

Spiritual care in an age of pluralism¹

Geoff Boyce²

Flinders University of South Australia

Abstract

Traditionally, and particularly in honour-shame societies, spiritual care has been mediated by a common, trans-national understanding of hospitality, the family, clan and village providing the basic social context. However the rise of the Hospitality Industry within modern western culture has placed hospitality within a consumerist setting, reducing its spiritual dynamic. Nouwen's concept of hospitality as 'making space' provides an accessible model for a recovery of traditional hospitality and a means for practising spiritual care in an age of pluralism. Spiritual care is not simply the province of chaplains or those in the caring professions; it is an essential practice for harmonious institutions and a harmonious society.

Key words

Chaplaincy in higher education, Flinders University, honour, hospitality, multifaith chaplaincy, St Martin of Tours.

INTRODUCTION

Standing in the doorway of my office, as a throng of Muslim men around us prepare themselves for Friday Prayer, PhD student Rezaul Haque has news for me – an award for his PhD work and the announcement of the death of his mentor in Bangladesh. I register his mixed feelings. Rezaul tells me he has written a poem - 'a small homage to the cherished memory of my teacher, Professor Md Enamul Hoque, of the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, who passed away in January 2012.' I ask if he might send me a copy to include in this presentation. He looks surprised that I should honour him and his mentor in this way, but I have good reason.

I dedicate Rezaul's poem to the many courageous international students, like him, who come to our country to study – in a foreign language, in a foreign culture, and dislocated from their families and social supports. They are a gift to us, bringing their language, their culture and their faith as offerings, enriching those who are open to receive.

In Memoriam: Professor Md Enamul Hoque³

It's time to listen not to the noises
of the world outside, but to the deep quiet within;

¹ This presentation was first delivered to Spiritual Care Australia (SA) in February 2012 and at Flinders University's 'Friday at the Library' public lecture series in March 2012. It draws on principles developed in the book, *An Improbable Feast: The surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy*, self-published in 2010.

² Author contact details: Geoff Boyce, Flinders University of South Australia. Email: Geoff.Boyce@flinders.edu.au

³ This poem, by Md Rezaul Haque, appears in *Transnational Literature*, volume 4, no. 2 and is used with the permission of the author.

it's time to see not the violence
of darkness stupefying the brilliant glow of light;
it's time to feel the placid pool
inside and let the howling winds pass by;
it's time to taste the nectar in a sieve
and leave the world to all its monkey tricks;
it's time, friend, not to settle an old score,
but just to forgive and be forgiven;
it's time to look back at the times when life
seemed not a nightmare but a splendid dream.
Teach me, friend, how to love and sing and pray—
so sure is the end, so close the hours of grey.

Recently I had the opportunity to meet a pastor from the Philippines who had taken part in *About Face* – a two-week cross-cultural experience organised by the Uniting Church in Australia. The program involved living in an Aboriginal community for a week. The pastor has sought asylum in Australia. As you may know, many pastors have been murdered by the Philippine's armed forces in response to their activism on behalf of native Filipino communities, dispossessed of their land as a result of the exploitation of the Philippine's natural resources by international corporates.

I can understand his quest for asylum, but why had he volunteered for *About Face*? He told me his purpose was to pay his respects to the Aboriginal people of Australia, the custodians of this land, since he was seeking citizenship here. I found his response, and the respect it implies, deeply moving.

I mention these two incidents because they illustrate the core within my twinned topic, 'spiritual care' and its context, the 'age of pluralism'. At the heart of this exploration is what I call *traditional hospitality*, illustrated by the attitude and practice of the Filipino pastor— a practice of invitation and generosity known and understood among most, if not all, traditional religions and indigenous cultures; a set of commonly understood expectations of how a host and a guest relate to each other, how difference is negotiated and how strangers become friends.

I invite you, if you will, to join me as an *insider* as I explore this topic, regardless of religious belief, not as an *outside spectator*, as if spiritual care is someone else's business. It seems to me that we are all charged with a 'duty of spiritual care', to ourselves and to others, if we are to build and sustain healthy relationships and a peaceful world.

