

Stone P 2013,

Book Review

An improbable feast: the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multi-faith chaplaincy.

Journal of the Tertiary Campus Ministry Association,

Vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 107-108.

Downloaded from: www.tcma.org.au

Book Review

An improbable feast: the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multi-faith chaplaincy

Geoff Boyce

Self-published, Adelaide, 2011

ISBN: 9781446688847

Paperback, 140pp., AUD \$22.50.

Reviewed by:

Pam Stone

Southern Cross University

Geoff Boyce is chaplain at Flinders University and whilst ministering in multifaith chaplaincy comes to the role from a Christian perspective, having been appointed by the Uniting Church. He has evolved in his role, having moved from a feeling to minister to other Christians to a true acceptance of the spirituality of all people. Boyce suggests that once religion is seen as a person's chosen way of seeking the spiritual, then the need for competing for identity disperses and openness is possible, if the right environment exists.

He has been influenced by Henri Nouwen who holds that we must create space for "The Other". In order to do this we must extend hospitality, create a place for that Other, be together and be comfortable about the being together. Togetherness, as all chaplains would know, enables opportunities to understand each other in, hopefully, non-judgemental ways.

Boyce discusses two images of chaplaincy. At Flinders there is a chaplaincy centre called *Oasis*. Within the centre may be found many folk of differing spiritualities who have, within the space, learned to know and live with each other in their differences. Both staff and students have found this multifaith space to be a place of welcome and acceptance where each is free to be him or herself as they get to know the person, and not simply their chosen form of spirituality. The centre and its chaplains are thus an encouragement to the growth in the communal life of the whole Campus. The other image of chaplaincy is found in the role of the individual chaplain as each makes him or herself available as an active listener - or as I, as a multifaith chaplain, often tell others, chaplains "loiter with intent!"

There should be nothing novel about a chaplain being there, providing an openness for quiet pastoral nurture and support, being there to assist students and staff. There should be nothing novel about chaplains visiting staff rooms and popping into offices. There should be nothing novel about a chaplain asking how someone is and expecting to have the person actually say just how they really are. BUT sometimes THERE IS.

This book reveals the slow but steady ways in which chaplaincy grows, as the incumbent makes space for the other. As hospitality is offered, so it provides a physical and spiritual venue for growth in relationships and consequent understanding and communication.

This little book, and others like it, need to be distributed widely to enable those who are not in chaplaincy to fully grasp the possibilities of multifaith pastoral carers. By painting a picture of the chaplain as an available person who actually has time in the busyness of a university to sit with one in need, to listen when there is a need and to care when there is hurt, Boyce reveals the depth of commitment on offer across faculties, to students and staff alike, when a chaplain shares “an improbable feast”. The appendices provide well thought out plans for the ways in which a multifaith chaplaincy can and does work.

The theme of this writing reflects 1 Corinthians 13:13 in the Bible: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”