

Introducing the Pacific Defence Faith Network

It has been five months since we met together in Auckland at the inaugural Defence Faith Forum (DFF). While time has flown, it has been an encouraging time, observing and supporting each other. I believe strengthening the bonds between us plays an important role in contributing to a stronger Pacific family. The South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting met recently and their communiqué (contained within this newsletter) highlights the success of our Pacific Defence Faith Network (PDFN) and our shared future.

This is our first PDFN newsletter and I pray we are all encouraged by the stories within. It should help us to stay connected and see what other network partners are doing. A big thank you to everyone who contributed. Please use the newsletter as an opportunity to promote our network where you are and to work toward a strong supportive partnership in Faith and Friendship.

Blessings,

Kerry Larwill
ADF Chaplains Committee - Chair



Chaplain David Ndramen (PNG), WO2 Apete Nabola, Chaplain Dan Taniele Gonerara Tama and Bill Tunidau (FIJ) with Chaplain Kerry Larwill at the Pacific Defence Faith Forum



Delegates from the Defence Faith Forum explore how military chaplains across the South Pacific can support each other and work together. Photo supplied by NZDF PAO



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Welcome to the very first PDFN newsletter, representing a wonderful collaboration. It is always a delight to see what God is doing in and amongst us, unifying us in faith and friendship within a Defence chaplaincy context. We realise that not everyone reading this newsletter will know about the PDFN and its purpose. Therefore, we thought it would be valuable to explain a little of what the PDFN is.

The PDFN represents a wide variety of countries and is a genuine faith collaboration. The permanent members are Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga. The PDFN is about faith and friendship. The pictures shown here represent the rich tapestry that makes up the PDFN, the shared stories of the delegates at the DFF and the newly established Senior Defence Chaplain's Group.

Our PDFN activities have been about building trust and connection as a Pacific family. This is achieved through gaining understanding of military chaplaincy in the region, strengthening people-to-people connections, and exploring opportunities for greater collaboration and learning. Faith is a unifying theme. We recognise that churches are the arena where Defence chaplains

receive much of their formation training. They are often 'grown' in the church and then appointed to Defence chaplaincy.

We have already done great work together over the past year and we look forward to building on this solid foundation into the future. The purpose behind creating the PDFN and conducting a DFF was to provide a safe space for 'Talanoa.' Talanoa is storytelling, faith sharing, growing deeper personal connections and creating a connected network from which personal relationships between our families are enhanced. More recently, the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM) gathered in Auckland from 1 to 3 October 2024 and issued a joint communiqué. Here is what they said about the PDFN:

Members commended the establishment of the Pacific Defence Faith Network at the inaugural Defence Faith Forum held in Auckland in June 2024. They noted that faith was an important part of Pacific societies and welcomed faith-based engagement between Pacific militaries as a means of enhancing people-to-people links. They thanked Australia for offering to host the forum in 2025.



Defence Chaplains and staff from across the South Pacific gather for the first Defence Faith Forum [Photo supplied by NZDF]

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As we look to strengthening connections into the future we can all ask the question “what does military chaplaincy look like?” This question can be further explored through chaplaincy training opportunities where we can learn from each other's shared experiences. Whilst there will be different individual training needs, there are likely to be common skills required by all. Some of these skills could be in community engagement, chaplaincy training and family resilience. We often come together during times of need, such as responding to disaster relief.

We hope you enjoy reading this first of what we hope will be many newsletters. Thank you for the stories and we look forward to what God will do in the future.

The Project Team

The PDFN project team wanted to take a moment to thank Chaplain Mick George for his work as the PDFN director. Mick helped deliver a wonderful inaugural DFF. We pray for Mick as he moves on to other ministry opportunities.

LTCOL Phil McMaster has joined us as the new PDFN director. Phil has served in the Australian Army for over 30 years in a range of different appointments. These include working with the Pacific family in Sinai Egypt and closer to home in Timor Leste. Phil has almost finished his theological studies and is actively involved in a local church as secretary. Phil has a passion for families and his wife, Julianne, has been involved in a ministry to female Defence partners, Solid Rock, for many years.

