



Australian Federal Police Chaplains

[By David Cockram]

What is a Chaplain? The term chaplain is traditionally associated with the word chapel, which is a place of worship serving a residence or institution, such as a school, a palace, a branch of the armed forces—the possibilities are endless. The chaplain served the people of that community in their spirituality and worship life.

Over the years fewer places have an actual chapel, yet many institutions still have a chaplain and, indeed, more are looking at the possibilities and advantages of working with a chaplain.

So, again, what is a chaplain? Traditionally, the chaplain is the “God person” as I’ve said, serving in spiritual care and worship. However, these days, chaplains are people who can be seen to bring another dimension to the day or to a problem. People that you can say “G’day” to or have a long and in-depth talk, who can help look at the wider implications of an issue or the share smallest details of your worries. They support, encourage, perhaps help people by seeing their lives in a different light.

The chaplain’s tasks should be less structured than those around them so that they always have time to spend. A chaplain who always looks busy can lose people’s confidence if they think “he won’t have time for me”.

This word—tradition—keeps coming up doesn’t it? It has been the tradition for spiritual leaders in most faiths to be men, for hundreds and thousand of years. Over the past 20 years or so, however, this has changed. After passionate debate it has become possible to be ordained as a priest in some churches if you are a woman. As you may realise, this has not come without cost for people both for and against this change, as it has been a debate which questions the fundamentals of who you are and your worthiness to perform a particular spiritual role versus the strong and long tradition of the Church and those who have maintained and supported that tradition. Nevertheless, change has come, and in the Uniting, Presbyterian and Anglican churches, women have been affirmed as leaders.

What advantage does this bring? As in all areas of life, this has helped broaden the range of perspectives, ideas and discussions available. Having people of different gender in an institution

changes dynamics, brings new styles, attitudes and importantly, balance. Although of course this is not always without pain, because change can be very painful.

This change has also now come to the AFP, as ACT Policing now has a female chaplain. Sarah Hubert, Anglican priest joins David Cockram, Khalil Chami, and Roger O’Donnell in a chaplaincy team that strives to provide balanced, compassionate and honest care to the people of the AFP.

But why does the AFP have chaplains— or padres as they are commonly known?

Like many large organisations, the AFP is committed to providing balanced support for its employees and their families, and this includes spiritual and pastoral care. Chaplains have uninhibited movement around the workplace to develop relationships and be a friendly, helpful, and neutral ear, to talk with people about anything. As one chaplain defined it, “We padres like to loiter with intent”.

The AFP’s team of four chaplains provides spiritual and pastoral care and counselling services to all AFP members and their families. They are available 24 hours a day for a confidential chat or advice on any matter, religious or otherwise. They do



*Top: Khalil Chami, Mick Keelty, David Cockram,
Roger O'Donnell and Sarah Hubert
Bottom: Sarah Hubert and David Cockram*

not keep notes or files on people and are also available to conduct weddings, baptisms and special services.

Chaplains undertake a whole range of activities from visiting homes and hospitals, to getting involved in training, to providing support to those deployed overseas. They try to compassionately walk the journey alongside people.

The padre is often seen as the iron-clad-confidential, soft option to check things out with, or someone to let off steam with.

They have a unique role, they are not welfare specialists, and are often used by people as a safety valve.

Our National Chaplain, **David Cockram**, an Anglican Priest, was an Army Chaplain for 19 years before joining the AFP. In army life he has been operationally deployed to Bougainville and East Timor, and has served in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, USA, France, Belgium, and Canada.

He initially joined the Army in 1969, and following recruit and infantry corps training was posted to the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR). He completed an operational tour of South Vietnam in a rifle company with 3 RAR, and was discharged in 1972. He rejoined the Army as a chaplain in 1984 and served in this capacity until February 2003 when he joined the AFP.

David is married to Nonie, a registered nurse and midwife, and they have three adult children. David has tertiary qualifications in theology, business, education, training and psychology. He has studied the Indonesian language.

In addition to his ministry training, David is also a registered psychologist and has an interest in the prevention and healing of stress and trauma. So why chaplaincy? "Chaplaincy is to care for all people, to walk beside them in their life journey with kindness and compassion, to help and to heal," he says.

David Cockram has an additional role of coordination and technical control of the AFP Chaplaincy. He can be contacted on **(02) 6270 4896** or **0417 457 295**.

