

## **SPIRITUAL SPACES ON AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES: A REPORT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Tertiary Campus Ministry Association (Australia) Inc, (TCMA) executive, commissioned a research project about spiritual spaces on tertiary campuses in Australia.

### **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this project is to collate data pertaining to spiritual spaces on Australian universities and provide a comprehensive catalogue on such spaces for tertiary chaplains for information and consultation.

### **RESEARCH TOOL**

The data collated here is based on a survey originally distributed to Australian university chaplains at the TCMA Conference in 2006. Subsequently, a further invitation to complete the survey was sent to the TCMA email list. There are currently 41 universities within Australia. 24 of these universities are represented in the survey responses by campus chaplains. Of the 24 universities, 45 campuses are represented.

The data provides useful insight into general trends relating to the use of spiritual spaces by chaplaincy services throughout Australia. Attached in the Appendix is a list of the 41 universities in Australia together with their relevant website address. There is also a list of current spiritual spaces on each university campus.

## **PART A – SPIRITUAL SPACES ON AUSTRALIAN CAMPUSES**

### **IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS SPACES ON CAMPUSES**

The first part of the survey distributed to chaplains from Australia asked whether “religious spaces” are perceived to be important, first by the chaplains themselves, and second by the university. The feedback received was generally affirming, both of the significance of such spaces on campus, and the support given by chaplaincy and the university for such spaces.

#### **Are religious spaces on campus important?**

Survey participants were asked whether religious space on campus is important. Of the 42 responses received, only one chaplain commented that they are “not overly”, though “can be useful for meeting places.” The remaining 98% of those chaplains surveyed said **yes**, religious spaces on campus are important. Reasons given were as follows:

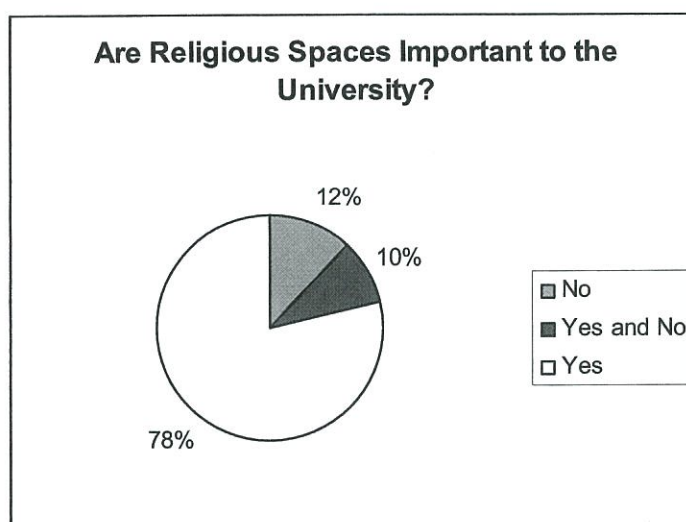
- Because students request the use of such spaces
- Because they express a visible sign of the presence of the chaplaincy service on campus

- To provide a place of quiet/solace
- To provide a place to meditate/reflect/pray
- To be used for memorial services
- To provide a “sense of space”
- To provide a space to relax and assist people to cope with stress and transition
- To provide a refuge/safe place on campus
- To provide a space for students and staff to take part in ‘spiritual activities’
- To provide a space for “contact”
- To provide a space for “religious expression” and faith development
- To provide a space for “worship”
- To provide opportunity for cultural expression
- To encourage community building
- “They are vital to expression of religious freedom”
- For use by the chaplaincy service
- “To show a presence of God on campus for students and staff”
- To allow a space for questioning and learning
- To be used by people of all faiths, as well as of no faith

Many survey participants took the opportunity to make further comments relating to the use of religious spaces on campus, including the following:

- “Such spaces provide recognition that we are spiritual people”.
- Such spaces represent a “holistic approach to student support and education”
- “It provides a way of addressing spiritual needs and exploration in a safe way”
- “An increasing number of overseas students do have strong religious commitments, and might feel more welcome if a space were available.”
- Such spaces provide “more visibility for the spiritual dimensions of life”
- For many such spaces are an important part of leading a “balanced life”
- Facilities should be multi-purpose because they meet such a range of needs
- Religious spaces play a vital role in “speaking of the importance of the sacred to the human being”
- Religious spaces are a response to the assumption that “the ‘spirit’ does not operate on our timetable”
- “Students need more than just academic resources. They need a more ‘spiritual’ space to find balance and guidance.”
- If universities are to cover all aspects of human behaviour, provision must be made for the spiritual.
- Spiritual awareness and development aids learning
- Such spaces help us to “get in touch with ourselves at the deepest level: to be renewed, to find joy, compassion and serenity.”
- Such spaces are useful “in the context of truly allowing a university to be a place where there is “universal knowledge”
- “Religion is one of the central dimensions of life and having religious spaces on campus conveys tangible evidence of what matters and what is valued by the community.”