He is thankful for God opening the door to serving with the PDFN, and considers the opening verse of Psalm 133, as key to our work.

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity” (Psalm 133:1)

David Hay and Andrew Oldfield are delighted to continue their involvement in the project team with assistance from our New Zealand friends.



ADF Chaplain Kerry Larwill and NZDF Chaplain David Lacey with former PDFN director Chaplain Mick George at Whare



LTCOL Phil McMaster and CAPT Andrew Oldfield planning for the PDFN

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*Chaplain Bill Tunidau – FIJI
working with the wider PDFN*



Chaplain David Ndramen from PNG



Chaplain Moli Taufa – Tonga - right in his Navy whites.

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FANC Chaplains

It is wonderful to introduce the chaplains working with the French Armed Forces in New Caledonia (FANC).



Chaplain Père Arnaud BABIN : Aumônier catholique des FANC

Chaplain Babin is a catholic priest, ordained in 2002. He studied in Poitiers and Rome and has been a military chaplain for 20 years. Chaplain Babin has a wealth of military experience having served in the material and logistic military school, in the French foreign legion and at the Army non-commissioned officer school (Ground Forces). He has deployed in Kosovo, Lebanon, in Africa and in Indian Ocean.

Chaplain Babin describes serving in New Caledonia as a “dream” appointment. *“I am very happy to take (my) place in this group, in this network. Faith is an important part of Pacific societies. Engagement between Pacific militaries are a means of enhancing people-to-people links. The link between chaplains interests me to share the testimony of faith on a daily basis. Each chaplain... works for everyone. He is part of the military community, member of the family. Like a friend! He is free because he has no rank.”*

A key verse in Chaplain Babin’s ministry is *“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? ... You are the light of the world.”* Matthieu 5, 13-14.

Those that attended the 2024 DFF in Auckland may remember Chaplain Djouate’s video message.

Pastor Djouate joined the French Armed Forces in 2020 and has been serving in New Caledonia since September 2023. He has previously deployed to Africa and Central Europe.

Chaplain Djouate says that *“it is obvious that faith is very important for countries located in the Pacific. I see my services as chaplain as a bridge that connects the ecclesial institution and the military institution, but also between the military institution and the population. I like to remind soldiers in serving you, I serve Christ who sent me to you. It is truly a pleasure to be at his service.”*



Chaplain Johnatan DJOUATE FANC

Welcome Arnaud and Johnatan, we look forward to getting to know you better in person at the 2025 DFF.

Event Spotlight: inaugural Pacific Defence Faith Forum

On the evening of 09 June 2024, the PDFN began as delegates from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga arrived at the Royal New Zealand Air Force Base, Whenuapai, Auckland. Apologies were received from Chile and France. Acting Principal Chaplain Dave Lacey of the New Zealand Defence Force welcomed everyone, and noted the official Maori welcome, to be held at the Navy Base in Devonport the following day, would formally begin our week together.

Forum sponsor, Principal Chaplain Kerry Larwill and event director Chaplain Mick George, both from the ADF, created a feeling of friendship for the upcoming three days. Chaplain Larwill emphasised the forum was an opportunity to deepen connections across South Pacific nations. Chaplain George likened the forum to laying a strong foundation for a long-lasting network built on trust, fellowship, and mutual encouragement - resilient against any challenge.

Delegates introduced themselves, sharing their ministry experiences and the passion they bring to support defence and police personnel in various contexts. There was an air of excitement and anticipation for the week ahead.

Friendship and Faith

The “official” first day saw delegates formally welcomed to New Zealand with a Powhiri ceremony at the Marae near the naval base in Devonport. The professionalism and warmth of the NZ Navy personnel impressed everyone, and morning tea offered a chance for friendly chats. A short service in the Chapel of St. Christopher aboard HMZNS Philomel followed, with an introduction to the chapel’s historical items.



A ferry trip into Auckland brought the group to the Maritime Museum, where they toured a replica of a traditional Waka. The tour host, Caleb Te Kahu was the son of one of our NZ delegates, Rewai Te Kahu, which was a very special moment. This vessel, the Waka, operational with some modern modifications, represents the kind of transport that allowed Pacific ancestors to navigate vast ocean distances, carrying their culture, and later, the Christian faith. Back at RNZAF Whenuapai, the Base Deputy Commander formally welcomed the delegates. The day finished with an Australian-style trivia night—a new experience for many. Mixed teams competed in good spirits, ‘breaking the ice’ and paving the way for the days ahead.