Sarah Hubert is our Chaplain to ACT Policing.

She had an unlikely start to the chaplaincy—becoming an apprentice chef after leaving school and spending the next 14 years working in various aspects of hospitality and catering in Sydney and England. Although not then a churchgoer, Sarah found herself drawn to church after the birth of her first child in Sydney.

After moving to Goulburn in 1991, she became involved in the church community and began visiting people in the local hospital, as a church representative. Sarah then began to heed a stronger calling to the church—having felt drawn to the priesthood for many years. After moving to Canberra to study for the ministry, she was appointed chaplain to the Brindabella Gardens Nursing Home and Hostel where she administered to elderly residents.

Later she became Anglican chaplain at Calvary hospital for a while and also worked with people affected by the 2003 Canberra fires for Anglicare Bushfire Recovery Unit. During that time she graduated from her studies with a Bachelor of Theology and was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church in December 2003.

Sarah is divorced and has two teenage children.

Why chaplaincy? "To be a listener, a supporter, a fellow explorer and even sometimes a challenger. Never to say that my life is any holier than any one else's but to acknowledge the struggles of life, seek ways together to make a little difference, spot hope and help celebrate the joys in life which sometimes slip away too easily. A chaplain's role is mainly a role of patience, of simply being and listening without judgement, two of the simplest yet most difficult things to do," Sarah says.

Sarah can be contacted on **0423 784 586**.

“Chaplains undertake a whole range of activities from visiting homes and hospitals, to getting involved in training, to providing support to those deployed overseas. They try to compassionately walk the journey alongside people”

Roger O'Donnell is the AFP's chaplain to the International Deployment Group (IDG) at Wangarralli Ngurumbai, in Canberra and to the Australian Protective Service (APS). He served 20 years in the Royal Australian Navy before coming to the AFP and is a Vietnam Veteran. Roger saw operational service during the Borneo confrontation 1963-64, operational service in Vietnam in 1971, and spent two years on Manus Island, PNG, doing communication intelligence work.

Before commencing theological studies in 1988 Roger was the Head of Information Data Services attached to the AFP's Bureau of Criminal Intelligence (BCI). He holds a Bachelor of Theology and a Master of Arts in Theology. He was ordained Deacon in 1991 by Catholic Archbishop Francis Carroll at St Christopher's Cathedral in Canberra. Roger has been married to Cora for 39 years. They have three married children and nine grandchildren.

Why Chaplaincy? "As well as celebrating weddings, baptisms and so on, I see my chaplaincy as coming from a very diverse background of life's experiences, bringing the presence of God and the spiritual into the many and varied activities of the AFP and the APS—a sense of compassion and trust in an uncertain and busy world," he says.

Roger may be contacted on **0423 798 737**.

Sheik Khalil Chami is our Muslim Chaplain. He arrived in Australia with three children in 1963, and three more children were subsequently born in Australia. Between 1968 and 1976 he was Imam for the Lebanese Moslem Association, and for several years was President of that Association. During this time, Khalil was involved in the building of Imam Ali Mosque in Lakemba, the first Mosque built in New South Wales. In 1976 he became President of the Islamic Council of NSW, and in 1977 received the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Medal. He became President of the Australian Islamic Mission in 1978 until 1990. Khalil received an OAM in 1983. Between 1980 and 1985 he was President of the Lebanese Welfare Council. He was editor of the Arabic column in the *El-Telegraph* and *Al-Bayrak* Arabic newspapers between 1980 and 1996. During that period he worked on the panel of Review of the Immigration Department, and became a Justice of the Peace. Between 1996 and 2002 he was Chairperson of the board of Al-Nouri Muslim Primary School and also Secretary of the Islamic Judicial Council. Since 1992, Khalil has been Manager of the Islamic Welfare Centre and Speaker (Khatib) for the Peshurst Mosque. In 2002 Khalil became the first Muslim Chaplain (part-time) for NSW Police, as indeed he is also the first Muslim Chaplain (part-time) to the AFP.

Why Chaplaincy? "Chaplaincy is part of my Sheik role to help anyone who needs help. My duty is to offer the person what they need. So I see chaplaincy as being for all who need help," he says.

Khalil is available for Muslim religious matters, and as a source of advice on the Islamic culture and religion, including as a lecturer for AFP courses or as a guest speaker. He can be contacted on **(02) 9740 6102** or **0419 423 293**.