

‘Faith and Friendship’

Malo/Gday/Bonjour/Hola/Bula/Kia ora/Halo olgeta

It's three months since we were in Canberra for the second Pacific Defence Faith Forum, and I have been very encouraged since then to see how we have all continued to work together to build chaplaincy and faith support of our people.

I feel very privileged that we now have genuine friends and ministry partners that we know and trust across our region. Thank you for your prayers for our Pacific chaplains, and thank you that our network is helping us to work together, encourage each other, learn from each other, and pray for each other. I commend the newsletter to you. It has some great stories of what we have achieved together, particularly at the recent Forum. May the Lord bless you and the faith of your people, and may He keep us in his will and bring us safely together again in Fiji next year.

Blessings,

Kerry Larwill

ADF Chaplains Committee - Chair



Chaplain Kerry Larwill and Chaplain David Ndramen (PNG), lay a wreath at the Australian War Memorial. (Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)



Australia hosted military chaplains and faith leaders from across the South Pacific for the second Pacific Defence Faith Forum from 29 March to 3 April 2025. Delegates from Australia, Chile, the Republic of Fiji, the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia (France), New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Kingdom of Tonga gained a unique opportunity to connect, learn from one another and share experiences in providing spiritual and pastoral support to defence members. (Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)



A word from the Secretariat

Dear friends,

It is wonderful to reflect on the rich time that we spent “labouring together” three months ago in Canberra, Australia’s capital. This second newsletter seeks to provide some highlights from this annual gathering as well as providing an update from each nation represented.

We are delighted to let you know that we spent over 62 hours of people to people time connecting together. We also met six of the eight objectives that we sought to achieve (the other two are well on their way to being completed too). There are many positive reports about the professional development we undertook together including trauma care, working with the Pacific Response Group (PRG) and in better understanding Women, Peace and Security. We are delighted in the way that faith strengthened our common bonds together.

We look forward to seeing you again next year.

Phil, Dave and Andrew
on behalf of the PDFN Secretariat



Defence Chaplains and staff from across the South Pacific gather for the second Pacific Defence Faith Forum at the Australian Royal Military College - Duntroon (Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)

Updates

Australian Reflections

This year's Pacific Defence Faith Forum was held in Canberra which, as a local, I'll admit didn't quite have the excitement of Auckland, but at least I didn't have to deal with airport security. One of the perks of being posted here was being able to bring my family along to the opening service and introduce them to my fellow chaplains — a rare and lovely crossover between my home and work worlds. It was great to reconnect with the crew from Auckland and to meet some fresh faces too. There's something special about being in a room full of people who get what it means to show up with faith (and a uniform) wherever we're sent.

A real highlight for me was our time at Parliament House, gathering for Bible study in a place that usually hosts very different kinds of debates. I also loved the small group sessions: swapping stories, laughing, listening, and discovering how chaplaincy is lived out across the Pacific. It was deeply encouraging to see the creativity, heart, and faithfulness in each context. I came away reminded that while our uniforms may differ, our purpose is shared — to walk alongside, to listen well, and to hold hope in the hardest places.

Chaplain Wendy Robertson, Australian Army



Faith and friendship in action: Chaplain Wendy Robertson (Australia) and WO2 Sosefo Hamala (HMAF) sharing a moment (Photo Supplied)



Chaplains and staff from six different nations of the South Pacific at the PDFN Forum at Royal Military College - Duntroon. (Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)