Chaplains attending the first Defence Faith Network are welcomed at Devonport Naval Base

Event Spotlight: inaugural Pacific Defence Faith Forum

Getting to Work

Day 2 began with a devotion led by Fiji, followed by presentations about their unique chaplaincy context and insight into their reconciliation journey for the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). Delegates then formed cross-national syndicate groups to discuss issues raised in the presentations and explore the potential of the PDFN. The day concluded with a relaxed dinner at a local restaurant, allowing relationships to deepen.



On Day 3, Tonga led the morning service, filling the room with the harmonious sounds of hymns sung in Tongan. The service set the tone for Tonga's presentation, which highlighted the role of faith within His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) and its influence beyond the military. Without formal military chaplains, HMAF members who are also ministers lead prayers and offer pastoral care, integrating chaplaincy into daily life.



Tongan presentation



Special guests from the Royal New Zealand Navy shared their experiences with the delegates, a support network within the Navy, underscoring the importance of faith. Syndicate discussions on the formation of the Network continued throughout the day and over a casual dinner.



Chapel sunrise

Event Spotlight: inaugural Pacific Defence Faith Forum

Final Day and Reflections

Day 4, led by Papua New Guinea (PNG), opened with traditional hymns that united all delegates. PNG's presentation underscored their nation's "Unity in Diversity" policy, with Christian faith as a foundation. The Chief of Defence Force's directive, "Put God First," reflects this ethos, with PNGDF chaplains appointed through the National Council of Churches. A video presentation from the French delegation, unable to attend, provided insight into their role in New Caledonia.

The day wrapped up with a PDFN workshop led by COL David Hay, synthesising the week's syndicate work into actionable outcomes for the network.

The closing ceremony, hosted by Bishop Te Kitohi (Kito), was as moving as the opening welcome, with a service attended by the delegates and 100 Pacifica community members. Prayers and hymns in both English and Pacific languages were shared, and Bishop Kito delivered a message of unity. Delegates and guests then enjoyed a feast with Pacific music, dance, and a traditional Cava ceremony, marking a meaningful end to the inaugural PDFN.

By SCHA Andrew Nixon, RAN



COL David Hay and Serena Dinner



Bill Taking Kava - Apete and Llyod watching



Song and Dance were a big part of the Defence Faith Forum



Fiji Farewell Song - Apete

Event Spotlight: Inaugural Pacific Defence Faith Forum



Pacific Defence Faith Forum delegates gather for a final service



Chaplain Wendy Robertson reads from the Bible



Bishop Kito speaks about unity

Principal Chaplain - New Zealand Defence Force

NZDF deepens ties with Pacific military chaplains through Auckland forum

Defence Force chaplains from throughout the Pacific came together for the first Pacific Defence Faith Network hosted by the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF).

The tri-service event created an opportunity for chaplains to participate in conferencing, sharing, prayer and to learn from key-note speakers in the faith community,

"This was a first. It was a really significant event for the NZDF and chaplaincy to host an event where Pacific Defence Force chaplains have come together like this."

"It was a wonderful opportunity to get to know each other better and to look at ways we can support each other and work closer together in the future."

"Having a faith network across the Pacific provides us with a unique opportunity to connect at a level and in a way we haven't done before."

Church services were held each day by Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea chaplains, culminating in a combined church service led by the Anglican Bishop to the NZDF, Bishop Te Kitoi 'Kito' Pikaahu, ONZM.

"The aim of the combined church service was to bring together the Pacific community in Auckland, to worship together. Chaplains in the military play a key role and are a "Force for Good", especially in island nations that experience conflict," Bishop Pikaahu said.

"We hold moral and ethical authority, especially in countries that experience conflict as chaplains are deployable with units to provide stability and community involvement."

"From village life, town life and church life, chaplains play a vital role in realising identity in the Pacific," he said.

