

Synod '24



Record of Service – Rev Dean Whittaker (Deacon)

I was born in 1959 and spent my childhood in Greenacres and Evandale SA. I attended local schools and my family were involved in Greenacres Methodist Church and then St Peters Presbyterian Church. We then became involved in Spicer Memorial Methodist Church which became Spicer Memorial Uniting Church in 1977. I was involved in worship, Sunday School and Youth Group at Spicer Memorial. On a youth group camp at Port Hughes I had a profound experience of God.

I attended Marden High School and began work as a Nursery Assistant at Payneham Plant Wholesalers on leaving school. During this time I attended a 40 week “Discipleship Today” training program led by Rev Ken Anderson. From then on, I also participated in UCA Youth and Young Adult Events on a local, national and international level which gave me an opportunity to be involved in a world of faith and discipleship which was exciting and transformative.

In the same year that I was involved in Discipleship Today, a significant time for me was my involvement at St Stephens House Lay Training Centre in North Adelaide where I spent one night a week initially before attending for a year full-time and then the following year becoming a member of a house for students and those in need. During this time I enjoyed contact with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship members and the AEF Congregation in Prospect.

I worked as a Youth Worker in the West Hindmarsh Parish at Flinders Park Uniting Church and continued to live in community houses. I spent time voluntarily supporting homeless young people who I shared a house with alongside other Christian workers. I enjoyed also voluntarily supporting Fuzz Kitto, John Smith and Paul Wightman in a “God Cares” school ministry program in schools throughout South Australia. John Smith provided me with an amazing model of ministry.

In December 1983 I married Penny and within weeks we went overseas to a UCA About Faith & Culture Exchange in Kiribati. We came home, bought a Frontier Services Landcruiser which had just gone out of service and headed to Karratha WA within days via rail and road. While in Karratha we were employed by Frontier Services. Penny as a Kindergarten Teacher and me as an Order of St Stephens Youth Worker. We stayed in Karratha for 1984 and 1985 and during this time I was involved with the North West Presbytery and with the Aboriginal Ministry and Youth in the nearby town of Roebourne.

We returned to Adelaide and I commenced as Adelaide North West Presbytery Youth Worker, a position I enjoyed for 2 years. In this role I was a member of various Presbytery and Synod committees and advocated for financial support to be granted to Congress (which had just formed) from the Synod Standing Committee.

Penny and I moved to a new home in Strathalbyn where our new family began. Between 1988 and 1996 we welcomed three special daughters into our lives. Jemma, Amber and Hannah have continued to provide us with much love and care over the years.

I found employment in Strathalbyn with a Commonwealth funded employment project supporting unemployed people in the region, and also as an Aboriginal Education Worker at Mobilong Prison. I also spent time working as a propagator, nursery-hand and salesman at my parents plant nursery in Strathalbyn. I worshipped at Strathalbyn Uniting Church and proceeded through to candidature.

I have always felt my calling was to serve God but I did not see the Minister of the Word model matching my sense of call. I was at the UCA National Assembly in Melbourne when Diaconal ministry was affirmed but delayed. When the diaconate was renewed I candidated for the ministry of Deacon. I have studied a BTh through Flinders University in Parkin Wesley College which included a major in Aboriginal Studies at Underdale Campus of UniSA.

While candidating and studying for a BMin I learnt a lot from CPE, Biblical Studies, Diaconal and Community Work related topics. Around the same time I was employed by a federally funded project with the SA Synod to promote the idea of reconciliation, establish Reconciliation Study Circles and reconciliation activities within the Church. This was the beginning of working for Reconciliation at a local, regional, State and National level.

As part of my work I was involved in a Reconciliation Study Circle at Kalparrin Aboriginal Community near Murray Bridge. I became aware of the concern by Ngarrindjeri Elders of the proposal at the time to build the Hindmarsh Island Bridge. I supported the movement against the building of the bridge. Along with many others who advocated against the building of the bridge, I was sued for defamation by the developers for writing one of a number of letters to the local Strathalbyn paper voicing my concerns.

This put my family home at risk and caused much angst for my wife and family. Eventually an out of court settlement was reached in my favour.

My ordination as Deacon by the Fleurieu Presbytery took place in St Andrew's Church, Strathalbyn on Sunday 19th March 2000. I was delighted by the Ngarrindjeri, other aboriginal and supportive people who attended to help make it a special and memorable occasion. I was particularly touched by a welcome song by Robert Wuldi, and that Uncle Tom Trevorrow [RIP] and Auntie Maggie Jacobs [RIP] laid hands on me for the ordination prayer.

My first placement was with the Frontier Services Jabiru Patrol which covered ministering in Jabiru, Kakadu, Cobourg Peninsula and Daly River plus being a Chaplain to Ranger Uranium Mine workers. I was privileged to be mentored by 6 Bininj elders and their families who attended Jabiru Uniting Church. I found the position to be rewarding and diverse with most of my time spent attending to the needs of the Bininj folk in Jabiru and their surrounding homelands.