Updates

Chilean Greeting

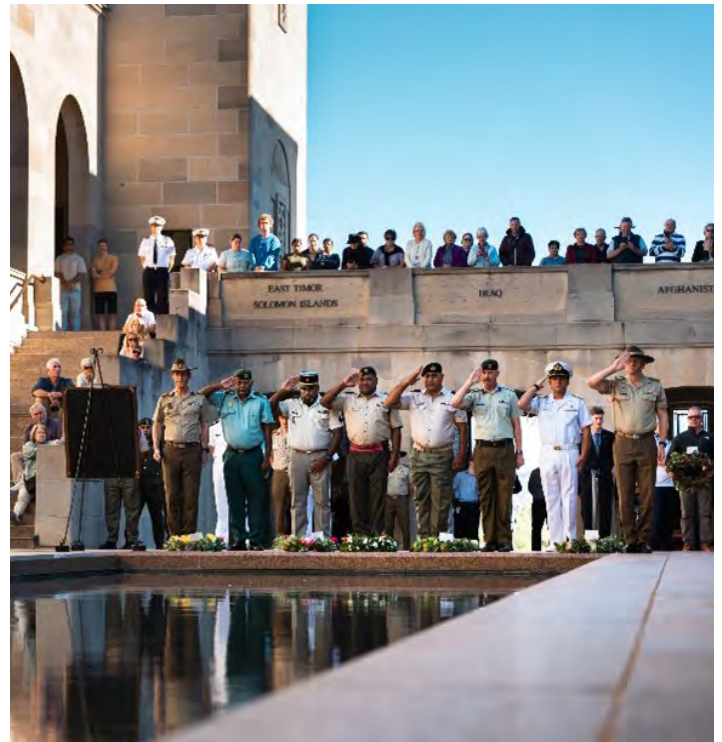
Captain Carlos Ruiz (Navy), the Chilean Naval and Defence Attaché was able to attend the Forum and provided some wonderful opening remarks on behalf of the Chilean Navy and the church of his homeland.

"I bring you warm and heartfelt greeting from Monsignor Pedro Ossandon, the Military Bishop of Chile, Chaplain Jose Jarpa and National Chaplain Vladimir Recabarren." They extend their "profound appreciation and acknowledgement of the importance of this forum, with hopes that the discussions and activities conducted here will be both rewarding and enlightening for everyone involved."

Captain Ruiz went on to present a specially crafted video for the occasion "showcasing the illustrious history of the Chilean Navy's religious service with a legacy spanning over 212 years" which had "been pivotal in providing spiritual support and reinforcing solidarity among our devoted sailors and their families."

"May you be richly blessed and may this gathering of faith and camaraderie be tremendously successful."

CAPT (Navy) Carlos Ruiz Q.



CAPT (Navy) Carlos Ruiz Q. with PDFN representatives remembering the fallen (Photo supplied)

Fiji delegation attends Pacific Defence Faith Forum

Ni sa bula vinaka.

The Fiji delegation extends heartfelt thanks for the opportunity to participate in the Pacific Defence Faith Network (PDFN) held in Canberra, Australia, this past March.

We are deeply grateful to the organisers and especially to our ADF Chaplaincy counterparts for their warm hospitality and unwavering support.

The gathering provided an enriching platform for sharing faith perspectives, strengthening regional partnerships, and learning from one another's experiences in service. The insights gained were both encouraging and invaluable. We offer our best wishes to the PDFN for its continued success and growth in fostering faith across the Pacific.

Vinaka vakalevu.

Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF)
Senior Force Chaplain

Rev. Maj. Viliame Tunidau



Chaplain Bill Tunidau (Fiji) and Chaplain Dave Lacey (NZ) exchange a traditional greeting at the Welcome to Country smoking ceremony

Updates

France (FANC) attends this years PDFN

Padre Arnaud Babin and Pastor Jonathan Djouate from the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia (FANC) represented France at the second DFF.

Unable to attend the 2024 forum Arnaud and Johnathan were able to represent France and New Caledonia this time around, sharing the specificities of the French organisation with their counterparts. This week was an opportunity for all the network's participants to deepen their mutual recognition and to advance their integration into the "Pacific Response Group" (PRG) in order to fulfil their primary mission: to provide moral and spiritual support to the troops.

The PDFN can be seen as a smaller form of the "Blue Pacific" organisation. In this context, the PDFN is an additional tool for unifying the Pacific nations under the umbrella of faith. Among them, France was proud to be so warmly welcomed and to meet new friends.

Chaplain Johnatan Djoute



Admiring the sights Canberra has to offer. Chaplain Johnatan Djoute looks on (Photo supplied)

New Zealand delegates enjoy special moments

Having had the privilege of being part of the first PDFN in New Zealand in 2024, re-establishing friendships and making new one's face to face was another wonderful experience.

There were many special moments for me like joining in fellowship in the chapel and especially hearing the wonderful harmonies fill the building with praise to our Lord. Enjoying good food together and hearing the stories of what is going on in the different countries while being immersed in the richness of our different cultures.