### Are religious spaces important to the University?



The majority of survey participants said that religious spaces are perceived to be important by 'the university'. Of course, in each case, who represents 'the university' will be interpreted slightly differently. However, reasons cited were as follows:

- Because it is seen as an important service to offer to staff and students
- Because students have demanded/requested such space
- Because they are a useful marketing tool and attract international students
- The university is concerned for the education of the whole person of which the spiritual is an important dimension
- Because such spaces promote peace, encourage harmony and assist staff and student well-being
- Because spiritual spaces make university life more holistic
- The university sees it as part of providing pastoral care on campus

Some surveys expressed that religious spaces were not perceived to be important to the university. Reasons given were as follows:

- The university is not aware of the importance of such space
- There is a particular section of the staff on campus who actively oppose any religious activity on campus
- The university's priority is academic excellence, and spiritual contentment is not considered important
- There is no room in the budget after educational needs are prioritised
- The space provided is only provided because "no one else wanted it"

### CURRENT FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

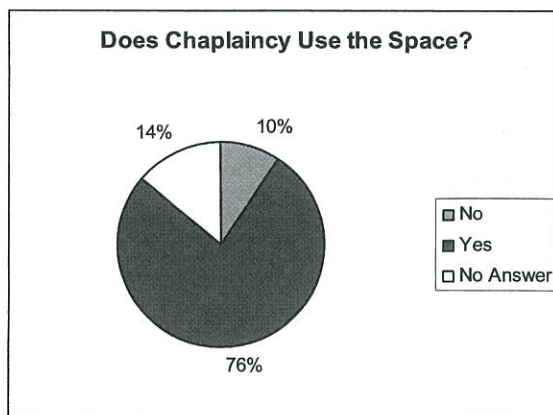


The second area that the survey focused on was what spiritual spaces currently exist in Australian universities, what they are called, how they are used and by whom. The survey also asked chaplains how spiritual spaces are managed, how they were funded and designed. The responses received were varied, though notable trends were the increasing numbers of multi-faith spaces on campus, and the role of chaplaincy in maintaining and overseeing the use of such space.

#### **THE NUMBER OF CAMPUSES ON WHICH SPIRITUAL SPACES ARE PROVIDED**

When asked where spiritual space is provided on campus only one survey participant said no. This participant stated that they were not aware of the reason; that the issue is discussed with the university every few years, but no decision has been made. All other participants made reference to some form of 'spiritual space' being used on campus.

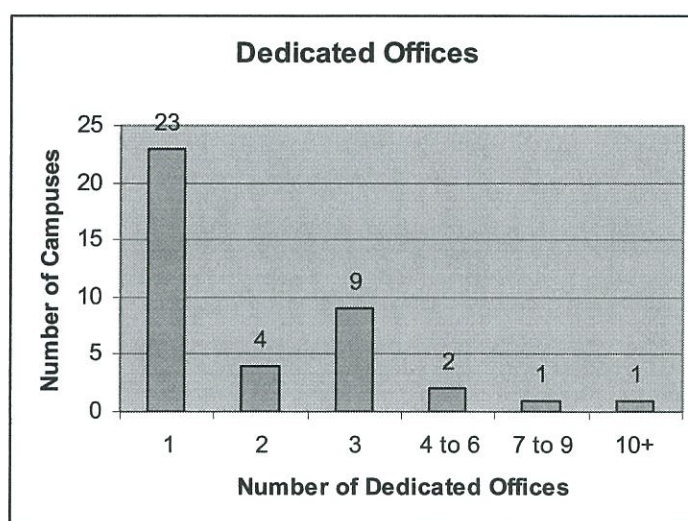
### DOES CHAPLAINCY USE THE SPIRITUAL SPACE?



