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# THE STORY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY, WELLINGTON, ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY<sup>1</sup>

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## **Key words**

*Anglican chaplaincy, chaplaincy in higher education, parish,  
truth, service, Victoria University Wellington*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Let me start by gratefully celebrating the fact that to be a university chaplain is a privilege – ministering to young adults with their unfolding minds and spirits is an excellent way to delay the ageing process (a little).

Sixty two years ago I walked through the doors of Victoria University as a student for the first time. Twelve years later, in 1965, I walked through those same doors as the first Chaplain of this Anglican Chaplaincy. And here I am again, fifty years on, still loitering in the vicinity.

It's a privilege in this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Chaplaincy to be invited to share with you something of its origins and rationale. As an historian, I'm bound to caution you that someone of my age may be prone to convenient memory lapses and to the reshaping of historical 'facts'. As the foundation Chaplain, however, I may have some special perspectives which could be of interest to you who minister in today's tertiary education institutions, more especially those of you in the universities.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented by the Reverend Canon Peter Stuart at a conference of the Aotearoa New Zealand Tertiary Chaplains Association, at the Victoria University of Wellington Anglican Chaplaincy, Wellington, New Zealand, on 26 November 2015.

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What follows falls into three parts: Origins; Rationale; Practice.

## ORIGINS

In the 1950's and 1960's there were two sides to university education at Victoria: formal and informal. Both were important. Student societies flourished, and cross-disciplinary discussions were often possible. Yes, the university still had its earlier night-school culture (shaped by part-time law and accountancy students), but counterbalancing that was a culture of genuine community in the search for truth, among many staff and students, and of a sense that the fruits of that search were to be held in trust for the common good of society. The Victoria University community was often politically radical, and therefore suspect in the eyes of the wider community, especially those who profited from the status quo. It also had a reputation for religious scepticism, and could justifiably be described as not only secular but secularist.

Nevertheless, there was a Christian presence here, among university teaching and administrative staff, and among the students. The main collective expressions of this were the student societies: Student Christian Movement, Newman Society, and the Evangelical or Christian Union, supported by individual teaching staff. Chaplains began to appear: an SCM chaplaincy, which morphed into a National Council of Churches chaplaincy, and a Catholic chaplaincy. There was, however, no clear discernible model of how Chaplains, Christian students and staff should relate together, let alone an overriding vision. Meanwhile, the Churches outside the university viewed it with suspicion and were basically only interested in protecting their young from its 'dangerous' influences.

In the 1950's, Anglican societies emerged in several New Zealand universities, including Victoria, and the Anglican Society here proved to be an important part of the strategy for ministry, which centred on this Chaplaincy, at least in its first seven years.

At an Anglican student conference in 1959, I presented a paper on '*The Church and the University: the Lay Apostolate*'. It was the result of my coming across this stimulating book: '*The Incarnation in the University: Studies in the University Apostolate*', edited by Vincent Buckley (1957). It was an Australian Catholic collection of papers searching for the full meaning of the Incarnation in the specific human situation of the university.

Drawing on that book, I suggested in my own paper that

'...if the Church had tapped to any significant degree the talents of the tens of thousands of students calling themselves Anglican who have entered the universities of New Zealand, then the laity of the Church would be immeasurably stronger today and the life of the Church very different... My own personal opinion [*listen to the brash young man speaking!*] is that there are few tasks more imperative for the New

Zealand [Anglican] Church, both in and out of the university, to tackle, than to take a long, hard-headed look at the university and determine how we can use it to further the Kingdom of God. To do this, university Anglicans must vigorously scrutinise their conception both of the lay apostolate and the university apostolate within the lay apostolate. To do this, the Church must have coherent and carefully conceived objectives in the university, and must then lend its full support to that part of the Church *in* the university. You remember the passage in ‘Alice in Wonderland’ in which Alice asks the Cheshire Cat:

“‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?’  
 “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.  
 “I don’t much care where-” said Alice.  
 “Then it doesn’t matter which way you walk,” said the Cat.  
 “So long as I get *somewhere*,” Alice added as an explanation.  
 “Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if only you walk long enough.”

The Cat’s answers, of course, are the answer which the unregenerate university gives to the student. But all too often they are also the answers which the Church gives to the Anglican student, by default.’

My paper fell into the hands of Harold Miller, the University Librarian and a staunch Anglican, and its ideas converged with his own. Its suggested strategy of building a priest-led ‘parish’ within the university community that either reinforced or created in his mind a desire to see something like this happen at Victoria, and he set about the considerable task of persuading the Diocese to create an Anglican Chaplaincy at Victoria, which would combine a full-time chaplain with a Chaplaincy Centre as a focus for Anglican presence on campus. It was a considerable task because it would cost money (and the Diocese was already contributing towards the National Council of Churches (NCC) chaplaincy), and because the ecumenical tide was running strongly towards Church Union. It was also a considerable task because Victoria University, with its secularist tradition and ethos, had to be reassured in the face of the new activity the Churches were launching into on campus: the NCC Chaplaincy, the Roman Catholic Chaplaincy...and now an Anglican Chaplaincy.