But if I had to pick one moment that really touched me it was sitting listening to the Defence Attaché from Papua New Guinea. He had such a commanding presence and in Māori we would say Mana. I loved the way he spoke about the importance of faith, especially in the Defence Forces and the high regard he held chaplains in. I found what he said both encouraging and inspiring so well-done PNG.

Ngā manaakitanga

(Blessings) Dave



Chaplain Paula Levy (NZDF) takes a moment to reflect on the fallen at the Australian War Memorial (Photo supplied)

Updates

Papua New Guinea Army Chaplains Reflect

Greetings to all the participants of the second Defence Faith Forum on the 28 March to 04 April 2025. I take a special moment of appreciation and gratitude to the hosting country Australia for the generous hospitality.

It was a very happy moment of sharing and praying together. Even though we come across the sea from different countries in the Pacific, we were all knitted as one through the body of Christ Jesus our Lord and King. We much valued each other's culture and belief with respect.

I have learnt a lot of new things in this forum. There were many important topics discussed in the presentations by different speakers and in the syndicate activities which can be of great help in the religious ministry to reach out to the needy.

Providing care and support brings restoration to individuals and community whose lives are being devastated by different causes of challenges. Moreover, it was very informative for future planning in the space of Faith building and understanding the values of varying cultures, traditions and beliefs.

All the activities both indoor and out were all beneficial for us. I believe every one of us have enjoyed the tour to the National Arboretum, the Tidbinbilla nature park, the Last Post ceremony and the visit to the Parliament House. The dining out was more of a family bond and fellowship.

One very significant event that impresses me most is the part in which the hosting country offered prayers for the other member nations. It demonstrates the physical, moral and spiritual bond we have in the Pacific Defence Faith Network. And I quote Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10 " Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up." (KJV)

Praying for one another is showing the Value of a Friend.

Chaplain Jason Evari



Papua New Guinea Chaplain Jason Evari saluting during the dawn service at the Australian War Memorial. (Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)



Papua New Guinea Chaplain Bernard Nosum at the Australian War Memorial. (Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)



Senior PNG Chaplain David Ndramen explores the bush behind Duntroon with Chaplains Jason Evari and Bernard Nosum to see a plaque commemorating the role of Kokoda Village in WWII (Photo supplied)

Updates

Tongan chaplains want to connect

I have to stay focused on our Defence Faith Network Forum and it's important to our nation, our family and our service too. This important and unique gathering brings us opportunities to get to know each other better and look deeply at ways we can support each other and work together in the future. So in my experience the PDFN will give me courage to show us how to fully support each other and to keep working together for the next generation. From my understanding there are lots of people in the Pacific and in the world that need help. Maybe the PDFN can work together to solve some of these things.

In my view from outside the Chaplaincy side it is good to continue on pressing the heart of our connecting. It is good to look for more opportunities to have tools to connect, support and help each other. We can develop this faith network around our nations before looking at ways to connect with the rest of the world.

Lieutenant Saula Taufa Molia,
His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF)



Representing HMAF: Lieutenant Molia, WO2 Finau and WO2 Hamala
(Photo supplied)

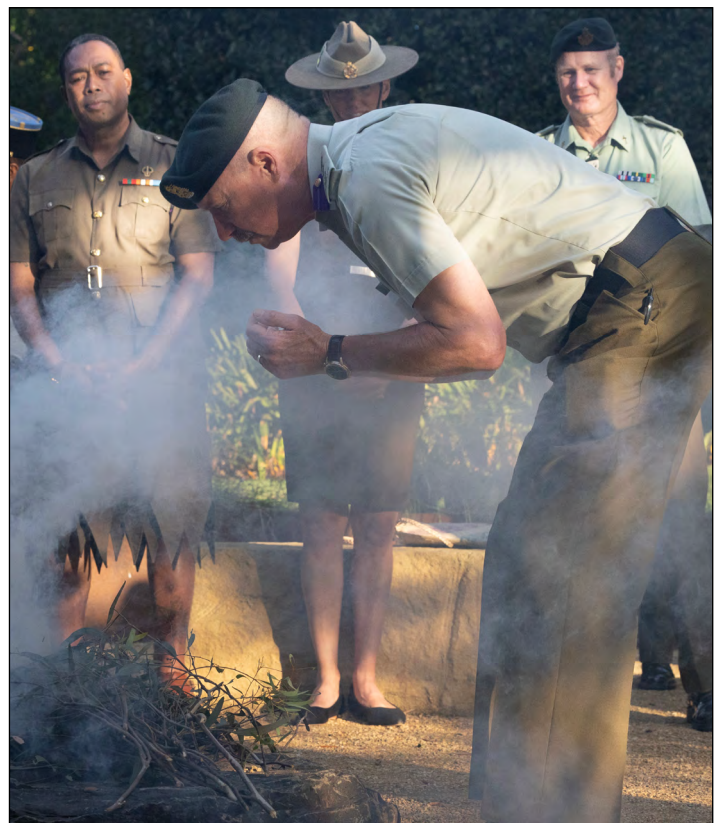
Opportunities to discuss faith in context

