

INCLUSIVE FUTURES CONFERENCE
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL INCLUSION
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Social inclusion has become a major part of the policy discourse in Australia and elsewhere.

But:

- what does it mean to be included?
- how do you tell whether someone is included or excluded, and from what?
- how does 'social inclusion' make space for difference: of culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability and so much more?
- does everyone have to be included? What is the relationship between inclusion, resistance and dissent?

We welcome contributions on these and related topics, from academics, policymakers, NGO workers and other practitioners. Send abstracts of 150 words to ashley.soytemiz@mq.edu.au by 20 December 2010.

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Abstract

The narrative of the emergence of a multifaith chaplaincy at Flinders University over the last decade provides a case study of attempts to create religious and cultural inclusion within the university's Religious Centre in a context of the university's increasing religious pluralism and a corresponding resistance by religious conservatives. The novelty of this journey toward religious and cultural inclusion, the adoption of a model of communal collegiality among the chaplains via a recovery of ancient traditions of hospitality informed by the world's religions, challenge the university, commissioning religious bodies and the traditional self-understanding of chaplaincy itself.

This paper traces the thesis developed in the soon to be published book "An Improbable Feast – the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy" which offers signposts toward future possibilities for religious and cultural inclusion.

The following paper summarises my input at a workshop, following a roleplay of an imaginary dinner party in which participants were assigned religious identities and asked to share plates of food, assigned to each of those identities, with each other.

Belonging

The need to belong seems to be axiomatic with being human.

We belong in families, schools and sporting clubs.

If we have been brought up within certain religious traditions we seek a religious or spiritual place where we may belong.

In these 'tribes', as social commentator Hugh MaKay calls them, we are able to test our beliefs and values and celebrate them. We expect support within the tribe when we are needy and we accept a responsibility for others in our "tribe" in return. Tribes give us a sense of identity and security.

Belonging in the Religious Centre

When I commenced chaplaincy at Flinders in 1997 there were a number of Christian groups who used the Religious Centre, which was a gift to the university by the Christian Churches and the Jewish community when it was first established in 1967. However, one group, affiliated with the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES), which was by far the largest, assumed dominance of the centre. Like a biker 'tribe' that takes over a hotel and imposes its culture on anyone who pokes their head in, they seemed to *live* there! For example, other groups seemed to have been made to feel as if they were imposing if they needed to meet in the main meeting space even though they had booked it. Needless to say, there was some animosity between the smaller groups and the dominant one.

Inclusion and Exclusion informed by Set Theory

The Missiologist, Paul Hiebert, in a paper entitled "Who is a Christian?" describes, using mathematical set theory, how such dominant groups understand themselves. The AFES group had constructed a boundary around themselves. Their members, who were "in" (inside the boundary), saw themselves as the true and faithful Christians who adhered to a literal interpretation of the Bible, and a number of exclusionary verses in particular. All members had to sign a declaration that they adhered to a number of propositional beliefs. No external person was authorised to communicate on matters of faith with the group unless they too had signed the declaration. Only certain books, authorised by the leader, were "in". And so on...

On the face of it, this was a legitimate student group like any other university club or society. Membership was voluntary, the members elected a committee and they abided by the rules and regulations for affiliated clubs and societies..

However, the group was really run by an external organisation embodied in a staff-worker, who acted like a traditional chaplain, employed to propagate the culture and agenda of the organisation. The barrier around the AFES group was impermeable. The staff-worker would not work cooperatively with the chaplains, for example, because he thought he would be setting a bad example that might signal that "any faith is as good as another" and would inevitably point others away from Christ - whom he perceived to be inside the AFES boundary. Maintaining religious purity - ie avoidance of sin - was a priority.

This model promoted judgementalism and almost total self-interest. At its worst, it promoted a Bible-verse-justified warfare model in which everyone outside the boundary was an enemy, either to be won over across the line by so-called "spiritual warfare" or excluded and condemned.

This model exploited the vulnerability of new students. The seeming certainty and simplicity they promoted was winsome; the sense of belonging inherent in their model, extremely powerful. The AFES staffworker and his associates worked the phones continually to promote inclusion at their large meetings and the many small intimate "cell groups" conveniently running day and night.

The drop-out rate was high, but every year they attracted a large number of freshers to join them.