In that spirit, I acknowledge that what I offer could equally be delivered with integrity by a person of indigenous culture or from another traditional world religion. They might use different illustrations than mine - I just happen to have been born into a Christian environment, so understandably, I draw on resources from that tradition.

TRADITIONAL HOSPITALITY

Let us picture the stranger, whether she is a refugee, a migrant, a newcomer to town, a new employee, a visitor to your home, an international student or a new face turning up at church or Rotary Club.

What does it feel like, being the stranger?

The stranger is in no position of power. The stranger is needy – needs knowledge, to find out how things work around here, how to survive. The stranger likely has no, or few, social support networks and needs trustworthy friends quickly – sources of knowledge and assurance. The stranger is vulnerable. The stranger is, more often than not, stressed, sometimes hiding from our view, quietly bearing his or her isolation and cultural frustration in solitude, or sometimes putting on a brave face that would lead one to believe that all is well.

What would I do, if I were the stranger?

I suspect most of us might turn to our credit cards. For us, money is power. When we are the strangers in a strange land, we book into a hotel. We turn to the *Hospitality Industry* to relieve the anxiety of vulnerability – travel consultants and guided tours ease our sense of dislocation.

But if we are not western tourists and we do not have that kind of credit, what is available to us?

In places that are home to traditional religions and indigenous cultures, which is most of the world, the *honour-shame* dynamic provides the underlying mechanism that gives social security to the stranger. (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992, pp. 11-13)

For the Filipino pastor the honour-shame dynamic of his culture motivates him to seek the blessing of the Aboriginal people if he is to live on their land. He is the stranger seeking welcome and acknowledgement from the host. To receive their blessing is to receive and give honour. It creates relationship. It fosters peace. It leads to security. Spiritual care is being exercised.

Perhaps you once took a holiday in a distant country, got off the well-worn tourist track and met a local person who has invited you into their home.

I wonder whether you felt as embarrassed as I, when abundant food was lavished on me, the host family appearing to have only the most meager resources? Or did you regret admiring some object in your host's home, as I have done, only to have it thrust upon you as a gift, despite every protest - and in the knowledge that it would almost certainly mean 'excess baggage' at the airport, and would probably never get past Customs when you got home?

One day on the campus I overheard a student talking with friends about his summer holiday in Saudi Arabia. He had got on to a bus and went to pay his fare, only to be told that someone had already paid it for him! He was the stranger and was therefore their guest! He was gob smacked!

This is *traditional hospitality*, the set of expectations about how a host relates to a guest in an honour-shame society – it brings honour to take care of the stranger.

If we have experienced that kind of generosity when we were strangers, I suspect that, like that student who visited Saudi Arabia, we would also take away with us an indelible memory that binds us affectionately with our host. We become friends forever. That is the spiritual, transformational dynamic of hospitality. Strangers, who, through separation of each other, might have seen each other as enemies, now become bonded as friends. The memory of the experience stays - forever!

The same spiritual dynamic is at work in religions.

For example, in the Exodus story, central to the history of the Jewish people, Pharaoh in Egypt typifies the *bad host*. He oppresses the people of Israel living in Egypt by making them work harder and harder, doing more with less. They cry out to Yahweh, their God, for freedom. Yahweh promises liberation and a new home. His chosen leader, Moses, eventually leads the people of Israel out of Egypt. Now they are free of their bad host, but find themselves strangers in the desert. Who will be their host now? Yahweh will be their host and provide for them. So the experience of the stranger being made guest by a gracious host creates the spiritual bond between the people of Israel and Yahweh. The memory of it lives to this day, and forever.

We may be familiar with the 23rd Psalm – 'The Lord is My Shepherd'. It is the same story. The psalm finishes:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies (the host offers hospitality)

You anoint my head with oil (a custom to show honour – raising the status of the guest to that of royalty)

My cup overflows (the extravagant generosity of the host)
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life (the experience of hospitality engages the imagination as a continuing experience, a living memory)
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (gratitude for hospitality creates an eternal spiritual bond).

