Geoff Boyce. September 2008
Reflection on the Discussion Paper

Issues and Innovation in University Chaplaincy:
a discussion paper in preparation for the
University of Western Sydney Chaplaincy Forum
'Reinventing Chaplaincy at UWS'
Geoff Boyce. August 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to add to, and respond to comments about, the discussion paper I prepared which you would have all received.

In circulating the paper to those chaplains and researchers whose work figures in it, I had a warm and generous response last week from Froukien Smit, Nijmegen University, in the Netherlands.

Her analysis of developments in the Christian chaplaincy in her university form the basis of the descriptions I lumped together under the rubric "Progressive Chaplaincy". [1] All chaplaincies in the Netherlands are Christian.

I think her observations, from pages 3 to 5 in my paper, may also be taken in a chronological sense – they describe a movement that has been happening within Christian chaplaincy over the last 10 years or so. It is a movement, over time, from a chaplaincy that concerns itself primarily with Christian ministry to Christian young people (what I would call "traditional" chaplaincy) towards teamwork (an *ecumenical* Christian approach to both Christians and the non-committed), and more recently toward concerns for the well-being of religious minorities. How chaplaincy negotiates the future with regard to religious and cultural pluralism is, I think, at the cutting edge for progressive chaplaincies.

In this regard, Froukien has recently taken a sabbatical to visit universities with Muslim chaplains in the U.K.. She has sent me a copy of her report, which I will leave with Ellen.

It seemed to me that her initiative could be quite instructive. Here we have a new and different religious group seeking to establish themselves within the chaplaincy paradigm for the first time. How will they go about it? Which models will they adopt?

I would expect them to be "traditional", ministering only to Muslims. However, I was surprised that, by and large, they have adopted a multifaith model, insisting on being seen as chaplains to the whole university not just to Muslims in the first instance.

> *"It is the common humanity that binds us; we do not ask specifically for people's religion when they come in". Along the same lines, Musa Admani mentioned as main aim of chaplaincy: "to promote the growth of humanity, dignity and respect; to help students become*

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[1] In using the word *progressive*, I had in mind a parallel with Jewry. There are Orthodox or 'traditional' Jews, who maintain certain boundaries within their religion which are reflected in their relationships with wider society. And there are "progressive" Jewish communities who are open to and embrace emergent responses to emerging contexts in the wider society.
They (progressive Jewish communities) embrace pluralism, modernity, equality and social justice as core values and believe that such values are consistent with a committed Jewish life.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Judaism)
In this sense, there are "orthodox" or "traditional" chaplaincies and there are "progressive" ones. My paper does not address "traditional" chaplaincies because their contribution to an inclusive response to the changed context of society and the university is limited.

'more human'". In this respect he emphasises the need to stress the common humanity, and not Muslim identity.

Smit reports that the Muslim chaplains she interviewed work with Christian, and other, chaplains on joint activities; they work as a team. She noted that a sense of mutual accountability had developed among the chaplains themselves. Surprisingly, she noticed a lack of "interfaith dialogue" groups and activities being promoted by the chaplains.

However:

There is no atmosphere of 'them and us', but of 'we'. I can see that this provides a good example to students of 'living dialogue in practice', a challenging example also in the Netherlands with its present polarisation between 'Muslims and the rest'.

Smit also noted that some of the Muslim chaplains arrived at their chaplaincy by first tasting it as a placement exercise within a training course set up for Muslim chaplains.

My assessment is that the political agenda hoping to address the possibility of the radicalisation of Muslim university students in the face of "The London Bombings", underlies all these developments. An inclusivist approach by the Muslim chaplains ameliorates the stigmatisation Muslim communities face as "other". But I suspect that in this politicised climate it would be difficult for Muslim chaplains not to be distracted by Islamic concerns even though they see themselves as offering an open, humanistic and holistic approach to all. On the other hand, the same political imperatives influence the priorities of chaplains of other faiths. I expect that these concerns would provide on going source for healthy discussions among a group of mutually accountable chaplains seeking to be transparent with each other. Through such open discussions a "community of colleagues" may be built.

