

A Faith Friendly University?
ANU Chaplains Retreat, February 8, 2013

Over view:

- Personal - Chaplain at my best
- The Team of Chaplains at their best
- Interfaith Dynamics
- my experience
- your experience
- inward and outward
- Faith Friendly Communities
- An Improbable Feast

Conclusion

1. Personal

Reading from Richard Holloway *Leaving Alexandria* pp 295-298

Before we jump to describe best chaplaincy practice, we might ask:

What kind of a chaplain am I? What is your essence as a chaplain?

Are you, as in the book, perhaps best described as a **presence**?

Or are you a Richard Holloway, always plotting the next good thing that needs to be done – an **activist**?

Or are you a **teacher**, with the happy knack of setting off light bulbs in the mind so that someone sees the way more clearly?

Or are you in the backroom, off the stage, making sure that everything is running smoothly for others – the **organiser**.

There may be other kinds of chaplain.

We are going to discuss this.

But first let's spend a moment thinking

what name I give to describe myself when I am at my best in chaplaincy.

What is my essence?

* Think back to an occasion to picture yourself when you were being the chaplain you are in essence – when you demonstrated best practice.

What was the situation – the context?

Where were you?

Why were you there?

Who was there with you?

What were your initial feelings?

What happened?

What was the outcome?
How did you feel about the outcome?

* Let us share our reflections:

The word that I think best describes me as a chaplain at my best is....
The situation which best illustrates my best practice...

* General Discussion: what did I appreciate from sharing these chaplaincy stories?

A Future Exercise:

De Bono wrote "Six Thinking Hats". Might an exercise for the ANU team be to construct a similar book for a diverse chaplaincy?

Note: the opportunity for university chaplains to offer their diverse chaplaincy talents as a **team**, drawing on each other's **strengths**.

2. The Team

Rhetorical Reflection:

"Who was I *appointed* to be chaplain to?" and "Who do I actually consider myself to be a chaplain to?"

And is there a gap between the two and how significant is that gap?

I want to suggest that, whether you know it or like it or not, you are **spiritual leaders**.

I suspect that in the eyes of others, a university chaplain is expected to offer a high level of spiritual leadership. A chaplain at the *Australian National University*, in particular, might be expected to be "a cut above the rest", in the same way that "Harvard" elicits an expectation of excellence!

Cairo Video

I would like to show a video clip that says a lot to me about the impact of spiritual leaders like yourselves, when they collaborate to serve a bigger than sectional vision.

Arto may want to elaborate when we break for dinner, because the scene is Cairo, in Egypt. And this video was taken last Christmas Day, just a month or so ago.

Imam Mazhar Shaheen from Azhar Mosque on the edge of Tahrir Square (famous for its inter-faith initiatives and the Imam's preaching in Tahrir Square during the revolution) joined the Christians on January 7th, 2013 celebrating Christmas in the nearby Qasr al-Dobara Church, the largest evangelical church in Egypt and the Middle East, led by Pastor Sameh Morris

Background (handout)

(from a news report in 2011): The Evangelical Church close to Tahrir Square has been turned into a makeshift hospital, helping to treat the constant flow of wounded protesters, cooperating with the Omar Makram Mosque, just metres away, which has also been turned into a hospital. Since the attacks began, the two houses of worship have been sharing doctors, supplies and an unbreakable resolve to tend to the injured. "We were worried that the protesters would not have anyone to treat them, and we simply could not keep the church doors closed in this time of need," Pastor Morris says. Like the church, the mosque's courtyard has been turned into a triage station, while the inside of the mosque has been reserved for severe wounds requiring surgery. One volunteer said, "There is an unbelievable collaboration between Muslims and Christians. I've been watching the doctors work. I've seen the wounded brought in, and guess what? Christian blood looks exactly like Muslim blood! We are not two different species; we are all humans!". In fact, the church has opened a section for Muslim protesters to come in and pray. A steady stream of Muslim worshippers have since done so. Indeed, many Muslim physicians and volunteers work in the church hospital. One Muslim doctor, Dr El-Menisy, said: "Islam is about tolerance and love. I feel very comfortable here, working on the church grounds, helping my Christian colleagues save lives." "A surgeon was needed in the mosque, so I went to the Church and my colleague Michael, who is a Christian surgeon, came to the mosque and replaced me. We are all working together and saving lives together.