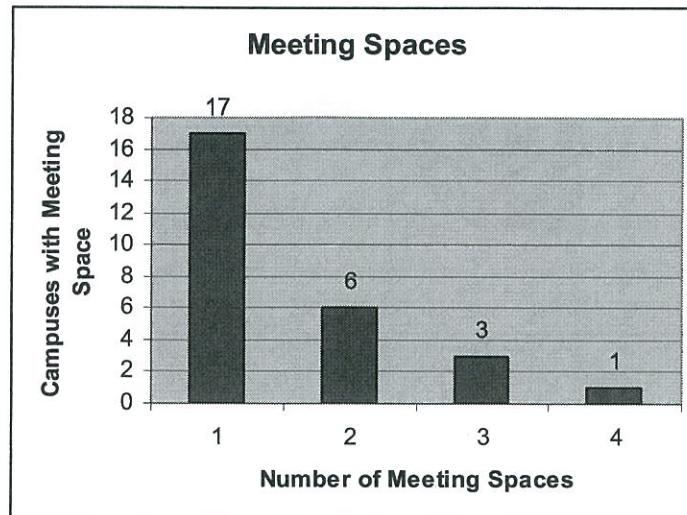
10% of those surveyed indicated that chaplaincy is not using the available spiritual space on campus. No reasons were given as to why this is the case.

### FACILITIES PROVIDED FOR CHAPLAINCY

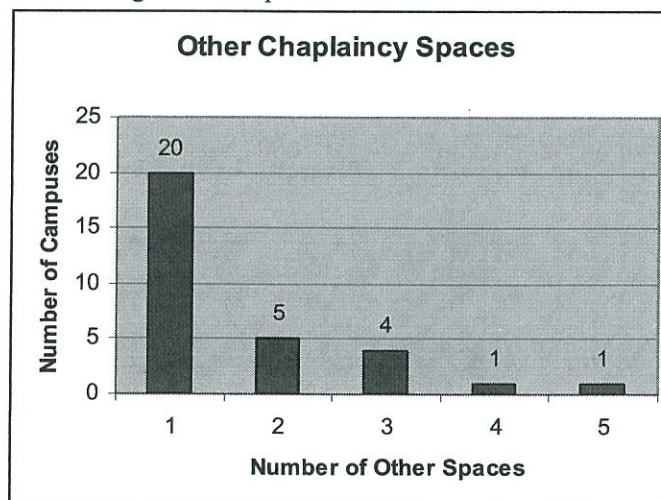
All of the chaplains surveyed indicated that they had some form of office space available to them to use, whether that be a dedicated or shared space. 15.5% of those surveyed indicated that they have one shared office space available to them. 89% of the campuses represented in this research have at least one office space dedicated to chaplaincy.



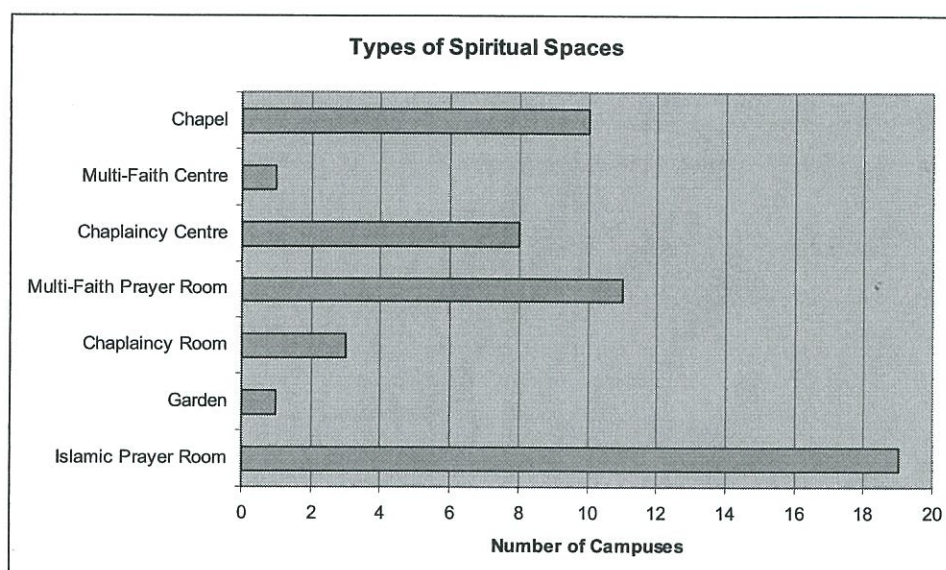
38% of the campuses represented in this research indicated having one 'meeting space' on site. These vary in design, from lounge areas, to a group meeting room, a couple of which included kitchen facilities. 40% did not indicate having any available meeting space on campus.