I can also report on a second "addition" to my discussion paper which has occurred this last week.

At Flinders University in South Australia a growing and warm relationship has been developing between the chaplains and *Flinders One*, the new organization that has formed, incorporating the old Student Union, Students Association and Clubs and Societies with the advent of Voluntary Student Unionism.
Flinders One has supported us in our own development to re-imagine the *Religious Centre* as *Oasis – faith, spirit, community*. We share a common concern to serve the needs of students.
Following a discussion with the Manager of *Flinders One* this last week, the *Oasis* Committee agreed to incorporate *Oasis*, chaplaincy being placed within this incorporated body.

The reasons for this move are as follows:

- The process of incorporating will help all stakeholders clarify their relationships within *Oasis* as both a physical centre and a vision. A number of workshops, facilitated by Nicholas Rundle of *Mission Australia*, will guide us through this clarification process. *Flinders One* will provide administrative and legal support.

- A legal entity will help us in applying for grants and connecting with Volunteer SA – providing avenues for volunteers accessed through their organization.

- It will provide the chaplains with sufficient autonomy to protect the vision and achievements of the chaplaincy, and clarity about expectations in the appointment of chaplains into the future.

Thirdly, last week I came across an old email I had printed and kept, which I thought might provide a little case study to contextualise our conversation around the issues and models in the discussion

paper. I am at first uneasy doing this because most chaplaincy works behind the scenes. Conversations are confidential. Holding trust between conflicting parties, for example, is imperative. So the work we do is invariably unreported – a problem in these times of self-promotion!

However, I have the agreement of all concerned to share this with you.

A few years ago, a Director of a Research Centre began to have an ongoing conversation with me. I had been visiting the centre for their weekly morning tea with staff and post-graduate students. Over time it became clear that the values he espoused conflicted strongly with those of decision makers "above" him. This led him to depression and eventual resignation. I accompanied him during this whole process, including his rehabilitation. From first contact to resignation was probably about three years.

I send an occasional blog, "Spirituality News", to my network of contacts. In response to a post on sustainability, in which I was commenting on the materialist view espoused by the guest lecturer at the annual Flinders Investigator Lecture, I received this from David Tacey at Latrobe:

> Yes, I agree with you. Everyone takes spiritual resources for granted, and as such, they are being depleted and exhausted. Everything is constantly discussed in purely material terms - this is itself part of our global crisis, an inability to see spirit and soul, simply because they are not readily visible, although their effects and actions are visible to us all. We are running on ever-diminishing spiritual capital, and faith, hope, love, charity, tolerance etc - all these things are gifts of the spirit, and yet are never factored into anyone's equation. This will be seen, in history, as the enormous gaping hole in our present-day intelligence.

After forwarding David's response to the former Director, I received this copy of an email from him to another Professor at another university (I have edited it slightly to protect identities):

> I have just received this email from Geoff Boyce that includes a response from David Tacey - one of Geoff's 'mentors'.
>
> This is THE MESSAGE for me. The concepts underpin my concerns at
> Flinders…
> Meeting deadlines, meeting standards, meeting budgets, achieving schedules, maximizing
> Output, Minimizing resource useage, ...
>
> overlooks the human spirit, human resiliance, and humanity. I am
> increasingly aware that part of my 'inner onion' is spirituality.
>
> That is what was what was depleted at Flinders, it is what I recharged during my famous trip to South Korea - and when I spend time at Beachport (near the sea) or at my home town (near the mountains), and with significant friends (like minded souls).
>
> This is the trait/characteristic/human condition that I have that enables me to work effectively with people (including students) - *(names of mutually known students).*
>
> Sadly, the systems I have worked in have not considered my 'spirituality' nor the 'spirituality resources' in the equation. When a person works in intense, sometimes traumatic or cathartic situations, their own spiritual resources are difficult to self-maintain. What do the 'systems' do to support, nurture, supplement an individual's 'spiritual resources'?
> ……...
>
> Thanks Geoff for the succinct statement, from David Tacey. It is
> GREAT!