

Oasis at Flinders –
Re-inventing Chaplaincy in the Public Domain

Geoff Boyce
Oasis Coordinating Chaplain
Flinders University of South Australia

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geoff.boyce@flinders.edu.au
or
geoff@geoffboyce.com

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It can be accessed at either: travellingchaplain.com/resources or geoffboyce.com/papers

Executive Summary

Oasis is an innovative project in a public educational institution, undertaking a paradigmatic shift in the provision of religious and spiritual support.

Following an incubation of ten years, marked by sectarian religious conflict, Oasis was launched at the Flinders University of South Australia in 2008 to embrace religious and cultural diversity, directing itself beyond pastoral care to the individual per se, to human flourishing in the context of inclusive human communities.

Its values, direction and practice draw primary inspiration from religious sources.

The ongoing evolution of Oasis is fed from the diversity of university life: expert knowledge of the Academe, diverse insights and passions contributed by the continuous flow of students, and the skills and experiences of the volunteer Oasis Team and their external networks.

In 2013, the achievements of Oasis were recognised by the University, embracing it within its administrative structures and appointing staff. In 2016 a purpose-built Oasis centre was created, providing new opportunities to achieve its vision.

The praxis of drawing inspiration from the best in religious traditions, while promoting inclusion and engagement for well being has created an innovative model of spiritual support at a systems level, adaptable to many communities or organizations.

This paper presents a summary of some of the major discoveries that have contributed to the re-invention of chaplaincy through the evolution of Oasis at Flinders, as it is today.

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*I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

Isaiah 43:19a (NRSV)

*The only thing we know about the future is that it will be different.
Trying to predict the future is like trying to drive down a country
road at night with no lights while looking out the back window.
The best way to predict the future is to create it.*

Peter Drucker

In our culture, we walk into the future looking backwards.

Ray Minniecon,
Australian Aboriginal Pastor

1. Why re-invent chaplaincy?

1. Chaplaincy

a. Church for the displaced

When I first began chaplaincy at Flinders University in 1997, chaplaincy was modeled on an extension of the local parish church – the chaplain-priest commissioned and paid by the church to administer the sacraments and pastorally support those geographically displaced and unable to attend the services of the local parish church, whether in the armed services, in hospitals, prisons and so on. Chaplaincy was imagined as a mini-church for displaced people. The architecture of chapels in institutions reflects this imagination.

b. Recruitment

For some Christian denominations, chaplaincy seemed to have been less about sacraments and pastoral support and more about recruiting converts or propping up Christian hegemony, particularly in the face of numerical decline in church attendance. The rise of para-church evangelical groups grew out of a frustration, not just with Liberal theology, but also with the settled, hegemonic culture of the established churches that were the traditional providers of chaplains. For them, traditional chaplains became objects of suspicion opposed to their crusade. At worst they were heretics!

c. Pastoral Care

In more recent times Chaplaincy has been drawn into the medical mindset, offering spiritual healing to spiritually, socially or physically sick or wounded people. 'Pastoral care' has become the main role of most chaplains. This model is particularly suited to hospitals and aged care institutions. It is understandable how a vocational pathway has been established for chaplains undertaking a mix of pastoral care and administration of sacraments (or conducting services of worship) in such institutions. One-to-one

pastoral care at the bedside sits well with Western individualism; and it is more easily understood by the public and by 'secular' administrators as the religious equivalent of psychological counseling. It also fits well with the 'church displacement' model, allowing individual religious communities to exercise their own discipline over individually appointed chaplains, cloned from the religious institution. Oasis has been evolving from a sickness to a wellness model, reflecting similar moves in psychology in more recent times, from individual therapy to systems-based resilience models.

2. Institutional needs and management

a. 'The Student Experience'

From the university's point of view, pastoral care is more useful to its institutional mission than sacraments and worship, the 'church away from church' displacement model. Chaplaincy as pastoral care allows the churches to contribute to what is generally called 'the student experience', an emphasis intended to encourage on-campus attendance, offsetting the burgeoning of on-line, off-campus delivery of courses. While religious communities are paying the wages, it's a price the public institutions are generally prepared to accept, though opposed to proselytizing.

b. Internationalization and Islam

In the 90's, internationalization of universities increased; the religious requirements of Muslims for daily prayer and for congregational prayer on Fridays became a challenge for university administrations. Generally, universities were prepared to fund the creation of prayer rooms, but not Muslim chaplains – plant, but not people – in keeping with the accepted practice of providing office space and communications for chaplains provided by external religious communities. In the UK, they eventually found that the provision of prayer rooms by themselves, a gesture following 9/11 and the 'London Bombings', gave Muslim hardliners homes for further radicalization. Provision of space, though important, is not sufficient in itself to promote a positive 'student experience'.

c. Capacity for Decision Making

Dependent on income from international students, universities were not able to continue to ignore religious and spiritual life. But what tools do 'secular' administrators have, to deal with religious observance on campus, particularly if they rose through the ranks during the 80's and 90's when most academics thought that religion could be ignored, as if in the realm of fairy stories? And if the religious needs of Muslim students were given priority on the basis of recruiting students from the Middle East and Asia, what about Hindus, Buddhists and Neo-pagans? How could all be realistically accommodated as the institution's inclusion policies demanded? Where did chaplaincy fit? And what kind of chaplaincy?