I went on to study theology in England, and investigated what was happening in English universities, and found there had been a huge growth in ‘Anglican Societies’ in England, contemporaneous with what had happened (more modestly) in New Zealand. More importantly, I also found that a number of universities had Anglican Chaplaincies up and running with similar visions to the one I had sought to articulate in 1959.

Harold Miller, meanwhile, had achieved the impossible, and persuaded the Synod to create the Chaplaincy at Victoria. It helped immensely that the Church already owned a strategically-sited house at 36 Kelburn Parade. I was appointed Chaplain and arrived in time for the 1965 academic year.

That year had its difficulties. There were, however, high points like the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, to launch the Chaplaincy – even though the building which was to bear his name (Ramsey House) was not yet completed. There were some edgy moments with John Murray, the NCC Chaplain, who was understandably ambivalent about my presence, but Matthias Murphy, the Roman Catholic Chaplain, welcomed me with open arms. So too did the Victoria History Department, who regarded me as one of their own, appointed me part-time tutor, and facilitated my rapid re-integration into the University. The struggling Anglican Society revived with my help and that of David Williams (now an Anglican priest and prominent lawyer). Regular worship – the daily Offices and later a daily Eucharist – began in the little chapel. John Roberts, Political Science Professor, created some excellent furniture for it, and Michael Smither painted, on site, an arresting Transfiguration window.

Thus started the Victoria University Anglican Chaplaincy, and what were to be seven demanding, exciting and fruitful years for me. During those years I found no reason to doubt the essential validity of the vision which had led to the creation of the Chaplaincy.

## **RATIONALE**

Let's turn now to some of the underlying concept and principles.

### *1. The concept of the Church within the university.*

It's not rocket science or dubious theology to affirm that the Church exists not only in geographically defined parishes but also in other natural communities. Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, later martyred for his outspokenness, put it this way:

‘The church will always exist as long as there is someone who has been baptised...Where is your baptism? You are baptised in your professions, in the fields of workers, in the market. Wherever there is someone who has been baptised, that is where the Church is. There is a prophet there. Let us not hide the talent that God gave us on the day of our baptism and let us truly live the beauty and responsibility of being a prophetic people.’ (*in* Brockman 1989, pp. 172-173)

This Chaplaincy was founded to be a sort of ‘parish’, with priest, worship, teaching, sacraments, pastoral care, and missionary outreach – and physically focussed on a chaplaincy centre. It was in fact more like a traditional geographical parish than were the eclectic inner city churches down the hill, because many staff and especially students lived comparatively close by the university, while most

members of those congregations came from all over the city.

Now follow a couple of pages culled and condensed from papers I wrote back in the 1950's and 60's. I look back over five decades and greet the idealistic young man who wrote them then.

Both Christian discipleship, and the academic pursuit of truth about humankind and this world, are incurably community-centred; each has its own distinctive community. Yes, there are individual creative "Outsiders", but by and large both Christian discipleship and the pursuit of truth are necessarily and properly 'institutionalised' in distinctive community.

Serving the university can only properly be carried out by a Church actually working and worshipping within the university: as a community within a community. The normal twin perils of the ghetto mentality on the one hand, and false accommodation – compromise - on the other, attend such a university Church community, as they do churches anywhere. Yet the alternative is disastrous: a Church attempting to minister to the university from outside, and within the university, religious individualism pure and simple, and rampant secularism.

## *2. The Church's service to the university.*

Before the Church can serve any group or individual, she has to identify genuinely with the situation of those she would serve - in this case, with the life and natural virtues of the university.

'The Church's service to the university' is a phrase that would make some secularist members of the university retreat to prepared positions! Nevertheless as Chaplain I became sick at heart when I saw the waste and the emotional and spiritual suffering here, especially (but not only) among students.