This is not magic! The same surprising spiritual connection that results from the experience of true hospitality, as today's tourist is taken into the home of a relative stranger in a foreign land, is the same dynamic at work among a whole people and their conception of the sacred.

But the host is also enriched. Hospitality is a two-way process.

Rezaul, who wrote the poem of dedication to his teacher, is from Bangladesh. To him, I am the host – I am the resident here. I receive him at my office door. He comes as a gift to me. I accept him and what he offers without judgement or condition. Intuiting this, he becomes free to share the deeper grief he bears. He recites his tribute and I ask him if he might send me a copy so that I might include it in my presentation. By including it, and by sharing my thoughts about his poem, I honour him and also his teacher.

By honouring him, I am creating the conditions for friendship, creating a bond of friendship. This also happens to be true religion – *re-ligio*, in Latin, *to bind together*. Honour binds.

His poem is a recognition that he stands on the shoulders of others, in particular his teacher. As such, his poem is a repudiation of what often troubles me as a modern westerner - crass individualism and its brother, unbridled competitiveness. His poem is a call to spiritual wisdom developed by nurturing the inner life – attention to the beauty of what life presents, and affirmation of our capacity to forgive, to dream and to love.

Rezaul was not born with such wisdom. Now, as a child grieves the loss of a mother or father, he mourns the loss of his teacher and mentor. In so doing, this loss spurs him to embrace his teacher's values with greater intensity, taking responsibility for the treasures that have been offered to him with greater purpose, now carrying this wisdom forward in his own life, beyond his teacher's death.

Such are the gifts of strangers to us, we who have the privilege of acting as hosts. Honour and respect are its currency.

In the Bible we read of the traveller waiting patiently by the city gate at sunset. It is a matter of honour for the reputation of the city itself that refreshment and a place of rest for the night are offered to the stranger.⁴

⁴ For example, in the Book of Judges, Chapter 19:15

... *he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night.* This was a bad omen and foreshadowed the wicked behaviour pervading that town, played out in the rest of the story. Compare with Genesis 19:1-3. Lot, Abraham's nephew, who lived in Sodom, a town notorious for its wickedness, offers traditional hospitality conforming to the Abrahamic model.

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

It is no different today. In Spain, for example, on the Camino, the traditional pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the Mayor of each little town along the way is responsible for the honour of his town; and that means hospitality to the thousands of pilgrims who pass his way. (Boyce, 2010, pp. 53-55)

It would be wrong to reduce our understanding of this kind of hospitality to that of charity – as if its motivation is derived from pity, or as if being hospitable is a matter of being polite or 'nice'. No, this kind of hospitality was, and is, the way that societies maintain peace, engage in trade and practice cultural interchange. Hospitality provides a safe place for engagement. Trust is given a chance to grow. Mutual understanding becomes a practical face-to-face necessity. Values are weighed. Life-learning takes place. Agreements are reached. Strangers go on their way as friends. Peace between neighbours is cultivated.

Hospitality of this kind was, and still is, *not an option*, but a way of building and maintaining civil society. For the majority in the world then and today, not to practise hospitality to the stranger brings dishonour on one's household, city and nation, and results in alienation, enmity, war and death.

It cannot be bought with money – it must be *given* and received.

It cannot be regulated – it must burst from the depth of our spiritual life, as a joyful act of grace.

My mind goes to the Macassan Traders who were hosted by the Yolnju Aboriginal clans of Northern Australia long before the white man came to Australia. Over the centuries they traded, as the seasonal winds brought them to each other's shores. There were few disagreements between them that resulted in war.

On the other hand, one might reflect on the counter story of the advent of the white colonists, who had a different worldview - in the words of the Yolnju, 'strange white humans who sailed in big ships, had much wealth and strange customs and ceremonial ways. White humans who pushed everybody around as though they owned everything ... white humans who came to visit, stayed and built their strange houses' (Trudgen, 2000, p. 16)

In this case the arrogant stranger abuses the hospitality of the host. The visitor wears out his (sic) welcome!