d. Cultural Clash

Further, a new threat to the sustainability of chaplaincy began to emerge: the cooption of management systems by public institutions intended to cut waste and increase efficiency, wedding older 'time and motion' efficiency practices with economic-rationalist consumerism, placing statistical 'evidence', time and the dollar as criteria for most everything. 'Disruption' by restructure, justifying staff cuts, is also contributing to changing the culture of universities, placing them at odds with the values of chaplaincy. Radical cultural change toward the consumerist, commodified corporate seems to have become the new organizational norm.

e. Re-inventing Chaplaincy

I contend that even the good of the 'pastoral care' paradigm is a reduction of what the author and patron saint of chaplaincy, St Martin of Tours¹, stood for. By revisiting aspects of his vision, starting points may emerge to consider how chaplaincy may begin to be re-invented to engage more positively and effectively with our present social, spiritual and political realities.

3. Context.

a. Violence

Another reason for re-inventing chaplaincy is perhaps more obvious. Walter Brueggemann asserted in 1993 that:

*...the large, experienced reality faced daily by those with whom we minister is the collapse of the white, male, Western world of colonialism. While that world will continue to make its claim for a very long time, its unchallenged authority and credibility are over and done with... as our systems of management and control break down, the collapse makes us at least anxious and perhaps greedy, and in the end it leads to a justification of many kinds of brutality... there is a lot of political mileage in rhetoric that pretends the old system works, but it is a deception.*²

Brueggemann is writing to a church audience with the broad brush of a theologian informed by contemporary philosophy and the social sciences. Anxiety, management harshness, self-interest and inter-personal abuse are indeed among us! So too is a reactionary undercurrent of anger. These dynamics are not limited to the church, to whom Brueggemann is writing, - or universities, for that matter! Whether the subtle violence of silence, fearful or underhanded; of exclusion to other voices or manipulative 'consultation' to justify the predeterminations of the few; or simply unashamed coercion - our institutions are struggling to adapt to post-colonial enlightenment, to find systems that value and enact the best of what we know about human flourishing.

Can chaplaincy turn a blind eye to humanly damaging systems, and settle for a complicit role, focused merely on ameliorating effects, while putting the root causes of human suffering in the too hard basket?

b. Pluralism

Brueggemann concedes a Christian chaplaincy that trades on status and assumptions from past chaplaincy traditions is likely to continue to be welcome in our public institutions, to care for and comfort life's wounded. But if a chaplaincy is re-invented that also challenges the root causes of woundedness, inequity and de-humanisation, it

¹ See Geoff Boyce, *An Improbable Feast – the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy*. p69 - 76 , referencing the Catholic Online Encyclopedia:

http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=81 (viewed January 11, 2010)

Unfortunately, this webpage seems to have been recently sanitised, airbrushing out the eye-witness stories of his disciple Sulpicius Severus that record Martin's radical hospitality, poverty, humility, advocacy and inclusion.

Aspects of this history may also be found in Geoff Boyce, *Models of Chaplaincy: Traditional, Professional Surrogate, Multifaith*. Journal of the Tertiary Campus Ministry Association Vol.2 No.2 2005

² Brueggemann, Walter, *Texts under negotiation: the Bible and postmodern imagination*. (Augsburg Fortress. 1993) p.10, 11.

must also take into account other aspects of its social context – in particular, that the religious base for the practice of a ‘pastoral care’ chaplaincy is itself contested.

- Are Christians the only ones who can comfort and care?
- Given recent revelations of sexual abuse by clergy, can the Christian church be trusted to provide a safe environment of care?
- And can a chaplaincy, defined within a *Christian* hegemony, be justified in the public domain, if the institution values religious diversity and inclusion, as now it must to survive politically and economically?

Surely in our new pluralist context, an understanding of the secular as not privileging any one brand of religion in the public domain³ spells an end to the traditional understanding of chaplaincy as a specifically Christian vocation?

c. Inclusion

The logic that follows an increasing recognition of pluralism is leading to a wider acceptance of human inclusion. Some recent examples include:

- This recent directive from the AirBnB organization, demanding its members to:
... commit to treat everyone—regardless of race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or age—with respect, and without judgement or bias.
- The soon to be opened, new Royal Adelaide Hospital has stated openly that their chaplaincy service must be ‘visibly multifaith’.
- The same murmurings for wider religious representation than Christian can be heard in our public schools and in post-disaster ministry.

d. Inclusive Conversations

Christian institutions (or Islamic or Buddhist...,for that matter) may conveniently bypass these challenges to retain their own cultures. But, if chaplaincy is to be a valued vocation in the *public arena*, radical conversations, not just with those we know will be supportive, but also with those who are opposed, will be needed. Wide community discussions are required to explore how a genuinely non-discriminative chaplaincy may be practiced. Education for chaplaincy needs to be on the table in such challenging conversations, hopefully beyond the Christian pastoral care paradigm, to include persons of other faiths or of no particular religious adherence, as both teachers and learners.

Aware of its own marginalization within the university in the past, Oasis at Flinders has been exploring many of these issues as a reflexive, self-managing community of practice in its public university setting.