Can the Church serve the university? Yes, I said, in the following ways:

- a. By affirming and supporting the basic identity of the university as a community searching for truth about humankind and this world. This affirmation can help to heal the aimlessness and selfishness of so much of university life; and, even more important perhaps in New Zealand, it can help this young country (and its governments) to understand and value what the university stands for. Today I would say that our governments especially need to understand and value this.
- b. By encouraging the members of the Church in the university to live the values of the university to the highest, and for the glory of God. The work of the university must be carried to the Father in worship and prayer day by day, week by week. The selflessness and integrity of a university life lived with such a spiritual motive, though this motive be not advertised, cannot help but serve the university.

c. By helping in the search for meaning and identity, especially (but not solely) among students. "Who am I?" is a question confronting students with considerable intensity. Here the Church's role merges into the service of love, and into her pastoral ministry, and often into sensitive evangelism. I often described university chaplaincy ministry as a mixture of jungle sharp-shooting and hothouse gardening. You often have only one encounter with a student, but if it is a genuine encounter they can then be 'all over you', in their search for authentic personal identity.

d. By sharing in the many-sided university dialogue, in the search for truth. The Church must be in the university to make her contribution, offer her insights and truths, and live dangerously in encounter with other world-views. A Church which believes her world-view is true, but holds back from the university encounter, is failing in love; a Church which is afraid her message is false, and therefore holds back from the university encounter, is intellectually dishonest and immoral. (In New Zealand universities the encounter when I was chaplain was primarily between Christianity and secularism; perhaps today we've moved into a wider encounter of all world faiths, including atheistic humanism, and the phenomenon of post-modernist confusion.) Here again, this university encounter can merge into evangelism or be the groundwork for evangelism.

e. By crowning the search for truth by affirming and practising the primacy of love. An apparent conflict between love and truth can often be witnessed in university members; at the worst, intelligence and knowledge are used selfishly and hurtfully. Aldous Huxley once noted 'the horrible sterility of intellectuals without love'. Ultimately, of course, in the Christian world-view, there can be no conflict between love and truth; and the university Church can usefully remind both the university and the wider Church of this. This affirmation and practice of the primacy of love should flow into and colour all the activities of the university Church, and be perhaps its supreme contribution to community in the university.

### *3. The university Church's contribution to the wider Church*

Without a university Church, the wider New Zealand Church is incomplete, her sensitivity and vision impaired. This is a vast subject, but the following points can be made:

a. The university Church can be an arena where Christians grapple intellectually with the meaning and implications of Christian faith in today's world, in the light of the knowledge and the discipline of clear thinking fostered by the university. If Christians in the university do not learn to "theologise", the result is intellectual gutlessness or dishonesty in the wider Church, and perhaps a swamping of Christian distinctiveness by national culture.

b. The university can shape a graduate laity to serve the Kingdom, serve it in the Church and especially in the world. This service could include a supply of lay "theologisers" and theologians, and also (and even more importantly) in a steady flow of Christian professional men and women who see their professional work in the light of their faith. There is a difference between a Christian lawyer and a lawyer who happens to be a Christian. But for this to happen, a sense of vocation has to be instilled, with academic work seen as an integral part of and preparation for a life work as a member of the Church and for the common good of society.

c. The university Church can be an important source of vocations for the ordained ministry, and the primary source of staff for theological colleges.

d. The university Church can be a setting where the nationalism of the wider Church is tempered by a true internationalism and inter-racialism, by an awareness of the international and inter-racial character and responsibility of the Church, this awareness coming both from study and from personal encounter with Christian students and staff of other nations and races.

#### *4. The Church's responsibilities to her members in the university*

Back in 1965 this was the point where many New Zealand Christians started: they saw the Church as totally outside the university and were concerned to protect Christians from the influences of a suspect and even evil institution. They were wrong, but the Church does have responsibilities to her members here.

a. The Church has to provide her members with the tools to do their job in the university and after graduation. These tools are primarily spiritual and intellectual.

\* Spiritual: The primary importance of obedience to the will of God, learned, expressed and empowered by disciplined prayer and worship. University Christians should be shown how to pray *as adults*, given a focus for worship as a community, introduced to the spiritual classics, given a theology of prayer. Without sacrificial, mature communion with God, all "theologising" degenerates into a word game, and service to others into "do-gooding".

\* Intellectual: This tool is the opportunity and the stimulus to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest Christian theology in its widest sense. This means books, lay and clerical theologians, meaty programmes. Today this would include the imaginative use of IT resources. But books still have their place: the right book for the right student at the right time can change a life. And any theologising must include a theological understanding of the university, otherwise all this will appear irrelevant to their academic life.

b. The Church has to provide her members with the experience of living

and theologising in a Christian community in the university. If Christian students in these their formative years do not learn to live and theologise in community about their immediate environment, their practice of the Christian religion in later life will be essentially individualistic and pietistic.

c. The Church has to provide and encourage proper pastoral care for her members. Chaplains, staff, and students should seek to form a community which ministers to its members.

d. The Church has to prepare and equip her members for the new situation of living as a minority in increasingly secularist society. (Such a situation was 'new' back in 1965, and it has now emphatically arrived.) Indifference and antagonism to Christian discipleship will increase, not diminish. There has to be a quality of spiritual and intellectual toughness about Christian graduates, together with a capacity for sacrificial and anonymous service. Without this quality and without this capacity, Christian graduates will not survive as Christians. The Church in the university fails in her responsibility to her members in the university if all she prepares them for is life in a religious coffee club.

