

Conference Streams

Landscapes of Justice and Respect

This stream sought to address justice connections that lead to increased well-being for all. We sought to explore ways in which chaplaincy can influence the university to reach beyond tolerance toward a respectful inclusion of all.

- Addressing issues of injustice within the context of the university
- Shaping our interactions with the environment that sustains us. What is eco-justice, and which environmental connections are currently contested in the University?
- Interacting with university structures and personnel in ways that promote social justice
- Finding appropriate ways for chaplaincy work to be connected with wider communities

This stream explored the power relationships and tensions within a globalising world and the contribution which university education makes. Universities expand the aspirations of the human community by contributing to the development of a peaceful, ecologically sustainable and just world. Yet universities themselves face competing interests such as new curriculum demands, academic integrity, market mentality, the 'commodification' of education, escalating costs, global competition, implications of corporate funding, and changing societies. All of these competing interests echo the larger debates at a global level. The university is caught in the middle of a struggle between these competing interests and aspirations for justice.

In this stream, we explored ways in which we can challenge our universities with the significant task of becoming an ethical institution and encourage members of the university community to take a stance on justice issues beyond the university.

Presenters of workshops and papers were invited to explore broad aspects of justice and respect or specific issues such as:

- the marginalisation of the vulnerable and the privilege of the powerful
- issues of social justice eg systemic prejudice, militarism, racism, sexism
- ecological issues and the sustainability of the environment that gives us life
- peacemaking
- economic responsibility in creating a just world
- the universities' responsibility in the face of competing political and economic forces
- the 'westernisation' or 'standardisation' of education

Landscapes of Learning Communities

This stream sought to address the university context in which we work. How does chaplaincy effectively engage the ethos, values and mission of a university?

- The chaplain's place and role within the campus community. What does it mean to be a chaplain on campus?
- Professional development of chaplains in the contemporary environment of the university
- The role of chaplains in engaging and influencing the intellectual quest. How can the chaplain be a prophetic voice within the university community?

This stream focused most closely on the settings in which we work as chaplains. The landscape of universities is undergoing enormous upheavals around the world. Escalating costs for students bring pressures to bear on them. Students are increasingly mobile throughout their education. Many universities now have large numbers of international students taking part in campus life, thus changing the nature of the student body. The nature and understanding of universities is changing in many places around the world, with students increasingly being viewed as customers, purchasing what they need from an educational supermarket. As chaplains we need to explore and respond to all these changes.

The nature of students is changing in other ways as well. In sociological terms, new "generations" are emerging more and more rapidly. Whether or not identifying a name for the current generation is helpful, it is clear that students currently at university have their own distinctive ways of understanding their lives, beliefs and values, and their own ways of envisioning their futures. Chaplains need to be able to engage critically with these distinctive values and beliefs in order to be able to be effective in ministry.

These understandings are critical to what we hoped to explore and learn through this stream of the conference. Presenters of workshops and papers were invited to explore the particular ways that universities are changing around the world and/or to present examples of effective and innovative chaplaincy practice.

Landscapes of Faith and Religion

This stream sought to lead us into an exploration of the diversity of our existing traditions as well as to reach beyond the boundaries of our own spiritual spaces into a deeper engagement with the realities of many faiths, religions and philosophies.

- Interacting with Indigenous traditions and major faith traditions
- Engaging with people of other faiths. How do we interact with the various forms of spiritual expression within the university community?
- Establishing and maintaining sacred spaces in academic contexts. Can we create meaningful spiritual spaces within the university?

This stream explored how we engage with the multifaith contexts in which many of us work. The world has always been religiously diverse but now we are more sharply aware of this diversity and the fact that so many of us encounter and need to understand and engage with people of faiths other than our own.

As university chaplains we aim to assist in making religious pluralism intelligible, and to help people live lives of commitment and purpose in the midst of societies in which the variety of choice is sometimes overwhelming.

Because of the multifaith nature of the university community, staff and students mix with people from a range of different traditions. As chaplains, we encourage students and staff not only to remain committed to their own religion, but also to broaden their approach and explore what they might learn from others.

In order to engage with the multiplicity of religious traditions, we need to re-examine the language we use to discuss our religious tradition. More than that, we need a new way of studying religion or doing theology in interreligious contexts. Such contexts require a dialogical stance and theological reflection on the dialogue. Given the multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious nature of the world, interreligious dialogue is a necessary basis for theological discourse.

The world is multi-religious. Pluralism exists. All religious traditions have yet to find a satisfactory way of speaking about the 'other'. The university provides an ideal space for this interreligious dialogue, accompanied by rigorous debate and exploration of how people of different faiths and religions can work together to achieve justice, peace and harmony for our world.

The multi-religious nature of universities around the world is a critical part of our discussion at this conference. Presenters of papers and workshops were invited to explore their own context, or to reflect on the nature of interreligious dialogue and co-operation.