³ See Section 4. *Invitation into the Public Sphere*

2. Oasis at Flinders

1. Foundations

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the origins of chaplaincy. But suffice to say that it grew out of the extraordinary life of St Martin of Tours, characterized by:

- A transformative vision, following his compassionate action to shelter a beggar, perishing in the cold
- Unconditional, sacrificial hospitality to the stranger
- Rejection of accepted structures of exclusion, such as prejudice of city over country, powerful over the powerless, rich over poor⁴
- Fierce advocacy for those unjustly treated by capricious power – particularly those whose voices had been silenced
- The creation of inclusive communities of prayer and spiritual support
- Radical humility and self-effacement

St Martin's life left a legacy to understand the heart of chaplaincy:

- that chaplaincy is not 'work', but a *vocation*, a life-style of compassion
- that hospitality is a disciplined denial of self-interest in service to the other – *any* other
- that chaplaincy is passionate for the achievement of social justice, particularly on behalf of the powerless or voiceless
- that sensitivity, through a life of disciplined, prayerful/thoughtful/reflective listening and communion, underpins action

Desmond Tutu comes to my mind as a living Christian exemplar of this spirit. Those of other faiths may well be able to name their own 'saints' who live, or have lived, similar values.

2. Belief and Practice

a. An Inclusive Community of Practice

Oasis at Flinders has evolved with those foundations in mind, as an inclusive community of *practice* - as distinct from a community intent on conserving religious *beliefs* as such.

That is, the Oasis team *applies* agreed religious values of care, hospitality, social justice and community-building, common to the world religions, as its *primary concern*, rather than the transmission of religious knowledge and rituals designed to maintain specific religious piety.

In contrast, a community seeking to conserve *religious beliefs* likely maintains the mindset of 'mini-church', 'mini-mosque', 'mini-temple' and so on. Such a community may recognize *diversity* - and attempt inclusion of diversity through a multifaith approach.⁵

⁴ But note that St Martin was also a person of his time – post-Constantinian, fourth century. He was strongly opposed to paganism - the primitive, earthy, agricultural set of natural beliefs and practices.

⁵ <https://geoffboyce.com/2008/04/28/diversity-and-pluralism/>,

b. A Theological Frame

From a theological point of view, how one responds to religious pluralism might depend on how one might answer the question:

Is my 'God' the 'God' of all?

c. Multifaith - Diversity

If the answer is 'NO', **MULTIFAITH** could be one way of coping with religious diversity in the public domain.



Fig. 1 Multifaith – multiple faith representation (different colours, different religions)

Multifaith acknowledges **DIVERSITY** and the right of each group to exist and maintain their identity. In a multi-faith approach, accepting the reality of diversity, chaplains and religious communities are expected to recognise, respect, and tolerate each other.⁶

But *Multifaith* can hold no expectation that any group will form relationships with any other. Indeed, like 'mixed marriages' such relationships might more likely be discouraged. Like tourists in a hotel, each located in their own rooms on the same floor, meeting each other in the corridor is unlikely. But if that embarrassing moment of meeting at the lift were to eventuate, polite smiles will usually be employed! Multifaith can keep relationships at a safe, but polite, distance.

3. Flinders Multifaith Chaplaincy

Multi-faith was the paradigm attempted at the beginning of the Oasis journey, from 1997 to 2001 - the establishment of Flinders Multifaith Chaplaincy. Flinders was one of the first Australian universities to take this journey. Recognizing religious diversity among students on the campus led the Christian chaplains to invite appropriate representatives of other world religions to become co-chaplains. They hoped a multi-religious chaplaincy would be more representative of the emerging student population.

⁶ One critique of this schematic model is that the different coloured circles reinforce a misunderstanding that there is uniformity within any religious grouping. In the past, conformity may have been easier to assume; but internationalization, migration and the Internet seem to be creating multiple diversities within and outside traditional religious boundaries. The multifaith model is far more complex than presented in this paper!



Multifaith Chaplains at Flinders with the Chancellor, 2004

Pagan, Catholic, Lutheran, Uniting,
Jewish, the Chancellor, Sikh, Uniting volunteer

(Missing from the photo are the Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu chaplains.)

Invitation by the dominant (Christian) religion to become equal partners in a common task was the first step. The minority faiths appreciated the gesture and responded positively. Representatives were invited to a weekly lunch. There was no particular agenda, just allowing the conversation to take its own path. In fact, religion was rarely the focus of discussion. We soon found that trust and friendship developed among us as a community of colleagues. We created a Charter for Multifaith Ministry⁷, a reflection of our experiences of working together. One of the guidelines was to defer to each other, directing religious questions to the appropriate faith representative; and defending the right of each to speak for their own faith, on their own. And each of us had to be sensitive to the diversity within each of our own religions.

4. From Multifaith to Interfaith

a. Radical Cooperation

Belief differences were gradually put to one side in favour of inter-personal relationships, unless religious difference impinged on a proposed cooperative action. This gradually led to radical cooperation and a shared leadership - a steady transition, fostered by growing inter-personal understanding and valuing of each other's contributions. Multifaith grew to become *inter-faith*, finding each of us tentatively saying 'YES' in answer to the theological question, *Is my 'God' the 'God' of all?* That is, crudely speaking, we were each working for the same 'Boss'!

⁷ The initial work, supporting our multifaith initiative, was done by Flinders Professorial Fellow, Norman Habel, and expanded by the chaplaincy as a result of their experiences.