So this was the vision.

It may seem to have been both a counsel of perfection (if indeed it be perfection), and (in its full original versions) too theological. It may be so; but one characteristic of New Zealand society has been a muddy pragmatism, devoid of principle and clear thinking. In the penetrating comment of André Siegfried, a visitor to this country a century ago, but still valid: "What New Zealanders most need, in fact, is principles, convictions, reasoned beliefs" (Siegfried 1914). And if the Church's work in the universities of this country is based on sloppy theology, anti-intellectualism and muddy pragmatism, she might as well withdraw.

## **PRACTICE**

Well, what happened in those first seven years (1965-71)? Very briefly (with the bad news first):

1. The university environment changed for the worse with the introduction of internal assessment. The time available for *informal* education was slashed; student societies withered dramatically, and thus the opportunities for university Christians (or others for that matter) to come together in community were diminished – though they did not disappear.

2. Students turned away from political activism and idealism and, turning inwards, became more individualist and often turned to drugs and certainly, to exploiting the new sexual revolution. The resulting casualties meant that by 1970 the crisis



component of chaplaincy pastoral work grew dramatically, at the expense of the wider vision.

3. The Chaplaincy nevertheless steadily began to flourish, and the ambitious vision was progressively achieved, in part at least. The model worked, and would have worked even better if there had been five Anglican chaplains, and not just me.

Daily Worship in the chapel was quietly supported- Eucharist and the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. (On Sundays we joined two neighbouring parish congregations). The Chapel was used for private prayer. There was an annual Holy Week Retreat at Frederic Wallis House in the Hutt Valley, and this event was our spiritual core.

Teaching: we had short courses and seminars, held reading parties, built up a library with the help of bequests – and there were countless discussions about faith

Pastoral care: this was a continuum, from quite secular counselling where I was working in close cooperation with the Student Health services through to specifically Christian counselling and to spiritual direction. I remember one occasion when a student came to consult me about a relationship problem – we worked through it on a secular level, we both stood up, and then I asked him whether he would like me to give him a blessing before he left. ‘Yes, please’. So I did. And then without another word spoken we immediately sat down again. And talked for another hour on a quite different level. I’m reminded at this point of Archbishop Michael Ramsey’s words ‘To be healthy and to be whole is no substitute for being penitent, holy and forgiven’ (Ramsey, Terwilliger & Allchin 1973, pp. 62-63). Chaplains are not a branch of the student counselling service.

Sacraments: in addition to the daily Eucharist, the Chaplain prepared people for Confirmation, celebrated weddings, heard confessions, pointed people to ordination – and buried people (not that burial is a sacrament!)

Mission: The missionary dimension (in the broadest sense) was ever present – how could it not be? We were after all ‘church-planting’. But insofar as evangelism is one part of mission, among students in the Sixties and Seventies it was not be easy to distinguish evangelism from teaching from pastoral care.

4. The ecumenical dimension: instead of this being represented by the existence of one interdenominational chaplain – the NCC Chaplain – it became expressed in a functional ecumenism. The three Chaplains prayed together; they cooperated on many things; and eventually related to one another structurally through a Chaplaincy Liaison Board; this in turn became projected on to the national scene – the various interdenominational chaplains had previously gathered together, but at this point the Catholic and Anglican Chaplaincies came within the national

Association. The various student religious societies started to use the same physical facilities (Ramsey House and the Catholic Chaplaincy).

5. The attitude of the University became remarkably positive. In fact some years after I left, when the Diocese was reviewing its commitment to the Chaplaincy, the Vice-Chancellor and the Student Counselling service strongly supported its continuation.

6. The attitude of the Diocese has been a supportive one – financial support has continued, reviewed of course from time to time. I'm less sure that it fully understands the rationale of University chaplaincy, or its crucial strategic importance.

**To sum up**, I still passionately believe that the basic principle to work from is that Christians must come together within the university and regard themselves as the Body of Christ in that place, the Church in the university, fulfilling the same essential functions the Church has anywhere, dependent on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to shape their life and work in that particular place. Yes, today's context is significantly different from the one we faced in 1965, and no doubt the vision needs to be embodied somewhat differently. Yet today, I still struggle to understand what place university chaplains can properly have, separated from that context of Christo-centric faith community – 'Church' - and servant leadership within it. So I pray that each of you ministers within such a community, and is ministered to by that community – some chaplains in the 1960's were lonely people.

May the Incarnate Word bless you. He was very patient with me.

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