

# The concept of human dignity in tertiary campus ministry: More than hot air

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## **Abstract**

In light of recent criticisms of the concept of human dignity, this contribution offers a proposal for the continued relevance of the concept for tertiary chaplaincy. It is important to consider the concept of human dignity in tertiary chaplaincy because: many higher education institutions continue to identify human dignity as a key value; the kinds of ethical issues that tertiary students face will often involve appeals to human dignity; and the religious connotations that have come to be associated with the concept fall within the scope of chaplains. Nevertheless, there have been recent calls for the concept of human dignity to be dismissed from ethical discourse as unhelpful. In ethical debate, dignity can be unhelpful when it leads to ‘dignity talk’, when there is disagreement about whether it is something human beings always already have or something that is realised through human activity, or when it conceals what people think is really at stake. In response to these criticisms, this contribution proposes a model for understanding human dignity that affirms the value of the human person as a multi-dimensional, historically-situated being in relationship to all that is, a being who is faced with difficult moral choices through which he or she makes meaning in his or her life. This model has both descriptive value in helping us to understand why people do what they do, and normative value in helping us evaluate what should be done.

## **Keywords**

*Chaplaincy in higher education, campus ministry, ethics, human dignity.*