This *bounded set* is one model of **inclusion**. It has a **future** in tightly defined “tribes” who derive their sense of identity and security from “either-or” logic, self-authenticating sets of beliefs and authoritarian leadership.

There are other kinds of mathematical sets. Hiebert suggests that a *centred set* may be a more appropriate model for thinking about his question “who is a Christian?”. One’s relationship to God is determined by one’s orientation and movement with respect to a centre, Jesus Christ, or more generally, the God-head. One may be near or far from the centre; and one may be moving toward or away from it.

Then there are *fuzzy sets* which have no boundaries or stable points of reference, with various degrees of inclusion - like a plain becoming hills, and hills becoming mountains.

How might these models contribute to **inclusion** and what **futures** do they have?

Each model was operating when I first arrived at Flinders. The bounded set among the so-called evangelicals, the centred set among some of the other Christian groups and the fuzzy set among the Christian mystics.

Inclusion and Exclusion and Religious Pluralism

But when the Pagans formed an association at Flinders in 1999 and declared their desire to appoint their own chaplain the horizon shifted radically. A faith different to Christianity was announcing itself. There was an immediate war declared by the AFES leader, but the Pagans simply insisted on their rights on the basis of university policies of non-discrimination and equal opportunity. The focus on the Religious Centre as the battle ground tightened.

The chaplains were also challenged. Could a Pagan become a chaplain when chaplaincy was a Christian tradition? Would the chaplains adopt the bounded set model and have nothing to do with them or oppose them? And what might be the directives of the chaplains’ employing religious bodies, who had their own agendas?

I thought that if the Pagans could agree in spirit to the code of practice of the Christian chaplains then, as far as I was concerned, they were entitled to the name “chaplain” and these documents might provide a starting point to explore what a multi-faith chaplaincy might look like. I gave them the policy documents and a week later they returned to say they could live with the Christian understanding of “chaplain” and code of practice. The Buddhists were almost immediately the next to knock on the door. By the turn of the Millennium, the Christian chaplains at Flinders were recognising chaplains of other faiths as their legitimate colleagues.

But would this mean each focusing on their own faith communities and remain polite but distant associates?

Or could a new model for chaplaincy be imagined in the face of a dominant, and sometimes competitive, traditional individualistic chaplaincy paradigm?

The battle for religious freedom and access to the Religious Centre, which began to be championed by the chaplains, now of a number of faiths, was assisted by the University, which appointed a senior administrator to develop management structures and a forum for decision making.

A second front was also established, with a decision to refurbish the centre itself, providing an alternative outlet for expression and a point at which all the parties might meet and work together. One of the university architects provided expertise that facilitated the process. These third parties proved to be essential to bring about change in ways that protected minorities.

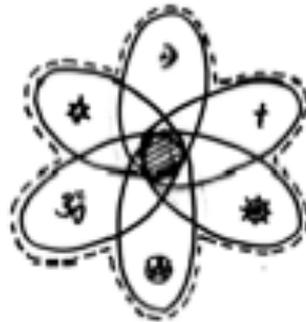
In these ways and with patience, the dominance of the AFES-led group was broken and other groups and individuals made welcome in the centre. It took a number of years and the involvement

of respected experts from outside the centre itself to achieve. More recently the centre has been re-named Oasis to reflect its changed, inclusive ethos.

A Multifaith Hospitality Model

The model of chaplaincy that evolved during this time is that of a community of colleagues serving the university within the rubric ‘nurturing spirit, building community’.

It is a model predicated on the practice of hospitality - a practice deeply embedded in all the world



religions and one easily understood and appreciated by the university.

The Flower Diagram

In this model the chaplains choose to be present to each other, meeting for lunch one day each week to plan what they can do together, debrief each other and enjoy each other’s company, with an eye on serving the needs of the university and, when called upon, the wider community.

If, as Henri Nouwen has proposed¹, hospitality is making space for the other, the overlaps in the *Flower Diagram* represent the relationships the chaplains create with each other, as they are hospitable to, or host each other. So the *Flower Diagram* may represent a *Multifaith Hospitality Model* of chaplaincy. The religious integrity of the contributing chaplains remains, but the overlaps are related to hospitality, rather than attributes of religion.

It is important to note that the purpose of the multifaith chaplaincy is not inter-faith dialogue as such. Inter-faith dialogue starts by recognising difference. But Hospitable Multifaith Chaplaincy begins by recognising the common ground, the common humanity, common values - directed practically to serving the needs of others.