See Geoff Boyce, *An Improbable Feast – the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy*. p41-46

b. Different Together

I think we came to recognize that the reason for our differences and our different perceptions was because each of us had different religious ‘roots’, different life experiences and different cultures (‘ways of doing things’). In other words, we were the ones with the differences, not ‘God’! And if ‘God’ is the ‘God’ of all, and that ‘all’ is diverse, this might mean we could provide a chaplaincy *together* to serve all that diversity. And if ‘God’ is the ‘God’ of all, might we not find ‘God’ in the public (as compared to the merely ‘religious’) domain?

Such an interfaith chaplaincy would likely have:

- Common vision
- Common values
- Radical cooperation

In the beginning, as we began to attempt to create an egalitarian multifaith ministry we soon encountered practical issues. Some of us were employed by churches, others volunteers; some of us were full time and others could offer only a few hours for the meal and a presence at events organized by the group. I quickly discovered that minority religions have far less resources!

c. Individual Integrity in the Plural Process

But we contributed as we were able to a common vision of service. One with computer skills created a website, another encouraged various traditions of meditation, and so on. We worked with our strengths. Our various religious traditions were only one aspect of our communion, as by trust, friendship, care for each other and a common vision, we each contributed what we could. We had become a self-managing community of practice, in service to the whole university, not just to our own. The weekly meal together became the time when we connected and shared with each other.

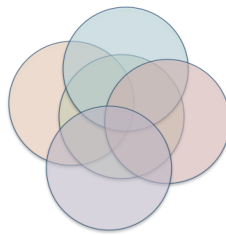


Fig. 2 An Interfaith Team

d. An Example

An example of this teamwork occurred when the Hindu chaplain, Dr Carl Belle, commented at lunch that a Government Minister had made insinuations in the local press about a possible terrorist cell in the local mosque. Carl had been in the Australian Diplomatic Service, so he had a nose for political maneuvering! He was also an excellent journalist and had been editor of the Australian magazine, *Hinduism Today*.

Talking with Muslim students we knew attended the mosque, and through the networks of our Muslim chaplain, we suspected, whatever the facts behind this front-page news, a political game was being played. We decided we needed to assure the Muslim students of our support and that of the university to counter this scaremongering. We decided Carl should write a communiqué on our behalf, and I as

spokesperson for the Chaplaincy, would seek permission from the President of the Muslim Student Association to read it, on behalf of us all, at the conclusion of Friday Prayer, flanked by my Muslim colleague. In addition, I would visit the Imam and his Council at the mosque, to be arranged by students of the Muslim Students Association, and I would invite leaders of Christian churches in the vicinity to accompany me.

This act of goodwill was extremely heartening to the Muslim community at Flinders and the mosque - a trust and goodwill that extends to this day.

f. Expanding Faith

After a few years I think we barely noticed that we had changed the way we understood chaplaincy, though we still offered pastoral care to individual students and staff. We had moved on from the sectarian solo priest model and had become an inclusive community of colleagues in learning and practice, acting as a team, drawing on our strengths.

We found that the fear that each of us would lose our own religious identities was unfounded. In an interfaith team (Fig.2) we each keep our religious identity (our colour), but extend our understanding of others in relationship *with* them – not at a multifaith distance. Interfaith was an expansion of our worlds, not a reduction!

g. Finding the Metaphor

We began to look for a new metaphor to describe our situation. After much searching, a chance conversation with a past student of Flinders gave us what we were looking for. She described the Religious Centre at the inauguration of the university, before religious divisions began to surface, as *an Oasis!* There it was - a metaphor for openness, a safe, convivial place for spiritual refreshment where stories of life experiences, wisdom and survival in life's 'desert' could be shared!

The metaphor of *Oasis* and the recovery of themes from within the story of the life of St Martin of Tours led us to recognize that what we were experiencing of one another from the beginning was *hospitality*. We had discovered a guiding theme for interfaith chaplaincy. Diverse religions and cultures could still celebrate their identities (*diversity* recognized and honored), but the chaplains had begun to act as hosts and enablers of relationships between and beyond such differences – responding cooperatively to pluralism. Hospitality became the vehicle for inclusion and promotion of well being, overtaking 'pastoral care' as the paradigm for working together. 'Pastoral care' still happened, but within a much broader, inclusive, social context.

3. Hospitality

1. Nouwen

Nouwen's conception of hospitality was found to be a key to unlock the door on a fundamental question: *how are we all going to live together, in spite of all our differences?*

Our newspapers were, and still are, full of *not getting on!*

Nouwen provided a language to describe the journey we had been on with Oasis and opened new insights and developmental challenges for us.

*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.*⁸

2. Interfaith Listening

It is not easy for those of us with strong religious commitment to put the particularity of our own belief system to one side, to create space for *the other* to explore *their own* spiritual journey.