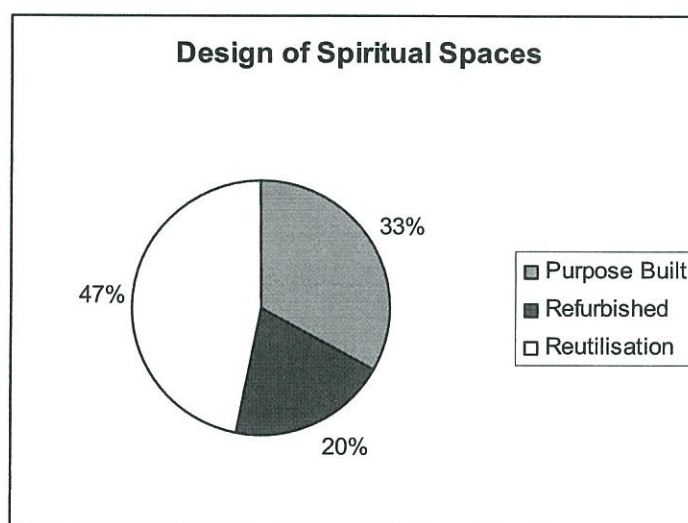
Included in the survey was a space for chaplains to note any other available space for chaplaincy on campus. Of the 44% of participants who responded to this question, the following available spaces were indicated:



80% of those surveyed indicated having some kind of spiritual space other than an office or meeting space on their campus. These included a variety of facilities, such as chapels, prayer rooms and a garden. The following were indicated:



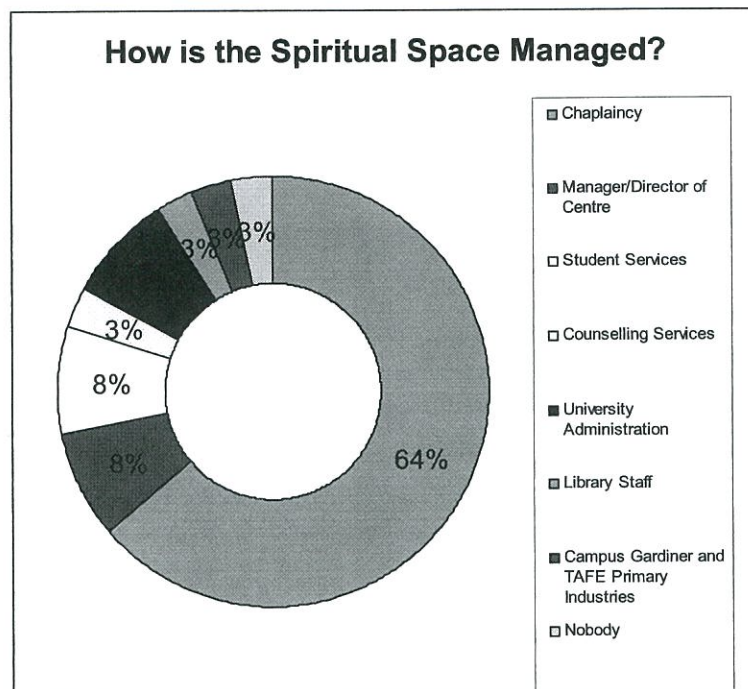
The 80% of participants who indicated that 'spiritual spaces' were present on campus, also included whether these were purpose built, refurbished or a reutilisation of another space. The results were as follows:



#### MANAGEMENT OF SPIRITUAL SPACE

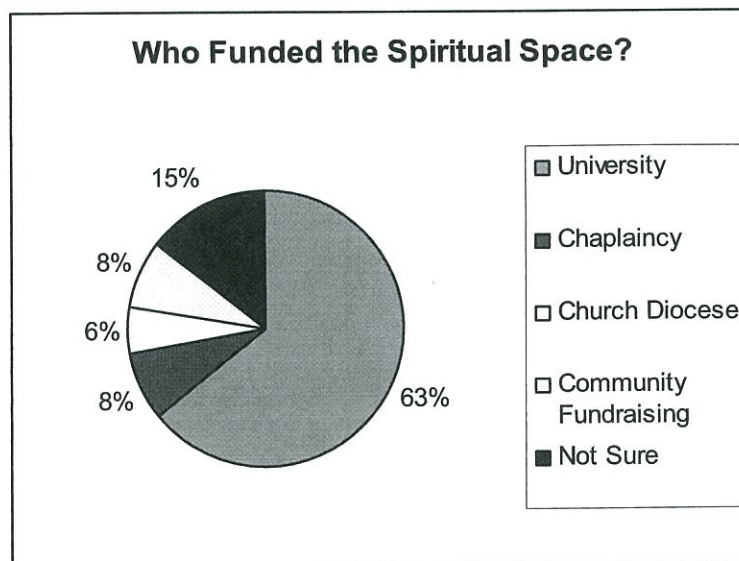
In the majority of cases Chaplaincy are responsible for managing and maintaining the spiritual spaces. In some cases other administrative staff on campus oversee use of the space.





