offer regular contemplative worship opportunities.

A call to Colonel Light Gardens UC came in 2002. One of the highlights of my time here was the involvement of the congregation in sponsoring a Sudanese refugee family to Australia. My continuing involvement with MiCS saw an expansion of my ministry in Christian Spirituality. In 2005, having negotiated with the CLG Church council to move from full time to .8FTE, I applied for, and was granted, Uniting Foundation funding to work one day a week in the development of an intentionally contemplative worshipping community. The Stillpoint Faith Community began in September of 2005 using the chapel at Nunyara. In 2006 Ann invited me to collaborate on a book on spiritual practices to be published by Upper Room (USA). Thus, was born Tending the Seed.

As the work at Stillpoint grew I applied for, and was granted, further funding enabling me to work full time as the minister of the Stillpoint Faith Community from 2008. In the year prior to this, Ann Siddall had established the work of the MiCS, also at Nunyara, where it took the name the Stillpoint Centre of Spirituality. Together we worked to promote Christian Spirituality within the UCSA. When Ann retired at the end of 2010, I embraced the role she had previously filled as Director of the Centre with my role as Minister of the faith Community. I was fortunate enough in 2010 to visit the UK to attend a conference on lay monasticism (monastic life for those who don't live in monasteries) organised by a group called MONOS. With this visit a relationship was established between MONOS and Stillpoint.

These years were particularly fulfilling. Each week saw a flow of people through the Centre for contemplative worship, daily or weekly prayer, spiritual direction, quiet days and retreats. The work conducted at the Centre was also taken out offered in various congregations.

Some of the highlights of this time were-

- attending the MONOS conference in 2010
- being part of an ecumenical team offering training for spiritual directors (2010-2015)
- sponsoring a visit by Esther de Waal to Australia in 2012
- speaking at a conference on lay monasticism at Canterbury Cathedral in 2013 and again attending the MONOS conference
- running a year long program introducing people to monastic spirituality in 2012 and 2015
- visiting the UK again in 2018 to speak at the MONOS conference and lead some quiet days
- delivering a ZOOM lecture to a Master's class through St. Mary's University in London.
- teaching courses in Christian Spirituality at UCLT from 2013-2019.

But above all, I treasure being able to journey with people as they sought to deepen their relationship with God along the contemplative/monastic path.

My placement at Stillpoint concluded at the end of 2016 when funding for the program was discontinued.

A number of supply ministry positions followed at Campbelltown, Burnside, Seacliff and Scots. Following the period of supply ministry at Seacliff I was called back to that congregation in a normal placement from August 2019. A feature of this time was serving alongside many gifted people in a wide range of ministry expressions within the church and in the wider community. The congregation

was also gracious in encouraging me to continue to offer meditation sessions, quiet days, spiritual direction and contemplative worship. I will always be grateful for being able to conclude my ministry at Seacliff UC.

Currently I serve as one of the Moderator's chaplains, a role I will continue for the duration of Rev Peter Morel's time. I hope to be able to continue my involvement in the area of Christian Spirituality, continuing to offer whatever I can. And I pray I will be open to whatever surprises God has along the way!

None of what I've reflected on above happens alone and I come to this transition phase of life with a deep sense of gratitude. I will always be grateful to those who have believed in me (when I found it hard to), encouraged, challenged and loved and cared for me. For colleagues, congregations and many other people from varying areas of the Churches life, thank you for your support through these years to me and my family. Thank you for the opportunities to discover and use the gifts God has given me.

Finally, but in no way lastly, I give thanks to God for God's love, grace, kindness and compassion which has upheld and sustained me through 42 years of ministry. Thanks be to God.

Rev Gary Stuckey

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