You may have heard the phrase 'entertaining angels unawares'. This has been our experience, as my wife Sandy and I have hosted 'Couch Surfers' over the last few years – those visiting Adelaide who make contact with us through the Couch-Surfing website,⁵ seeking to stay a night or two in our home. This is not a commercial operation - no money changes hands - but an act of hospitality that we are in the privileged position to be able to offer.

Security for both parties is maintained through the Couch-Surfing webpage; we can check each other out first – what other hosts have said about them when they were guests and what guests have said about us, as hosts. This referral mechanism informs both parties, reducing the risk of a bad placement and enhancing the prospect of a valuable sharing experience. This is a modern equivalent of *The Hospitality Code* - a set of protective expectations for host and guest in honour-shame societies in Biblical times (The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, 1998). We have certainly been enriched by sharing the lives of some of the 'angels' who have sojourned with us.

The phrase “entertaining angels unawares” comes from the Bible.

But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.

⁵ www.couchsurfing.org

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

The writer would have almost certainly had in mind a particular story about the patriarch Abraham - the seminal story of what hospitality should look like and the way it ought to be practised, for Jews, Christians and Muslims. It is the story of the hospitality of Abraham to strangers in the desert, which, as a result, brings blessing. (Genesis 18: 1-15)

The story is immediately followed by one which is meant to show the consequences of *in*-hospitality – the story of Sodom and Gomorrah – which ends in horror, suffering and death (Genesis 18:16–19:29)

The Abrahamic paradigm of traditional hospitality and 'entertaining angels unawares' permeates Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditional practice and forms the basis of much contemporary practice in law and culture: and of particular relevance today, refugee law. (Boyce, 2010, p. 64)

When we engage with new arrivals to our country, whether they be migrants or international students, we who are citizens here, are the hosts. The host needs to know that the stranger from an honour-shame society is in no position to make demands. That would bring shame and dishonour on them and on their host. It is for the host to be generous to her guests. The stranger will accept whatever hospitality is given, but if it is heartless, if it is mean, if it is de-personalised and commodified, it will be incongruent with the expectations ingrained in honour-shame consciousness. The unspoken message that would be given and carried back to their kin would be one of being dishonoured, not of honour. The host would never know this, no matter what questionnaires or surveys it undertakes, because it would not bring honour to disclose it.

I learnt this lesson early on in my chaplaincy when I asked Suparto, the President of the Islamic Students Association, if I might attend Friday Prayer. I wanted to see what they did. “Of course, Geoff,” he said, “anyone may attend!”

So the following Friday I sat, uncomfortably, at the back of the little Prayer Room off the Mall, to experience Muslim Prayer for the first time. But as I was sitting there I noticed how musty the room smelt. The water from the washing place had affected the surrounding carpet – and there didn't seem to be any window in the room that opened!

Afterwards I said straight-out to Suparto, 'Suparto, the room smells terrible! There isn't any ventilation!'

“It's all right, Geoff,” he said with his flashing Indonesian smile, and changed the topic of conversation.

He is the guest. It is not the place of the guest to demand of the host. It is for the host to offer hospitality, to shower generosity on the guest!

I contacted the relevant people in the University and the ventilation problem was quickly and easily solved.

As I look back on the incident, the Muslim community has treated me with honour and respect from that day, though it was not my object at the time.

In today's university, dollars matter and course offerings matter, but there's more to establishing a reputation than these!

ADAPTING TO PLURALISM

In 1999 the Christian chaplains were confronted for the first time with an application from a person of another faith to be appointed as a chaplain. 'If the Christians can have chaplains, why can't we?'

We, the Christian chaplains, agreed that if the person were to abide by our existing code of practice for chaplaincy in spirit, there was no reason why not. The other faith organisation scrutinised our foundation documents and agreed they could live with them; and so, as far as we know, Flinders became the first university in Australia to have a Pagan chaplain. A Buddhist chaplain soon followed.