#### FUNDING OF SPIRITUAL SPACE

The majority of the spiritual spaces included in the survey results were funded by the university. The breakdown on funding is as follows:



#### NAMING A SPIRITUAL SPACE



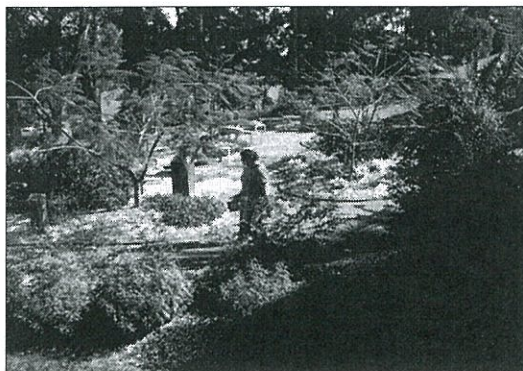
The survey results indicated a broad range of names being used for the various types of spiritual spaces on tertiary campuses throughout Australia. Some have a specifically religious overtone, others not. The various names indicated were as follows:

- Chapel
- Worship Centre
- Muslim Prayer Room
- Chaplaincy Room/Centre
- Spiritual Meeting Place
- Jacob's Well
- The Sacred Garden
- Multi-Faith Prayer Room/Multi-Faith Prayer & Reflection Room
- The Multi-Faith centre
- Prayer Room
- The Spiritual Centre
- Reflection Centre
- The Religious Centre
- The Quiet Room

#### **MODELS CURRENTLY BEING USED**

The research revealed that a substantial variety of models for spiritual spaces on campuses are currently being used. Here are three examples of particular interest:

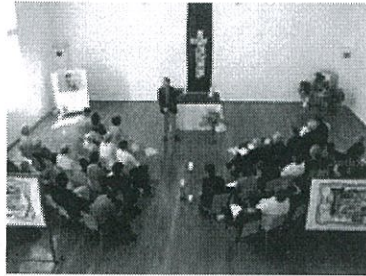
##### **Southern Cross University's Sacred Garden:**



The Sacred Garden at Southern Cross University was established in 2002. The trees, shrubs and flowers are flourishing and many students and staff find a place of solace for prayer and meditation in the Garden. It also serves as a Memorial Garden for the campus. The campus gardener and TAFE Primary Industries manage the physical space. It was funded from donations given by business people,

churches and service clubs. Projects currently underway include the building of a water feature and student-designed public art piece.<sup>1</sup>

#### **THE RMIT SPIRITUAL CENTRE<sup>2</sup>**

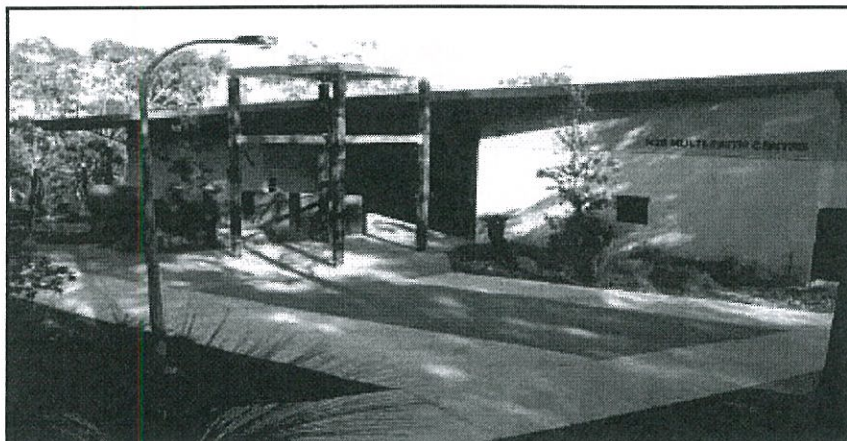


The RMIT Spiritual Centre is a reutilisation of another space, namely the prison chapel of the Old Melbourne Gaol. It is used by different faith communities for prayer, meditation and ritual. It can also be used for less specifically religious ritual. The website reads, "At all times, it is a place that encourages and inspires personal reflection, elevates the inner spirit and honours the highest aspirations of the human spirit and noblest traditions of the world faiths."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SCU Sacred Garden [http://www.tcma.org.au/sacred\\_garden.html](http://www.tcma.org.au/sacred_garden.html) (Accessed 16 September 2007).