I also connected with non-Aboriginal people, many of whom were transient as they came to work in the mining town of Jabiru. Memorable occasions included conducting baptisms in crocodile infested waters, weddings in scenic parts of the national park and funerals honouring traditional aboriginal elders.

Following my family's relocation to Adelaide I commenced work with the UAICC SA team and was inducted at the Salisbury North property in early 2004. We commenced a weekly worship service. Initially Ngarrindjeri people were mainly involved but over time more Anangu and others joined the church.

Many Anangu members and their families were in Adelaide for medical treatment for chronic ailments. Often their families would come down and join them bringing the burdens and struggles back in their homelands.

I was delighted that over time an amazing group of leaders and committed prayers built up around our ministry. The congregation had a very strong emphasis on prayer, intercession and seeking God's presence, passion and power. Our congregation and I believed that renewal and revival will come to Australia fully only if and when the First people are given their proper standing, rights and recognition in the nation. We believe that revival will come to Australia through the leadership of First people.

While we believed God holds First people in high honour, we knew that First people were under significant attack. We upheld many of the folk in our congregation and their families to God as they or their family struggled with sickness, homelessness, addiction, lack of money, violence and grief. We knew we had little capacity to make a difference for them ourselves but we cried out to God on their behalf. We had up to seven folk in our congregation who were on dialysis at any one time, we had a number who were very seriously ill with heart disease, we had many families who struggled significantly with mental illness and addictions, and we had most of our families who had family members in, or in and out of prison. Deaths in Custody has also impacted most of the families. We also had significant connections with Aboriginal people who drink in the city's parks.

Our desire was to be a congregation where people enjoyed God's love or came from out of alienation, brokenness, addiction and hurt, to find hope, healing and new life in Christ, to grow in their faith and identity, and allow the Holy Spirit to develop their gifts in discipleship and take on ministry themselves.

I was pleased that as a congregation we had major leadership and involvement in prayer gatherings and retreats, Bible study and Bible Storying Workshops, involvement at Congress SA and SA Synod meetings and events, as well as attendance at NCYC and Congress National Conference. Our Anangu folk also participated and led many Adelaide based APY organisations and events. They were, and are, remarkable artists and singers.

In mid-2010 our family moved to Mapuru in Arnhem Land NT to help establish an independent school. I resigned to support the move but was delighted to return to the position of Minister at UAICC Adelaide Congress on our return to Adelaide in 2011.

In some ways my ministry at Adelaide Congress was more like serving a city church than a local church. We had folk who came to church from Elizabeth North and Davoren Park to Gilles Plains, Klemzig, Pooraka, Blair Athol, Kilburn, Brooklyn Park, Woodville, Woodville Gardens, Queenstown, Pt Adelaide, Taperoo, and Salisbury. Most of them required assistance with transport. We had two 12 seater buses which worked hard to try and get people there when needed. Volunteer drivers were greatly appreciated.

I was delighted that during my time at Adelaide Congress Ministry we were able to have a major building extension added, and the car park sealed. Services on a Sunday began with providing transport for people to join us, a lively worship led by the Spirit and those who had something to share, and a meal for everyone – which could mean a long day for some. Often the Church was full and people with many burdens joined together to worship God and receive renewal.

I have been blessed to be part of a dynamic ministry, sharing with others as they receive ministry and minister to others. I have always strived to stand alongside the members of the Congregation whom I served in representing and voicing their needs and convictions within the local and wider church and community. It has been a privilege to share in making a significant contribution to the UCAs national “A Destiny Together Justice for First People’s” process. We had a special relationship with Uniting Communities to establish ATHOS the Aboriginal Traditional Housing and Outreach Service now called Kurlana Tampawardli. We spoke out and acted on prisons, deaths in custody, the issue of nuclear waste, the Northern Territory intervention, APY Lands struggles, and the importance of Jesus being Lord in our Uniting Care organisations.

We also worked closely with others who are committed to Holy Spirit ministry and the Uniting College in organising Charismata Training days in the past. These are examples of the meaningful ministry I enjoyed while sharing with the UAICC Adelaide Congress Congregation.

I have had a rich journey as a member and a Deacon in the Uniting Church. Over recent years I have had significant health issues including a brain aneurysm in 2012 and a heart valve replacement recently. I have also struggled with mental health issues over the last few years. As a result, it seems time to retire.

I want to say a huge thanks to Penny and my girls, they have paid a heavy cost at times because of my ministry. Thanks to everyone who has been part of my journey, and who have put your trust in me and my ministry.

Thanks Lord God for your abundant love, for Jesus’ Lordship, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit made available to me and to those I have worked alongside and for. God bless.

Rev Dean Whittaker

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