The Forum provided many opportunities to discuss chaplaincy capability within the Pacific, building on the professional development opportunities that have already been mentioned. Chaplain Andrew Thorburn, Royal Australian Navy, provided a short update as to how Australia is considering multi-faith chaplaincy.

Australia is a culturally diverse nation that includes many different faith groups and ethnic backgrounds. As the ADF increasingly reflects this diversity, chaplaincy capability is growing to serve the needs of members and families from various beliefs and backgrounds. The Royal Australian Navy has introduced Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officers. Chaplaincy personnel now represent a wide range of faith traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam.

The move to multi-faith chaplaincy involves respect and acceptance. Respect for the differences between our belief systems and practices and acceptance of the wisdom and service each of us bring to the mission of supporting our personnel in the trials and challenges of service life.

Chaplain Andrew Thorburn, Royal Australian Navy



Chaplains from six different nations of the South Pacific at a smoking ceremony at the Royal Military College - Duntroon.
(Photographer CPL Luke Bellman)

A parting word

There were many, many warm moments together within this Pacific family. Here are a few more pictures of some of the special moments.





A Call to Prayer / Upcoming Events

Please Pray

Please pray for your brothers and sisters in the PDFN:

- Pray for the second phase of the RFMF reconciliation program. Give thanks for the recent Peace Building Workshop
- Happy 66th Birthday to His Majesty King Tupou VI, Commander-in-Chief of HMAF
- Pray for preparations for the PNG 50th anniversary of independence
- Pray for the Support Chaplains course for new-to-service Chaplains and Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officers at the Australian Defence Force Chaplains College which commences on 21 July for a month
- Give thanks for the upcoming visit of the Chilean Navy tall ship Esmeralda from the Chilean Navy to Sydney 12-16 August 2025. Pray for a safe and calm passage
- Give thanks for the successful conduct of French-led Exercise Croix du Sud
- Pray for Exercise Talisman Sabre 25, a large-scale multinational military exercise in Australia. Many nations are participating in this major exercise which involves over 30,000 military personnel and platforms from 19 nations.

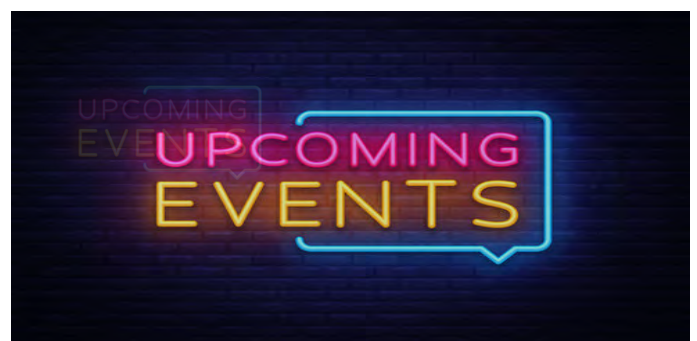


Upcoming Events

Senior Chaplaincy Leaders Group meeting online:
Tuesday 19th August 2025

Next PDFN Newsletter release: early November 2025
(articles and photos wanted)

2026 Pacific Defence Faith Forum – Fiji
on a date to be confirmed for 2026



Got Feedback?

There are opportunities to make the next newsletter even better.

We welcome your feedback.

Please send any comments to: LTCOL Phil McMaster at phil.mcmaster@defence.gov.au