During the 18 days of the 2011 revolution in Tahrir Square, from January 25th to February 11th, Christians praying in churches were surrounded and protected by Muslims, and vice versa. Prior to the revolution, Egyptians, particularly those from the majority Muslim community, tended to take good relations between Christians and Muslims for granted – they no longer do. Rather, such good relations between these religious communities are to be preserved, fought for, and actively renewed, again and again. This is especially true because the revolution led to the rise of an Islamist president and of the hardline Muslim Brotherhood movement. Post-revolution politics and Islamist pressures have placed the centuries-old tolerance and understanding between Muslims and Christians under great strain. Senior Muslim Brotherhood leaders declared that wishing Christian compatriots a Merry Christmas was haram and religiously forbidden and sinful for Muslims to do.

This Christmas, Muslim Egyptians stood outside Christian churches on the December 25th and January 6th and the 7th to reassure Christian Egyptians that indeed, they and them were one people. Muslim and Christian Egyptians to this day still chant 'One Hand' in demonstrations, and even within churches, to demonstrate solidarity with Christian Egyptians.

Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxTAOEKzUCs>

* Talk with your neighbour about the clip, what impressed you and what was triggered in your mind about how you would like to see chaplaincy at ANU.

* Come up with three points you think might be relevant to grow the chaplaincy at ANU.

* Whole Group Discussion

Gather the points on the whiteboard.
Prioritise them.

The relationship between the church and the mosque on Tahir Square didn't begin with an invitation to come to a Christmas Day service!
And the unity expressed in the video arises out of the prior relationship between the two spiritual leaders, who model what that unity looks like. There are educational and theological implications to their leadership.

3. Interfaith Dynamics -

(a) My experience

I suggest there are at least two starting points for collaborating in the presence of difference:

1. A need becomes evident in which difference must be confronted and a tangible response called for. (eg the Egyptian Uprising, The Good Samaritan)
2. The beginnings of a broader, encompassing vision arises from the experience of engagement. This vision suggests further engagement – and so the interfaith collaboration grows.

The Flinders Experience

For us at Flinders in 1998, the “need becoming evident” came in the form of a request by the newly formed Pagan Association to use the Religious Centre. This request became a defining moment.

All the chaplains at that time were Christian, appointed by their churches. We had no experience or knowledge of Paganism, and, in fact, had a negative predisposition to any contact with Pagans. Our response could have been:

1. ignore it and hope it goes away – ‘let them fight their own battles’ (walk by on the other side of the road)
2. engage in a debate about the *legitimacy* of Paganism (could they rightfully claim to be a religion and hence claim access to the Religious Centre?)
3. oppose them and deny their request and defend the status quo
4. provisionally accept their right as a religious group to access the centre, support that right and agree to see if we could find enough common ground for living peaceably together.

At that time, all of these options were chosen by various stakeholders of the Religious Centre at Flinders . I'm glad I chose the latter, even though it led me to unknown and sometimes threatening places. But it has been one of the richest of journeys.

The response to the need precipitated starting point number 2 – developing a broader vision to accommodate the new situation – now we had to live alongside

Pagans as well as the hardline Evangelical Christian group vigorously opposed to them, and increasingly to us. We had to re-think our chaplaincy.

That reconsideration led me to discover foundational documents when the Religious Centre was first given as a gift to the university in 1968. It was given by “the Christian churches and the Jewish community”, “for the spiritual benefit of all”.

So religious pluralism was alive at the beginning, but had been lost along the way. Religious inclusion was also a foundational value.

Following the logic of this, I began to act according to the emerging vision. I invited other religious groups to use the centre.

We also began naming ourselves as a multifaith chaplaincy (toward the end of 1999, well before 9/11).

It also predisposed us to eventually discover the concept of the Faith Friendly Community and the development of a Faith Friendly Charter for Australian communities, an over-arching vision we will examine later.

(b) Your experience

Reflection

* What was the need, or the triggering conditions, which led to the formation of the *Multifaith* Chaplaincy at ANU?

* What responses/adaptions have been made to accommodate the need? (dot points)

* What secondary needs have arisen that still need to be met? (dot points)

* As the wider community looks (to you?) for principles of religious cohesion, how will you document your story?

Communities will not begin the journey of being Faith Friendly unless they have a need to do so. In my book, “An Improbable Feast”, I suggest that the event known as 9/11 created a need in western society. The options I have suggested, when we at Flinders were confronted with Paganism, apply – turn off the news and ignore it, question legitimacy, oppose it, or accommodate it. You can probably think back and recognise all of those responses being made by various groups or individuals in Australia and the west in general following 9/11.

I realise that the western response to 9/11 is complex, and all four of those responses can be seen, but in my view, western *leaders* chose, by and large, what I have called ‘protectionism’, which is ultimately a form of opposition. The Flinders chaplains, on the other hand, had already commenced a journey of peace-building and adaption, having chosen to accommodate each other and the new Pagan group. We were already on a different trajectory.

We are religious leaders. This choice for peace-building has become the mission of the chaplaincy at Flinders – to promote the building of Faith Friendly communities starting with ourselves.

