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## Book Review

# Professional spiritual and pastoral care: A practical clergy and chaplain's handbook.

Rabbi Stephen B Roberts (editor)  
SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2012.  
ISBN: 978-1594733123  
Hardcover, 460 pp., AUD \$39.65.

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Both title and subtitle ('professional', 'practical' and 'handbook') are confirmed by the contents of this very welcome addition to the reference shelves of institutions and individuals involved in teaching and practising spiritual and pastoral care, especially in the health sector (e.g. hospitals). This handbook is the product of an ecumenical, interfaith and across-national-borders endeavour. It is both a 'hands-on' as well as 'professional' work, and can be equally used profitably by volunteers, 'professionals' and those whose vocation it is to provide spiritual and pastoral care. (The two terms are used interchangeably throughout the book).

It is a remarkable publication in several respects: The jacket /sleeve is identical to the actual binding; instead of a cover illustration there is a concise reproduction of the contents (*not* the Table of Contents of the book).

The various chapters of the book can function as 'stand alone' or freestanding entities, with their own notes, bibliographic references, and biography of the chapter's author. The various contributors are (in the words of the Editor) "leaders in the field of chaplaincy" and include "seven past presidents from the organisations just listed" (viz. *Association for Clinical Pastoral Education*, *Association of Professional Chaplains*, *National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, and *National Association of Jewish Chaplain*), although "they in no way acted for their organization".

While the 'mechanics' of the book (stand alone chapters, on very specific aspects of the profession, written by outstanding authors) may be a major strength, the very same fact may (in my view) have its own 'Achilles' heel', if the total may not be a sum of the individual parts. Let me elaborate: the word 'chaplain' may have its own idiosyncrasy in North America, but in Australia, it is a generic/umbrella term that covers all varieties of professionals (and sometimes volunteers), in a range of settings: hospitals, hospices, palliative care and other health facilities, nursing homes, educational institutions (universities and schools), the defence and police forces and correctional facilities. The reviewed publication seems to be using 'chaplain' to mean a hospital or health care chaplain (even though in the United States, as the Introduction states, these persons provide "effective professional chaplaincy/spiritual/pastoral care – whether as a congregational clergy member, a seminarian, or a professional chaplain"). The pervading paradigm or analogy of the book is chaplaincy/spiritual/pastoral care *in the health sector*. Every paradigm has a downside and each analogy its limitations, because by definition both models function on the basis of a likeness, correspondence or (partial) similarity *in particular circumstances in which a comparison may be based*. This is implicitly the case in chapters 1 and 2 of Part I, and explicitly in chapters 3, 4, 11, 12,

13, 20, 21, 24 and 25 of Parts II and III. Even in Part IV (the core of the book dealing with 'systemic' issues), chapter 30 deals with *Health Care Chaplaincy as a Research-informed Profession*, once more chaplaincy in health care being the paradigm.

The book is in 4 parts:

Part I. *Theology of spiritual/pastoral care: creating a personal theology to do spiritual/pastoral care.* This section addresses the attempt at establishing/finding a personal 'theological framework' that would enable the practitioner to operate, minister and survive. It goes without saying that by its very nature a personal theology is 'personal' but it would have been very useful to have the handbook deal with the issue (not simply orthopraxy, but with the reality of contradictory theological positions especially in evangelistic faith traditions that may favour 'commitment to witness' in spite of an official undertaking 'not to proselytise').

Part II. *The process of spiritual/pastoral care.* This part reviews the various processes and procedures from assessments, plans, and charts. Listening and responding skills, prayer and ritual, palliative care etc are all included. Importantly this section also deals with 'spirituality groups', the spiritual care of staff, gender issues community religious resources and 'transdisciplinary' relationships.

Part III. *Spiritual/pastoral care with special populations* covers, international and immigrant patients, children, mental health patients, people with diverse sexual orientations, people with disabilities, people with chronic illness, and people with complicated grief.

Part IV. *The infrastructure of spiritual/pastoral care* includes chapters on strategic planning, outcomes orientation, quality assurance and improvement (the bread and butter of managers and administrators), the intersection of theory and ethics, cultural competencies, and prayer and ritual.

Especially in respect of Part IV, it is very pleasing to have a handbook that helps move spiritual/pastoral care from the outlays/expenditure side of the ledger to the credit side so that carers are professional and form an integral part of the 'business'.

While the burning question is whether the insights and lateral thinking pervading the contents can be readily and easily adapted to the provision of spiritual and pastoral care in settings other than hospitals and palliative care (e.g. tertiary educational institutions and corrective facilities), such adaptation and application are made difficult. Chaplaincy in other settings are only mentioned in passing: prison inmates (15 lines); soldiers (4 lines), police and fire fighters (3 lines) and that only in the context of survival grief. Military chaplains merit some 22 lines in the context of the US Congress repealing the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy that deals with gay and lesbian people serving in the army. The Index fails to record the models of chaplaincy also practised by the US military (almost all of page 33). It was particularly disappointing for me personally that chaplaincy in education (especially tertiary institutions) did not get a mention at all, particularly because chaplaincy clients are not a 'captured audience' and can vote with their feet.

For a ministry field that is rapidly changing and professionalising, this resource is a *must have*. While the editor claims, "No other current resource similar to this handbook exists," after reading the whole handbook one would tend to agree with him, with the reservations that we considered above.