This pluralism in chaplaincy meant that we had to re-invent chaplaincy in a generic way. We invited the other major faiths to engage with us in its re-articulation and re-construction. They accepted this invitation, even though some could not commit to time on campus. So Flinders Multifaith Chaplaincy was born.

It was born against the reactive conservatism of a dominant Christian culture intent on preserving its own self-interest. Its birth was successful because the dynamic within the tradition of hospitality to the stranger is ultimately more powerful in the long run than the self-interest of any religious institution. We celebrated its birth with a refurbishment of the then Religious Centre in 2001, and we have been in a process of evolving ever since, establishing *Oasis* as a centre of hospitality in 2008.

To establish a common understanding of chaplaincy, it was important to go back to the roots of how chaplaincy came to be.

It was founded on the legend of St Martin of Tours, the Patron Saint of France, who lived from 316 to 397 CE (Catholic Online Encyclopedia, 2010).

You may know the story: Martin was serving in the Roman Army. One day, on guard duty, he noticed a beggar shivering in the cold. Nobody was helping the beggar. So he went out to him and cut his own army cloak in half and gave one piece to the beggar. That night Martin had a dream. In the dream, the face of the beggar was the face of Jesus.

Martin quit the army as soon as he could to become a monk. Before long he became known for his self-less service to the poor. He established communities of unconditional hospitality that were also places of spiritual nurture. Authorities feared him for his fierce advocacy for those suffering, often arbitrary, injustice. Later, against his will, he was tricked into being made a bishop by the people of Tours who loved him for all he stood for. He began the practice, maintained by bishops today, of visiting every parish once a year, particularly in the country, where people were generally neglected. He was self-effacing, and insisted on being buried in a pauper's grave.

Martin's piece of the cloak became a holy relic. The guardian of the cloak (Latin 'capella') became known (in Latin) as the 'Capellanus', which, in old French, and then English became 'chaplain'. The place of keeping was known as the chapel.

The qualities and values, from what we know of the life of St Martin of Tours, that have informed the building of Multifaith Chaplaincy at Flinders, and which we promote as the underlying values for chaplaincy in an age of pluralism, are these:

(1) The compassionate impulse to help

Chaplains are available unconditionally to support the needy, not just individuals seeking help, but also in nurturing a caring ethos in the university.

Among chaplains, the compassionate impulse to help is sometimes expressed as 'doing whatever needs to be done'.

'Doing whatever needs to be done' does not mean doing *any*-thing or *every*-thing. Engagement is framed within our mission statement - to *nurture spirit, build community*. So the question we ask

ourselves, as we engage with the university, is - Does my encounter *nurture spirit*? - Does my engagement *build relationships/community*?

Secondly, the chaplain does not subvert the roles of employees. The chaplain does not do what an employee is paid to do. In some situations, chaplains may have qualifications and experience beyond those of equivalent employees, but our role is to *complement* with particular attention to contributing within the rubric of ‘nurturing spirit, building community’, not to set ourselves up as a religious alternative to what the university may be offering.

Thirdly, this complementarity is fostered by developing collaborative relationships. For example:

a. Joint ventures

The International Student Services Unit and the chaplains became aware of some needs of families of international students. Whereas the University understandably focuses its support services on the one who is undertaking study, typically the husband, his wife and children may be isolated in the community, often lacking language proficiency, one of the major keys for confidently engaging with the Australian community. The well-being of spouses impacts on the capacity of the husband to concentrate on his study. Consequently the International Student Services Unit and *Oasis* decided to provide a weekly Friday morning of English Conversation for spouses of international students, often accompanied by their young children, helping spouses make new friends, while boosting their confidence in English language. A Friday morning was chosen particularly, so that Muslim families may join with other Muslim families for lunch together after *English Conversation* and *Friday Prayer*, enhancing community building – one of the aspirations of the chaplains.