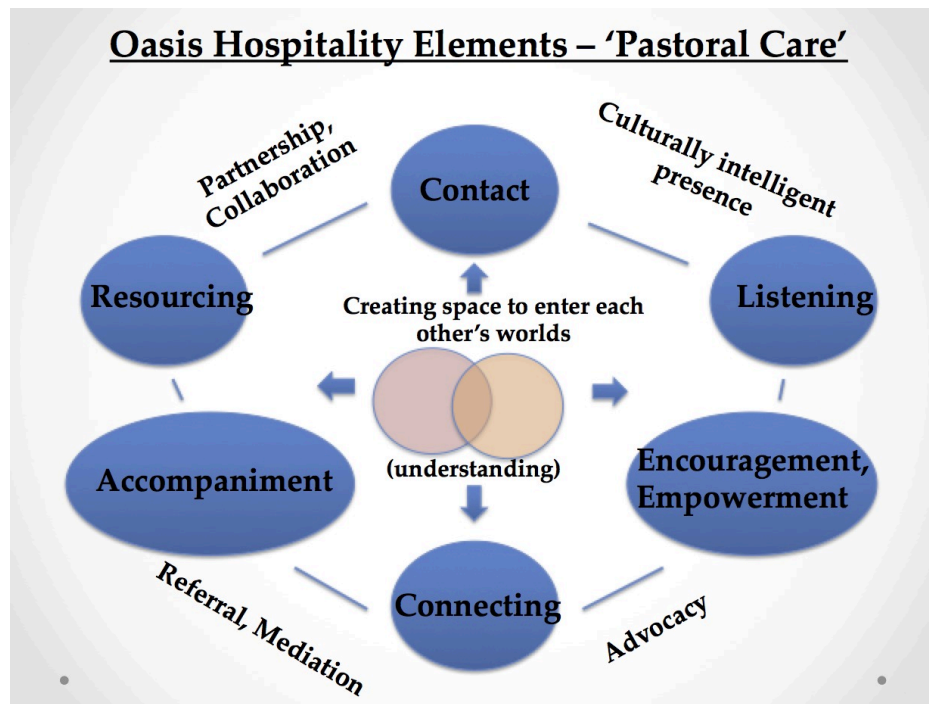
One of the hardest un-learnings for me, so counter-intuitive to my ingrained religious consciousness, has been to resist 'telling'; to listen without judgement; to resist looking for an opportunity to jump in with my own opinion, which I may have been toying with in my mind while ostensibly listening. Managing simultaneous internal multiple conversations, including listening to God, while listening and discerning underlying meanings and motivations of the other, takes some serious learning! This kind of listening is quite exhausting! It takes great discipline to listen to understand the other. What appears to outsiders as 'doing nothing' is actually quite demanding!

It has also been hard to create space for listening; we tend not to think we are *doing* anything unless we are running programs or events and can show how successful we are by the numbers who attend. The problem is that programs and events take up the space we need to listen. Instead, Oasis discovered that it is enough to *host* programs and events run by *others*, focusing instead on creating the cultural environment for such events. In that way, we maintain the free space to listen. And in listening, empowering others 'to sing their own songs...and dance their own dances'!

3. Hospitality Elements – 'Pastoral Care'

To clarify and spell out aspects of hospitable practice, both with each other on the team and with those with whom we engage, the Oasis team came up with its own theoretical model. It started spontaneously at our usual lunch together, with the observation that, at that time, our main function in the university seemed to be as 'listening posts'. And it grew on the whiteboard and from reflection on our experiences, from there.

⁸ **Henri Nouwen.** *Reaching Out: The Three Movements in the Spiritual Life.* (1975 Doubleday. New York) p 68



In the hospitality process, creating space to enter each other’s worlds, we are the ones who often need to make contact and initiate a conversation with unthreatening questions. It is standard practice to personally welcome everyone who comes into Oasis, creating safe space, and perhaps later, when new-comers are more comfortable and familiar with their surroundings, to look for occasions to open ‘listening’ conversations of friendship; and in that spirit, support the person, drawing on the intent of the theoretical model as appropriate, clockwise around the circle. Often these conversations take place around food, or the free tea and coffee we deliberately offer as a symbol of Oasis hospitality. This model also applies to the team itself in the way we show hospitality to each other.

4. Appreciative Enquiry

In this regard, the idea of ‘appreciative enquiry’ has become a useful adjunct to the listening process. The idea comes from the field of management, where it means identifying and building on business strengths, rather than focusing on identifying and fixing weaknesses. It reflects the movement from a focus on sickness to a focus on wellness, as previously alluded to in this paper.

For Oasis it means inquiring about what we have in common as fellow human beings, rather than focusing on differences. It shifts us from the ‘fix-it’ mentality. It’s ‘can you help me understand ...?’, rather than, ‘what do you believe...?’, as though looking for an argument. It’s ‘how are you...?’ rather than ‘what’s your problem?’ as though I’m OK and you’re not! It’s not about me, but about finding out and appreciating (valuing) ‘you’! It sits nicely with the Nouwen understanding of creating space for the other that underpins the support provided by Oasis.

4. Invitation into the Public Sphere ⁹

1. Restructuring

Following the Global Financial Crisis, many religious organisations restructured to cope with lower budgets. In the second half of 2012, Oasis lost four of its chaplains, and looked like collapsing. At the same time, University funding was boosted with the re-introduction of student service fees. The University stepped in to embrace Oasis within its administrative structures and funded two full-time positions: an Oasis Coordinating Chaplain to coordinate the volunteers and an Oasis Administrative Officer to manage the centre. And it provided a modest running budget to allow Oasis to offer hospitality, for team building, professional skills development and re-imburement of out-of-pocket expenses by volunteers.

Given the scope of service to the whole university in a way it had never before encountered, what changes would now need to be undertaken by Oasis, if any, now it was part of 'the system'? As the University's new Oasis Coordinating Chaplain, exploring this was my primary task from 2013 to 2015.