- The refurbishing of our centre, making it more physically welcoming,
- the change from Religious Centre to Oasis, to create an ethos of hospitality to all ‘travellers’ and

- a vision for Faith Friendliness in the wider community which has led to invitations to facilitate religiously inclusive events in the community and to promote that vision.

(c) Process – Inward and Outward

It seems to me that chaplaincy in the presence of difference involves both inner and, if you like, outer capacities.

1. Inner

By 'inner' I am referring to those often hidden prejudices or hurtful memories which generate repulsion from or fear of the other. In my view, if we are to be faith friendly team members, dealing with these in ourselves first, as individuals, is a top priority.

In my experience, the process has worked this way.

- a. Consciousness - I confront my prejudice/fear of the other in myself. I bring it to mind.
- b. Courageous action- I take prayerful courage to put myself in an experimental situation in which I engage with the other.
- c. Confession - I begin the relationship by indicating my purpose is friendship/collaboration and I am willing to confess my prejudice/fear and my ignorance of their world.
- d. Clunkiness – I ask to be told if I do or say anything offensive in their eyes while engaging in friendship. "I need you to tell me or I won't learn!" We recognise feelings of discomfort when on the other's turf and go with these feelings, focussing on the relationship of friendship rather than cross-cultural discomfort.
- e. Cooperation/collaboration on a common concern.
- f. Continuing consideration of each other.

ie from self-consciousness to clunkiness to an un-self-conscious relationship.

Example: Dave Andrews and Ramadan.

(Reported by Rachael Kohn

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/spiritofthings/my-spiritual-diary3a-dave-andrews27-ramadan-diary/4227560>)

2. Outward

As collaborating chaplains in a multifaith team there seem to me to be two aspects:

- a. working individually but conscious, and open to disclose, that you are part of the team
- b. working as a team on collaborative projects drawing on individual strengths.

Note: The time and energy needed to relate together increases dramatically as the team number increases. So time and energy must be allocated to the maintenance of the relationships among the chaplains.

Discussion of the above.

1. What was your first experience of relating to 'the other'?
2. What was your best experience?
3. Do you identify with the 'inner' process?
4. How do you achieve 2a?
5. What was your best experience of 2b?

The University

I have dwelt on the individual and the team in this retreat because:

- Skilled and gifted team members with appropriate values, attitudes and behaviour enhance a team's capacity to serve as a team
- The way a team functions conveys its own message of wholeness, respect and radical cooperation to the university and the wider community.

4. Faith Friendliness

(Handout: The Faith Friendly Charter)

Any community will spell out the Faith Friendly concept for themselves in their own way and in their own time when there is a presenting need.

But it's a useful phrase – a faith friendly school (as Woodville High School has now claimed for itself – which now changes how chaplaincy works and is named in that school), a faith friendly garage, a faith friendly church or mosque, a faith friendly university!

Now our questions might become:

What might faith friendly chaplaincy look like at its best ?

How might the Faith Friendly Chaplaincy empower a Faith Friendly University?

In my view the development of a Faith Friendly chaplaincy in the university, with a mission to empower a Faith Friendly university in the first instance, might be a good overarching vision for tertiary chaplaincy in our time. Such a chaplaincy positions itself for spiritual leadership in the wider community.

Additional Exercise – sharing experiences of the process of interfaith dynamics

Think back to an occasion to picture yourself when you were being that chaplain you are in essence – when you demonstrated best practice – but in a situation involving a different religion, culture or race.

What was the situation – the context?

Where were you?

Why were you there?

Who was there with you?

What were your initial feelings?

What happened?

What was the outcome?

How did you feel about the outcome?

Now let us share our reflections:

The situation which best illustrates my best practice with other(s) of difference...

General Discussion: what did I appreciate from sharing these chaplaincy stories?

5. An Improbable Feast - Reflections on my book?

*Are there insights from the book that are helpful to you?

6. Conclusion: My 'why?'

"Get Along" video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdtxHEIbeZE>

This video captures for me the reason behind the chaplain I am. It expresses

- something of my own consciousness as an individual
- the importance of working collaboratively as a team
- the urgency of creating an ethos of Faith Friendliness in Australian communities, beginning with the Chaplaincy Centre and working out to the university itself and other communities as opportunities present themselves.

Thank You!

The challenge I leave is to ask how you may provide religious leadership in Australian society, starting at home by working toward Faith Friendliness

- in your own consciousness as individuals
- in working collaboratively as a team
- by creating an ethos of Faith Friendliness in the Chaplaincy Centre
- by transforming ANU to become a Faith Friendly university
- and to act as agents of Faith Friendly transformation in the world.