b. Hosting cross-university networks

The chaplaincy hosts a monthly *Service Providers Forum* in *Oasis*, providing a neutral venue for university student support staff to network with each other. The forum is organised by the university’s Health and Counseling Service. *Oasis* provides a comfortable space and good coffee. The meeting consists simply of each person in a circle sharing in turn what is happening in their domain, allowing connections to be made across the circle. The Chair of the Forum rotates among the participants.

c. Positioning within the university

A partnership with *Flinders One*, the body established to maintain student life when *Voluntary Student Unionism* became mandatory, enabled *Oasis* to be born. *Flinders One* agreed to provide the supportive administrative infrastructure for the *Oasis* enterprise, *Oasis* being recognised as a valuable student support service. This relationship enables *Oasis* to connect with other initiatives within the university that enrich the student experience.

Fourthly, the chaplains provide the campus community with a confidential and independent third party. This is classic chaplaincy. Sometimes we play a supportive role during times of personal or professional crisis, often in times of transition, such as coping with the grief of an unexpected bereavement, or occasionally helping to untangle ethical issues. Sometimes it is just a matter of being available to lend a listening ear, to provide assurance of ongoing and unconditional support, at times extending beyond the bounds of the workplace – a seemingly simple service that seems to be increasingly in short supply.

So the first and most obvious value derived from the life of St Martin is the compassionate impulse to help – and to help without judgment or condition. This is a service that may be offered by chaplains of any religion or none.

(2) Communities of hospitality and spiritual nurture

Chaplaincy used to be a solo affair, often envisaged as an extension of the role of the parish priest, bringing the sacraments to the geographically displaced, those unable to attend the local church whether in prison, in hospital or in the armed services and so on.

But our pluralist situation calls for a pluralist model for chaplaincy.

Diana Eck, Director of the *Pluralism Project at Harvard*, has made a telling distinction between *diversity* and *pluralism* (n.d.). Diversity recognises that there is someone else living alongside me who is different. Some so-called 'multifaith chaplaincies' are really only 'diverse chaplaincies' - chaplains from different traditions may tread the same floors, may smile and be polite to each other, but they remain separate in their intent and operations. They are chaplaincies of individuals probably working in the parish-priest-to-their-own-adherents mindset.

Diversity recognises the right for difference. This is an important right. But diversity provides little inherent motivation for groups to look beyond themselves, even though such altruism may be enshrined in their belief systems. Diversity affords no basis for ameliorating the inherent competitiveness between groups and therefore the conditions that feed the human propensity for violence in its many active and passive forms.

The sub-text of religious diversity, it seems to me, is more often than not, self-promotion; the symptoms being a predilection for self-justification – an argumentative apologetic to define one's group *against* others - and an underlying unease at *being*, in favour of *doing* – a *doing* motivated by a need for an anxiety-reduction that comes from the effort and possible rewards of recruitment of others to the cause – or if the cause is being lost, contributing to its survival!

There may be nothing *wrong* in this, per se. It's just an inadequate basis for a multifaith chaplaincy and a limited foundation for enabling a harmonious society.

Pluralism, on the other hand, requires active engagement *between* those of difference. It means chaplains make their first priority the nurturing of the relationships *between each other*, committing time and energy to deepening those relationships, and sharing a commitment to serve the community at hand. This does not mean religious identities become submerged. Rather it means radical hospitality to each other and asking what can be done together for the good of all. It means being a community of colleagues. This radical understanding of pluralism-as-community, and *traditional hospitality* as the means of establishing and sustaining it, is probably the main reason the Multifaith Chaplaincy at Flinders has flourished.

Together we have transformed our shared space from a *Religious Centre*, which was envisioned as a facility for the use of religious clubs and societies, to *Oasis* – a community centre, a centre of welcome, of unconditional hospitality nurturing the well-being of all, and a 'home away from home' for students.