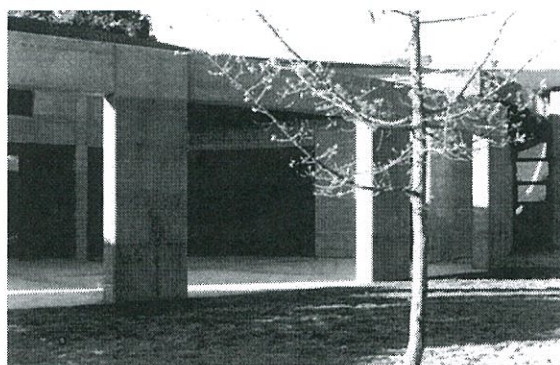
<sup>2</sup> RMIT University Spiritual Centre. <http://www.rmit.edu.au/chaplaincy/spiritualcentre> (Accessed 16 September 2007).

### **GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY MULTI-FAITH CENTRE:**



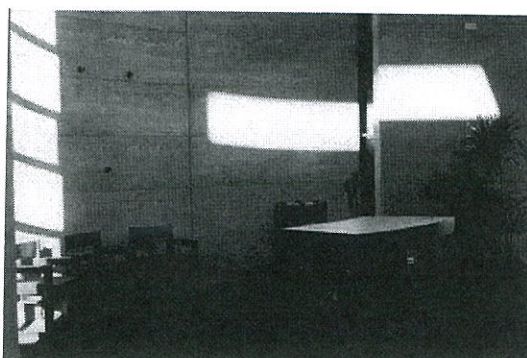
The Griffith University Multi-Faith centre is established on the Nathan Campus, overlooking the edge of the Toohey Forest. It was opened in May of 2002, after generous donations from various individuals and faith communities enabled it to be built. It is managed by the Centre Director, and used to host a variety of religious gatherings and events promoting multi-faith dialogue. The Multi-Faith Centre was envisioned a venue where people from diverse faith, religious and spirituality traditions can deepen their understanding of their own faith and actively participate in inter-faith dialogue, education and action.

### **MURDOCH :**



Murdoch University has a purpose built Worship Centre which was built in 1996 with funds raised through a public appeal via the Theology program. It includes Muslim washing facilities and a space in the Centre is used regularly for Muslim prayers. There are also Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Church Eucharists on a weekly basis during semester and other church and faith traditions use it on weekends. The building is also used for weddings on a commercial basis.





## **PART B – WHAT IS ‘SPIRITUAL SPACE’?**

### **WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL SPACE?**

Though participants named and identified various ‘spiritual spaces’ on campus, the research asks the deeper question: what, after all, is spiritual space? Two survey responses said that there is no clear definition for ‘spiritual space’. One participant wrote, “The term is too broad to be of any practical use.” However, the overriding response was that there is a sense in which certain spaces can be named as spiritual. Such spaces were described by participants in the following ways:

- A space for reflection, prayer, meditation
- A space for “religious activity”
- A space for worship
- A space for community building
- A space for quiet
- A space for group spiritual study and teaching
- A place where people can find personal space away from stress
- A safe space
- A place for people to feel comfortable
- A place for particular spiritual activities (eg. Gospel sharing)
- A place to experience the divine/God
- A space that can be used for memorial services and weddings
- A place for people to reflect on the meaning of their life journey/spiritual quest
- “A sacred space which presents a sense of peace and calm, where services can occur and where candles can be lit, music played and a safe and sacred place to be.”
- A space that can be used by religious and spiritual groups
- “A place that is set aside, allowing time and activities for other than the core business of teaching and learning ...”

### **SPIRITUAL SPACES & RELIGIOUS SPACES**

The final question that participants were asked to respond to was, ‘What is the difference, if any, between a ‘spiritual’ and a ‘religious’ space? One person commented, “I don’t like the word spiritual, nor do I like the idea of spiritual space as it tends to a dualism of spiritual/non-spiritual. All space is space in which life can be lived deeply.”

Another participant commented that, “A religious space is spiritual but not necessarily visa versa.” Others said that the spiritual incorporates the religious. 13% of participants indicated that there is negligible to no difference between a religious and spiritual space. Other participants, however, did comment on differences that they perceived between a ‘spiritual’ and a ‘religious’ space, indicating a preparedness to see a dualism between the two. A number of thematic differences came from the survey responses. They are tabled below ...