To provide inclusive religious and spiritual support to the whole university campus, the chaplains had already responded positively by creating a multifaith chaplaincy. But what about the majority of students and staff *without* religious affiliation? How might Oasis also play a part in their spiritual support?

a. Inclusion

Many students and staff have negative perceptions of religion or are not affiliated with any religious community; though international students tend to bring their faith and culture with them.

One of our responses was to begin to use 'inclusive language' - to express the purpose of Oasis in simpler and more universal language, avoiding religious terminology - to signal that Oasis is for everyone, religiously committed or not.

This meant a much broader understanding of the place of spirituality and religion:

- everyone has a spiritual life and we affirm its value
- religion is a construct that is meant to foster healthy human spirituality

⁹ A note on the term 'secular'

In this paper, the terms 'secular' and 'public domain/public sphere' are used interchangeably.

The understanding of 'secular' employed by Oasis is that the secular is not opposed to religion, but refers to an even-handedness in governance: that *no preference* be given in the public sphere on the basis of religion. In an inclusive society, 'secular' cannot be equated with 'godless', for that would exclude a major portion of society.

How else to understand 'secular' when the founders of South Australia drew a firm line between church and state, at the time when Adelaide boasted twenty five churches in the square mile, and the colonial 'dissenters' were also seeking a new religious life away from religious repression in their countries of origin?

See **Douglas Pike** *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829 -1857*. Melbourne University Press. Second Edition 1967

Oasis delegates sectarian religious *practice* to appropriate local religious communities, and university religious groups are directed to the university's provision for clubs and societies. Ideally, all activity within Oasis is inclusive and non-ideological.

See Geoff Boyce, *Freedom to Believe – Celebrating a Human Right*, World Religion Day, 2007
<https://geoffboyceblog.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/worldreligionday21january2007.pdf>

- faith, belief and religious practice are inextricably bound with culture

b. The Whole Person

By relativizing religion we moved toward a ministry of support for the whole person in their cultural life, not just a person's religion, but inclusive of religion. It was what we had been moving toward in 2008 with the development and public launch of a *Charter for Faith Friendly Communities*.¹⁰

It also led us toward win-win collaborations with other parts of the university, particularly International Student Support.

c. Team

Secondly, we started using the terminology of 'team', rather than 'chaplains'. The Oasis Team began to be comprised of volunteers with or without religious affiliation, but who were committed to the Oasis vision and practice. Guidelines from 'Volunteering Australia' became important for establishing frameworks for management of the team and for defining the rights and responsibilities of the volunteers with respect of their university host.

In other words, now in the public sphere, as Oasis Coordinating Chaplain, I began to look to the public sphere to articulate what we were about, without fundamentally changing our vision and purpose, looking through the rear-view mirror to our collective inspirational religious mentors, and for me, the mirror of the life of St Martin, in particular.

2. Creating a Hospitable Physical Space

a. Getting educated

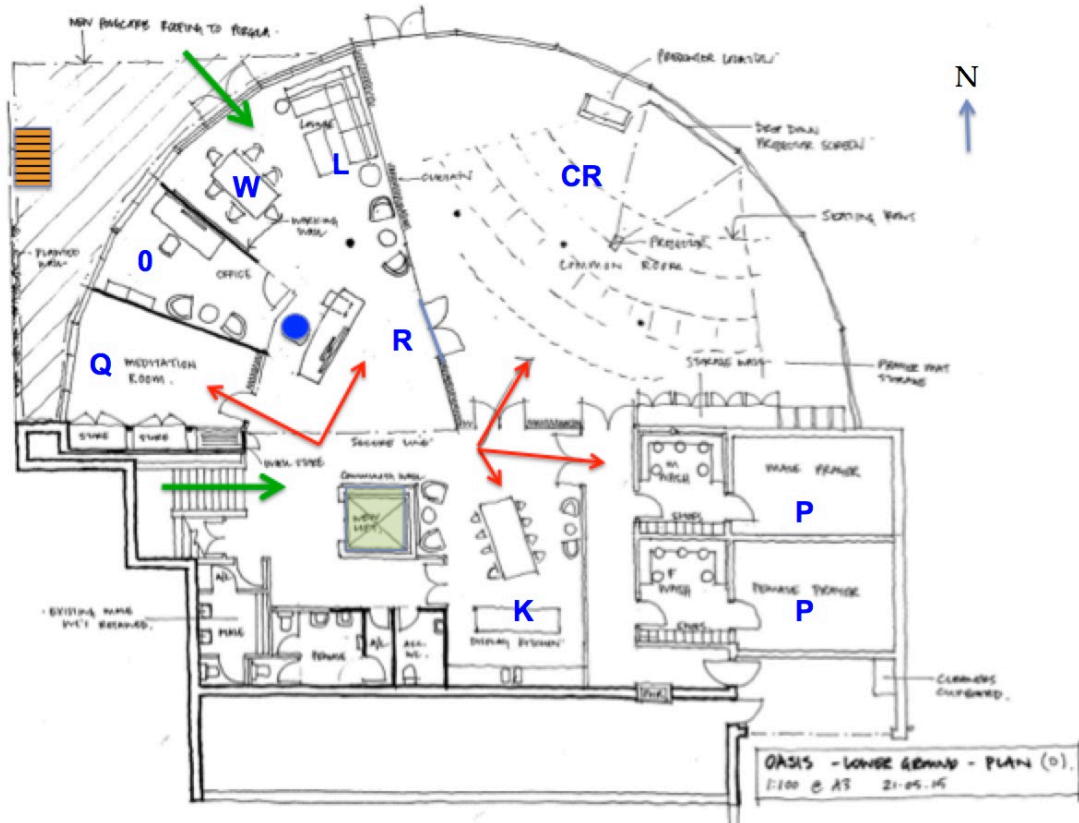
In 2014 my program of transitioning from the religious to the public sphere was interrupted by the announcement that the university was going to demolish the Union Building where we were housed, to make way for a new student Hub, in which we would be given space. Rather than an interruption, I welcomed this diversion, broadening my path, exploring hospitality in public spaces. I had been looking at all aspects of multifaith since the first global conference of chaplains took place at the University of British Columbia in 2000, affording conversations with a wide range of chaplains from across the world, and of different faiths. I visited a dual church-synagogue-public space in Ann Arbor, in Michigan, where they had architecturally found ways for the different faiths to maintain their religious integrity in a common space. My neighbours, Kevin Taylor and Kate Cullity, principals of the internationally awarded landscape architects *TCL*, revelled in discussing these issues of spirituality in public spaces with me. I had also been long inspired by social entrepreneurship, documenting a visit to Andrew Mawson's Bromley-By-Bow community centre in the east end of London in 1995. I was impressed by the way he had created multiple spaces to form a centre for the local, socially disadvantaged community. I had become good friends with Jussi Murtovuori, head of chaplaincy in Finland, who, while Chaplain to the Arts in Helsinki had helped create a remarkable wooden egg-like structure for meditation in one corner of the Helsinki town square. It has become the fifth most