Oasis is not just a space for people to use. That might have been the intention of the founders of the *Religious Centre*, but that would be to conceive it in 'diversity' terms. Fundamentally, it would be no different from the refectory, for example, where space is offered for people to gather and eat together, or the Library where people may gather to seek information. *Oasis*, on the other hand, is conceived not as a passive space, but one where people are actively and unconditionally welcomed. It is animated by the presence of a community who practise *traditional hospitality*. It is the difference between a house and a home. It is an inhabited space, its ethos modeled and sustained by the chaplaincy community, including others who contribute to the activities on offer. In the metaphor of *Oasis*, the chaplains and other volunteers tend the waterhole and ensure its accessibility and nourishment. A shared lunch together each week nurtures the life of this inner animating community – the 'Improbable Feast'!

Perhaps another factor in its flourishing has been the volunteer dynamic. Because our engagement together is voluntary, anyone is free to walk away if the enterprise does not work at the most fundamental level. Its voluntary nature ensures an in-built accountability, inherent within the model itself.

But it lives! Looking back over the last decade or so since that first approach by what I thought was a strange group, the Pagans, we can say that hospitality to each other has transformed us chaplains from strangers to friends. And we may have done some good around the university along the way.

(3) Fluidity

A third aspect of the legacy of St Martin today is fluidity. St Martin often left his communities to visit ordinary people in the countryside, often neglected and looked-down-upon by town officials.

Chaplaincy today is a fluid occupation, not confined to a desk and detailed appointment schedule, but mobile, unobtrusively engaging with people where they are in their everyday life, particularly with an eye for those in need of support. Such a chaplaincy is likely characterised by disorder, rather than neat programmatic plans and schedules.

More often than not, chaplains find themselves 'journeying' with people, sometimes over years, as they work through issues in their lives. Spiritual support means giving people courage to face life. The 'answers' for each person are often within them, chaplaincy providing a safe place for exploration and reflection on tentative attempts to find a path ahead.

The fluidity of our chaplaincy has been greatly enhanced since the appointment of a Coordinator to *Oasis* by *Flinders One*. While ensuring the smooth operation of the centre, the Coordinator also provides a warm welcome to all who enter. She connects students with each other. She refers those in need to appropriate resources. This has given the chaplains greater freedom to venture out of the centre to meet staff and students in their own environments, in the tradition of St Martin.

These three qualities derived from the life of St Martin of Tours – compassion, building spiritually nurturing and hospitable communities, and fluidity – are the qualities any chaplain from any religious tradition or none, may embrace for the good of the community they serve. At the same time, they are qualities welcomed by recipients of chaplaincy services, no matter their religious tradition or none. This, I believe, is a sound basis for offering spiritual care in an age of pluralism.

And if a Christian or two, a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Pagan, a Sikh and a Jew can not only get on together, but also become good friends, then maybe we have something to offer!

HOSPITALITY AS MAKING SPACE

Finally, I would like to add another perspective to the understanding of hospitality I have spoken of, one that has been the cornerstone for our formation as a multifaith chaplaincy, the means of its sustenance, and the method of our engagement with the university.

It is an idea developed by the Catholic priest, Henri J. Nouwen – that of hospitality as *making space*.

In an age of increasing commodification and accountability, such a concept is counter-cultural, and I believe a necessary corrective to unbridled economic rationalism and rampant regulation, which are damaging the human spirit and institutions themselves, institutions which in the past saw themselves as responsible for fostering human flourishing.

Nouwen's understanding of hospitality involves us making space for the other, putting our own agendas on hold to allow the other to undertake their own exploration of their own worlds, in their own time and in their own ways.

Importantly, Nouwen recognises various kinds of hospitality, different kinds of space-making, among them:

- *physical* and *social* space where others are welcomed;
- *emotional* space where others may identify and engage with their world of feelings;
- *intellectual* space, where ideas may be explored without reactive judgements and
- *religious* space, where others may explore the symbols and rituals that give them meaning, inspiration and identity.

If universities are running out of space, as I suspect they may be, Nouwen's conception needs urgent attention on the university's agenda.

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 (Nouwen 1975, p. 68).

As I move among the university community I find those who espouse and practice the qualities of hospitality, of honour and respect. They are practitioners of spiritual care. I find such people scattered everywhere and I consider them my colleagues in making a difference to the quality of our life together on the human journey in this place.

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