"Chaplains play a vital role in the well-being of our sailors, soldiers and aviators. This is an opportunity to strengthen relationships between the different countries based on faith, and further support our people, which is quite unique," Chaplain Lacey said.

NZDF Principal Chaplain COL Dave Lacey writes:

The time has flown since we were together in Whenuapai. The memories are still so strong and I find myself smiling every time I think about our time together. The forum reinforced a number of things for me.



Bishop Kito and NZDF Principal Chaplain COL Dave Lacey

Firstly, the unique challenges, but also the amazing opportunities we as military chaplains have and the privilege of serving our Lord in our environments.

Secondly, the range of experiences we have all had and the opportunity to learn from each other seemed endless.

Lastly, it again showed me that it doesn't matter where we live, what our backgrounds may be or what denomination we come from, when people come together who have a heart to serve the Lord it is always a special time. The formation of this network has opened doors and opportunities for us all, and especially for more meaningful engagements between us. I'm encouraged by how well this is working already, and I look forward to serving with you all into the future.

Blessings to you all!

Chaplains from the Pacific Defence Faith Network

Lieutenant Saula Molia

It is a great honour to contribute to the Pacific Defence Faith Network (PDFN) first newsletter for 2024 as a delegate from Tonga serving in His Majesty Armed Forces (HMAF). As discussed in New Zealand this year at the PDFN inaugural meeting, the first Pacific Defence Faith Network meeting is an opportunity to get to know each other better and to look at ways we can support each other and work closer together in the future.

Today, in my beautiful Island of Tonga, we still continue to have our weekly Friday prayer and services/sermon after the colour ceremony to make sure that the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings is the captain and the commander of HMAF in the kingdom.

The sound of God's music coming from every subunit at the Base and the fleet every morning makes us keen to do some more good things to our friends, to our people and to our country who really needs help.

Chaplain Monu from the 1st Australian Division visited me here in Tonga while he did a welfare and pastoral care check to the members of the 1st Australian Division POVAI Series currently doing good work with the HMAF in my little island.



Moli with Lin from the US Coast Guard, Ian from the Tongan Police Force and Finau from the HMAF

ADF Chaplain Wendy Robertson

One of my key takeaways from the Pacific Defence Faith Forum was seeing how proactive chaplaincy thrives in Pacific cultures, where relationships are prioritised over productivity.



Selfie Time with the Fijian Chaplains

I was struck by how deeply chaplains engage with soldiers and families, sometimes visiting every home. I also admired the Fijian military's focus on national reconciliation, using prayer, fasting, and forgiveness as tools for healing. While such an approach is unfamiliar to many Australians, I respect the way they have drawn a line and committed to reflection and renewal. It reminded me that true strength lies in community, connection, and addressing past wounds openly.



ADF Chap Wendy Robertson with Chap Monu Maumau and Chap Ben Bareta, (PNG)

Chaplains from the Pacific Defence Faith Network

CAPT Benstead Bareta, PNG

A picture from the monthly Church Service beginning of this month with our ADF counter parts. I conduct monthly Church Services for PNGDF Pers and ADF Pers every month. On the 20th of this month, I conducted the Military wedding for one of our officers. Two ADFs attended. Our Chapel pews are bought by ADFs. Thank God for ADF for being a blessing to ATW.



ADF COL Dave Hay with Chaplain Ben Bareta, PNG

CAPT Dan Taniele Gonerara Tama, RFMF

Acts 1:8 emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit, which equips believers to be Christ's witnesses in their local communities and across the world. It underscores the importance of spiritual preparation before engaging in ministry. Without the Holy Spirit, efforts lack divine impact. This passage encourages believers to renew their commitment, allowing God's Spirit to shape, guide, and empower them. As the world rapidly changes, the unchanging message of the Gospel must be shared with wisdom, love, and power. The Holy Spirit is essential for growth, guidance, and effective witness, ensuring that God's purpose is fulfilled through us.