¹⁰ The impetus for this came out of the insight of David Miller in his 'Faith at Work' project at Yale – that faith at work contributes to the financial bottom line. This insight was important to the Ford Motor Corporation in the USA, who encouraged the formation of the Ford Interfaith Network, promoted for their employees. See www.geoffboyce.com/faithfriendly

visited tourist destination in Finland. So I was excited about the opportunity of starting with a relatively blank canvas to create a purpose-built centre for hospitality, open to everyone, at Flinders!

b. A purpose-built centre of hospitality

In late 2014 it was decided not to place Oasis in the new Hub. The old Staff Club, which had become a Function Centre, was offered. This would put us away from the hub-hub of the Hub! But we thought it might be an advantage to be away from the bands and the bustle. By May 2015 the architects' concept, responding to our vision and values, had taken shape.



The main entrance would be down stairs (or via adjacent lift), a secondary back entrance from an outside barbecue area (green arrows).

Guests would be greeted in the reception area(R), open to the lounge(L) and working area(W), (with a wall of whiteboard), and also open in the other direction to a large kitchen/eating space(K), modeling a home kitchen.

Easy access to the Quiet Space for meditation(Q) and a staff office(O), linked visibly to the Administrator's reception desk. The Administrator (blue dot) can observe every area, and takes prime leadership in welcoming all who pass through, particularly Muslim students attending the prayer rooms(P), to the right. For Friday Prayer, Muslim students have easy access to the multi-function Common Room(CR) after washing in the Prayer Rooms.

3. A long view of achievements

As the university considered taking Oasis into its institutional structures, I suspect the decisive factors had to do with keeping the religious peace on campus and creating a positive marketing point for attracting more fee-paying international students. But I

think the University got more than it expected: we had done a lot of work in the quest to re-invent an effective chaplaincy for the public domain.

a. Pre-empting Radicalisation

In disempowering the dominant Christian evangelical hegemony in the Religious Centre, strategies that pre-empt radicalization and fundamentalisms that lead to open conflict were conceived and enacted.

b. Finding the Universal Key

The ancient practice of hospitality, embedded in many cultures, and informed by Nouwen's work on hospitality as creating space, was adopted.

c. 'Secular' making space for everyone

The traditional understanding of the meaning of secular, not as 'godless' but as egalitarian, inclusive of religious spiritualities, favouring none over others, was recovered.

d. Finding a Common Language

An inclusive, faith friendly environment for all, regardless of faith and belief particularity, was created and religious concepts translated into inclusive (commonly held) language.

e. People not Programs

In providing spiritual support for all, hospitality, and its outworking, was found to be efficacious, releasing the Oasis team to value people in their diversity, rather than focusing on running programs.

f. Integrity and wholeness

Just as the individual integrity of the members of the Oasis team was respected, so also the students; by removing restrictive boundaries in a common space, whether undergraduate or post-graduate, science or humanities, faith or 'no-faith', cooking or conversing, singing or drawing, meditating or reading, relaxing or studying, Oasis modelled connectivity and wholeness.

g. Fostering culturally competent global citizens

Inclusion in all respects brought people of difference together to learn how to talk with each other and to respect and enjoy each other, in difference and similarity, dissolving prejudicial boundaries to find surprising common ground, inspiring new horizons for collaboration for peace, with a global purview.

h. informal not formal

Oasis drew a line between the formal learning of the Academy and the no-less-important informal learning that comes from social contact and appreciative listening.

i. the 'hidden' curriculum

We found ourselves uncovering the informal 'hidden curriculum' (complementing the formal academic curriculum), providing safe spaces for reflection and the making of neural connections, complementing the learning process in a safe environment.