RELIGIOUS SPACE	SPIRITUAL SPACE
Relates to a specific faith tradition	Multi-faith
Often has identifiable icons or objects of worship	Relates to a contemporary situation
Refers to denominations	Non-denominational
“Religious space infers particular rituals or tradition activities recognised as religious”	Can be used by people with no faith
Relates to tradition coming from divine teachers	Relates to “that which is nourishing to a person’s sense of self and relation to others”
For a select group of people	Can be used by anyone
Specific	Non-specific

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL SPACE ON A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS?

Many of those surveyed commented on the importance of “making space: and creating “sense of space” in our lives for the spiritual. One person commented that, “Space, in its many forms, is the name of the game.” A strong theme that came through in the research was value of creating physical space, as a tool or proper to creating inner space for spiritual expression and encounter. It was also commented by many that spiritual spaces assist in providing individual and cultural identity in people’s lives.

Of particular interest were comments made to the effect that ‘spiritual spaces’ on university campuses, provide a place of safety and refuge. This prompts one to consider perhaps what some of the dangers and stresses are that university students face on campus and in life today. How can the chaplaincy service provide a place for students to retreat to, to experience safety, securing, and peacefulness? It would appear that, ‘spiritual spaces’ on campus, whatever they are called and however they are formed, are in some sense different to, or set apart from the everyday space in which students find themselves.

### CONCLUSIONS

A number of general trends and themes have been drawn from the research data. In summation, the following points are of particular notability:

- The majority of universities are providing some form of spiritual space

- The form and focus of the spiritual spaces on campuses vary substantially
- Most spiritual spaces in universities around Australia are managed and maintained by Chaplaincy
- An increasing number of universities are opting for creating a specifically multi-faith prayer space
- There is a growing sensitivity to the needs to student with no faith background to access and use a 'spiritual space' on campus
- There is an ongoing need to explore and define the meaning of 'spirituality' in the context of Chaplaincy, and the provision of spiritual spaces on campus
- Within universities there is a growing awareness of the need for holistic education, which embraces the spiritual. Spiritual spaces may form a part of this education of the whole person.
- Spiritual spaces can represent a place of safety and refuge to students
- An increasing number of Islamic Prayer Rooms are being made available on campus.

## APPENDIX

### List of Australian University Website Addresses

UNIVERSITY	WEBSITE
Australian Catholic University	<a href="http://www.acu.edu.au/">http://www.acu.edu.au/</a>
Australian Defence Force Academy	<a href="http://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/">http://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/</a>
Australian Graduate School of Management	<a href="http://www2.agsm.edu.au/">http://www2.agsm.edu.au/</a>
Australian National University	<a href="http://www.anu.edu.au/">http://www.anu.edu.au/</a>
Bond University	<a href="http://www.bond.edu.au/">http://www.bond.edu.au/</a>
Central Queensland University	<a href="http://www.cqu.edu.au/">http://www.cqu.edu.au/</a>
Charles Darwin University	<a href="http://www.cdu.edu.au/">http://www.cdu.edu.au/</a>
Charles Sturt University	<a href="http://www.csu.edu.au/">http://www.csu.edu.au/</a>
Curtin University of Technology	<a href="http://www.curtin.edu.au/">http://www.curtin.edu.au/</a>