CAPT Dan Taniele Gonerara Tama, RFMF

Republic of Fiji Military Force (RFMF) Reconciliation and Restoration Program

The RFMF Reconciliation and Restoration program is a 245 days plan of action which was launched on the 3rd March and will be closed on 2nd November this year. The purpose of this program is to provide a pathway for reconciliation within the RFMF with regards to the events of the 1987, 2000 and 2006 coups that the RFMF was part of, and also the 2nd November, 2000 mutiny. The events mentioned above badly tarnished the reputation of the RFMF, and thus this initiative is also designed to help the institution retain its public image and trust. The RFMF believes that this program is initiated by God to enhance the spirituality of the institution so that it may become robust to execute its constitutional roles and responsibilities.



Prime Minister of Fiji at the Former Senior Officers session



The Commander RFMF (CRFMF) at the launching



The RFMF engaged in fasting and praying



The seniors shows their commitment to this program



An emotional moment - It God's time for the RFMF

Republic of Fiji Military Force (RFMF) Reconciliation and Restoration Program



We are still brothers no matter what happens



Fijian protocol of reconciliation - Whale's tooth is presented



This photos says thousands words



This photo was taken after four hours of dialogue

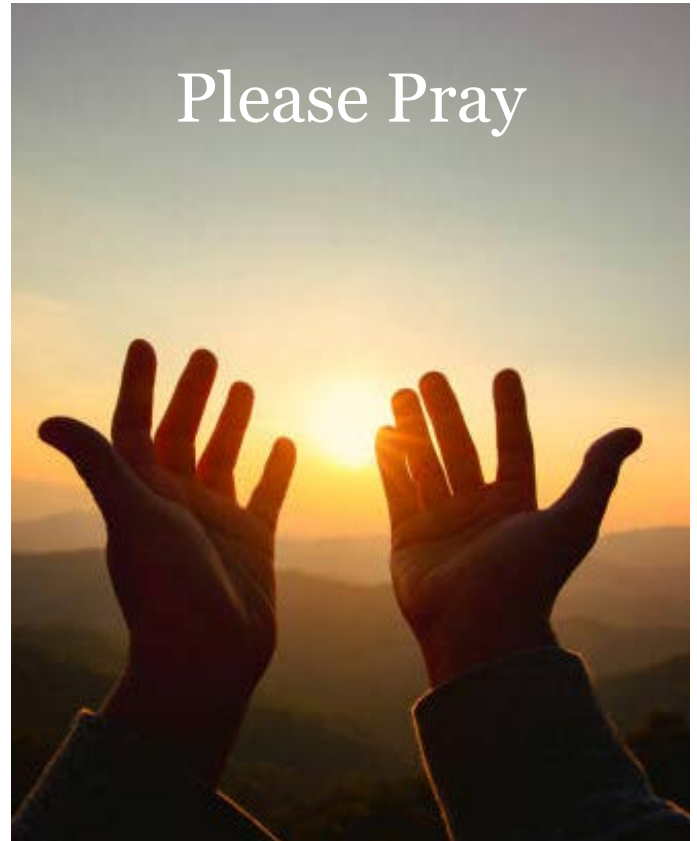


A Call to Prayer / Upcoming Events

Please Pray

Please pray for your brothers and sisters in the PDFN:

- Thank God for the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Restoration and Reconciliation program. Give thanks for the 02 November ceremony, the launch of the new bible and pray for God's guidance in the next steps
- Thank God for the service of Principal Defence Chaplain Pete Olds. Pray that his transition from this role would go smoothly. Pray for Dave Lacey as he assumes the role of Principal Defence Chaplain
- Pray for the PNGDF end of year CDF Church parade. Pray for Chaplain David Ndramen as he takes on the role of Acting Staff Chaplain
- Pray for Lieutenant Saula Taufa Molia in the work he does with His Majesty's Armed Forces (Tonga)
- Pray for Chaplains Johnatan Donate and Arnaud Babin and their work with the French armed forces in New Caledonia
- Pray for Chile and increased engagement with their Chaplains



Upcoming Events

Senior Chaplaincy Leaders Group meeting online:
Tuesday 10th December

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

2025 Defence Faith Forum – Canberra Australia
Saturday 22nd March to Thursday 27th March 2025



Got Feedback?

This is our very first PDFN newsletter. We realise we do not have everything right. 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