Teasing out the strands of hospitality is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice to make some observations here.

1. Hospitality creates the multifaith chaplaincy in the first instance. The chaplaincy develops its life from the mutual engagement of the chaplains as they host each other. Without generous hospitality, multifaith chaplaincy is not possible.
2. It arises, not theoretically, but out of praxis – the day-to-day, week-by-week, engagement in ministry to the university and the chaplains’ reflections on that engagement with each other. Hospitality is the means of creating the common ground enabling the chaplains to share their practice as chaplains and in the process discover shared beliefs and values.

¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen *Reaching Out* . Collins 1976

3. Hospitality is a tradition among all religions². It is understood by each chaplain through his or her own tradition. So hospitality is the place to start when building a collegial community of chaplains.
4. It is also positively understood among the university community, particularly because of its hosting of international students. So a shared understanding of hospitality establishes expectations about the practice of pastoral care on the campus; hospitality becomes the metaphor for undertaking and reflecting on pastoral care, the core of chaplaincy practice.
5. Because it is a common tradition, a chaplaincy built on hospitality at its core opens up the possibility of chaplaincy becoming a ministry that may be undertaken by all faiths. Such a chaplaincy is not just a Christian occupation. A Buddhist offering pastoral care and spiritual support can be just as much a chaplain if it is offered hospitably. An equitable collegial life among the chaplains can therefore be built.
6. The consistently hospitable ethos created and sustained among the chaplains themselves is, of itself, a significant contribution to the life of the university. It sustains the ethos of Oasis. The value of a non-judgmental, hospitable space in the university, even if rarely accessed, should not be under-estimated. It serves as a reassuring presence. A place of sanctuary is available to all.
7. Multifaith chaplaincy does not produce multifaith chaplains. Rather, each chaplain maintains their religious tradition.
8. The common practice of hospitality as making space for the other, enables each chaplain to engage with each member of the university, of faith or no faith, firstly as a fellow human person. The practice of hospitality among the chaplains ensures that they defer to each other as circumstances demand.

² For examples of hospitality within Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, see <http://www.slideshare.net/nayeemk/definitions-of-hospitality-in-religions-regions-presentation> (accessed 13 April 2010)

See also:

Hospitality around the World http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospitality#Hospitality_around_the_world (accessed 13 April 2010)

World Scripture – Charity and Hospitality <http://www.unification.net/ws/theme141.htm> (accessed 13 April 2010)

The Basic Buddhist Virtue – Dana <http://ratnaghosa.fwbo.net/danatwo.html> (accessed 13 April 2010)

Since an understanding and practice of hospitality derived from the world religions is essential to the formation, function and sustainability of this model of inclusive engagement, it is necessary to recover such an understanding, particularly to distinguish it from more modern meanings associated with the Hospitality Industry, which is founded in consumerism.

I think the Catholic pastor, priest and writer, Henri J. Nouwen captures the spirit of hospitality born of the world religions:

Hospitality... means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opportunity to others to find their God and their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt a life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own.

My view is that Hospitable Multifaith Chaplaincy may be a threat to the very institutions involved in university chaplaincy.

1. It may be a threat to sponsoring religious institutions who are neither theologically comfortable with religious pluralism nor structured to be sympathetic to others who are religiously different. The bounded set model, intent on identity maintenance, even if considerably moderated, continues to prevail. Hospitable Multifaith Chaplaincy subverts the cultural agenda of employing religious bodies more self-interested with ministry to their own adherents and disempowers them by locating power within the community of chaplains of diverse faiths themselves.

2. It may be a threat to the university because they have become commodified multinational businesses concerned with statistical accountability structures, quite at odds with more ancient honour and shame cultures sustained by hospitality as an essential practice necessary for the sustainability of civil society.

3. It is a threat to traditional chaplaincy itself, which became based on the idea of the priest ministering the Mass to adherents geographically displaced from the church, whether in the armed services, in hospital, prison, at sea or in the university. Hospitable Multifaith Chaplaincy changes the model from an individualistic to a communal one, and the focus of ministry from the religious adherent potentially to an engagement with all.

It remains to be seen whether Hospitable Multifaith Chaplaincy is sustainable and a worthy contributor to inclusive futures. However, the recovery and encouragement of hospitality as it is traditionally found in the world religions may well be an important strategy in promoting inclusive futures.