Deakin University	<a href="http://www.deakin.edu.au/">http://www.deakin.edu.au/</a>
Edith Cowan University	<a href="http://www.ecu.edu.au/">http://www.ecu.edu.au/</a>
Flinders University	<a href="http://www.flinders.edu.au/">http://www.flinders.edu.au/</a>
Griffith University	<a href="http://www.griffith.edu.au/">http://www.griffith.edu.au/</a>
James Cook University	<a href="http://www.jcu.edu.au/">http://www.jcu.edu.au/</a>
La Trobe University	<a href="http://www.latrobe.edu.au/">http://www.latrobe.edu.au/</a>
Macquarie University	<a href="http://www.mq.edu.au/">http://www.mq.edu.au/</a>
Monash University	<a href="http://www.monash.edu.au/">http://www.monash.edu.au/</a>
Murdoch University	<a href="http://www.murdoch.edu.au/">http://www.murdoch.edu.au/</a>
Queensland University of Technology	<a href="http://www.qut.edu.au/">http://www.qut.edu.au/</a>
RMIT University	<a href="http://www.rmit.edu.au/">http://www.rmit.edu.au/</a>
Southern Cross University	<a href="http://www.scu.edu.au/index.php">http://www.scu.edu.au/index.php</a>
Swinburne University of Technology	<a href="http://www.swinburne.edu.au/index.php">http://www.swinburne.edu.au/index.php</a>
University of Adelaide	<a href="http://www.adelaide.edu.au/">http://www.adelaide.edu.au/</a>
University of Ballarat	<a href="http://www.ballarat.edu.au/">http://www.ballarat.edu.au/</a>
University of Canberra	<a href="http://www.canberra.edu.au/">http://www.canberra.edu.au/</a>
University of Melbourne	<a href="http://www.unimelb.edu.au/">http://www.unimelb.edu.au/</a>
University of New England	<a href="http://www.une.edu.au/">http://www.une.edu.au/</a>
University of New South Wales	<a href="http://www.unsw.edu.au/">http://www.unsw.edu.au/</a>
University of Newcastle	<a href="http://www.newcastle.edu.au/">http://www.newcastle.edu.au/</a>
University of Notre Dame Australia	<a href="http://www.nd.edu.au/">http://www.nd.edu.au/</a>
University of Queensland	<a href="http://www.uq.edu.au/">http://www.uq.edu.au/</a>
University of South Australia	<a href="http://www.unisa.edu.au/">http://www.unisa.edu.au/</a>
University of Southern Queensland	<a href="http://www.usq.edu.au/">http://www.usq.edu.au/</a>
University of Sydney	<a href="http://www.usyd.edu.au/">http://www.usyd.edu.au/</a>
University of Tasmania	<a href="http://www.utas.edu.au/">http://www.utas.edu.au/</a>
University of Technology Sydney	<a href="http://www.uts.edu.au/">http://www.uts.edu.au/</a>
University of the Sunshine Coast	<a href="http://www.usc.edu.au/">http://www.usc.edu.au/</a>
University of Western Australia	<a href="http://www.uwa.edu.au/">http://www.uwa.edu.au/</a>
University of Western Sydney	<a href="http://www.uws.edu.au/">http://www.uws.edu.au/</a>
University of Wollongong	<a href="http://www.uow.edu.au/">http://www.uow.edu.au/</a>
Victoria University	<a href="http://www.vu.edu.au/">http://www.vu.edu.au/</a>

#### LIST OF SPIRITUAL SPACES AVAILABLE ON AUSTRALIAN CAMPUSES

UNIVERSITY	SACRED SPACES	RESPONDED TO SURVEY?
Australian Catholic University <i>Melbourne</i>	Chapel Multi-Faith Prayer Room	Yes
Australian Defence Force Academy		
Australian Graduate School of Management		
Australian National University	Chaplaincy Centre Prayer Room	Yes
Bond University		
Central Queensland University		

Charles Darwin University		
Charles Sturt University	Islamic Prayer Room	Yes
Curtin University of Technology <i>Bentley</i>	The Chaplaincy Room	Yes
Deakin University	Muslim Prayer Room	Yes
Edith Cowan University	Prayer Room	Yes
Flinders University	The Religious Centre	Yes
Griffith University	The Multi-Faith Centre	Yes
James Cook University		
La Trobe University <i>Bundoora Campus</i>	Chapel Muslim Prayer Room	Yes
Macquarie University		Yes
Monash University <i>Gippsland</i> <i>Berwick</i>	The Spiritual Centre The Quiet Room	Yes Yes
Murdoch University	Worship Centre	Yes
Queensland University of Technology	Office	Yes
RMIT University		
Southern Cross University	The Sacred Garden	Yes
Swinburne University of Technology		
University of Adelaide		
University of Ballarat	Prayer Room Muslim Prayer Room	Yes
University of Canberra	Multi-Faith Prayer Room Muslim Prayer Room	Yes
University of Melbourne <i>Parkville</i>	Chapel Islamic Prayer Facility	Yes
University of New England	The UNE Mosque St Mark's Chapel St Albert's Chapel	Yes
University of New South Wales		
University of Newcastle	Multi-Faith Prayer & Reflection Room	Yes
University of Notre Dame Australia		
University of Queensland	Chapel	Yes
University of South Australia		
University of Southern Queensland		
University of Sydney		
University of Tasmania		
University of Technology Sydney	Multi-Faith Centre	Yes
University of the Sunshine Coast		
University of Western Australia	Chapel Reading Room Muslim Prayer Room	Yes
University of Western Sydney <i>Parramatta</i> <i>Hawkesbury</i> <i>Camperdown</i> <i>Bankstown</i>	Jacob's Well Prayer Room Muslim Prayer Room	Yes Yes Yes
University of Wollongong		
Victoria University	Reflection Centre	Yes