j. wellness not sickness

We realized that Oasis is about wellness, rather than sickness. Oasis should be seen as complementing other support services but having a different rationale.

k. generosity and the sharing economy

The custom of students sharing food with each other prompted Oasis to encourage sharing as a means of mutual support – surplus fruit and vegetables and unwanted items placed on a ‘Give and Take’ table in the kitchen (sharing) area. Provision of a modest budget by the University to support hospitality and the life of the Oasis Team underwrote Oasis’ commitment to inclusion and well being,

5. Organisation and Management

1. Looking for a model that nurtures ‘soul’

a. Transition

In the transition from solo chaplain responsible to an employing religious body to a coordinating chaplain working with a volunteer team as a member of university staff, attention now needed to be paid to organisation and management, congruent with the values and practices of chaplaincy and policies of the university.

Two university-appointed, full-time, paid staff, had been inserted into what had previously been a flat, ‘leaderless’, self-managing structure.

As the new Oasis Coordinating Chaplain, I began to look for ways to retain the collegiality we had previously enjoyed. I sought various mentors to support me during this quest to understand relevant aspects of corporate organization and management - not requirements of my previous employment as a solo chaplain.

b. First Best Fit

The university agreed that a ‘command and control’ approach would be inappropriate for Oasis. I was keen to avoid becoming a gatekeeper; to avoid members of the team feeling they always had to seek my permission. I wanted to empower them to accept responsibility for their commitment, to get on with their own contributions to bringing our common vision to fruition – as we had done in the past. So I began to introduce Lean-Agile management practices.¹¹

My son, working in software development in London, and his ‘webby’ friends, had introduced me to Lean-Agile management, common among software development companies. It is a way of organizing that avoids hierarchy and authoritarianism and encourages autonomous creativity and responsibility, characteristics I wanted to foster in the Oasis volunteer team and in keeping with the way Oasis had evolved.

So if the ‘Owner’ is the University, what is the product the owner expects of the enterprise? And as the ‘Scrum Manager’, how do I manage the scrum of volunteers to pull together to deliver an exceptional result, working through short iterations toward the overall goal?

One of the biggest challenges was communication. Whereas individuals in computer-based Agile communities can be continually on-line with each other, most of our team,

¹¹ <https://travellingchaplain.com/2015/02/08/agile-lean-and-the-scrum/>
<https://travellingchaplain.com/2015/02/09/comments-on-agile-scrum-and-lean/>
Others are also attempting to transfer Agile management to their spheres:
<http://indaily.com.au/news/business/2015/06/23/the-vanguard-lawyer-adopts-agile-approach/>

being primarily older, face-to-face, people-persons, were restricted to the occasional email and weekly meeting. This made 'scrumming' difficult.

So when I recently came across an emerging organic management model that seemed to better espouse our values and history, I was intrigued! Could it be possible to organize for wellness and leave hierarchy and coercion behind?

2. Self-managing Organisations: Frederic Laloux

a. Rationale

Frederic Laloux researched organizational models across the world and, in 2014, proposed a paradigmatic framework for understanding their characteristics.¹² The preface of his book 'Reinventing Organisations' gives a taste of the conclusions of his research:

The way we manage organizations seems increasingly out of date. Survey after survey shows that a majority of employees feel disengaged from their companies. The epidemic of organizational disillusionment goes way beyond Corporate America – teachers, doctors, and nurses are leaving their professions in record numbers because the way we run schools and hospitals kills their vocation. Government agencies and nonprofits have a noble purpose, but working for these entities often feels soulless and lifeless just the same. All these organizations suffer from power games played at the top and powerlessness at lower levels, from infighting and bureaucracy, from endless meetings and a seemingly never-ending succession of change and cost-cutting programs.

Deep inside, we long for soulful workplaces, for authenticity, community, passion, and purpose. The solution, according to many progressive scholars, lies with more enlightened management. But reality shows that this is not enough. In most cases, the system beats the individual - when managers or leaders go through an inner transformation, they end up leaving their organizations because they no longer feel like putting up with a place that is inhospitable to the deeper longings of their soul.

We need more enlightened leaders, but we need something more: enlightened organizational structures and practices. But is there even such a thing? Can we conceive of enlightened organizations?

In this groundbreaking book, the author shows that every time humanity has shifted to a new stage of consciousness in the past, it has invented a whole new way to structure and run organizations, each time bringing extraordinary breakthroughs in collaboration. A new shift in consciousness is currently underway. Could it help us invent a radically more soulful and purposeful way to run our businesses and nonprofits, schools and hospitals?

The pioneering organizations researched for this book have already "cracked the code." Their founders have fundamentally questioned every aspect of management and have come up with entirely new organizational methods. Even though they operate in very different industries and geographies and did not know of each other's experiments, the structures and practices they have developed are remarkably similar. It's hard not to get excited about this finding: a new organizational model seems to be emerging, and it promises a soulful revolution in the workplace...¹³

¹² **Frederic Laloux**, *Reinventing Organizations*. 1st edition. Nelson Parker (2014)

¹³ From the Preface, **Frederic Laloux**, *Reinventing Organisations – an illustrated invitation to join the conversation on next-stage organizations*. Nelson Parker 2016

A brief introduction to Laloux's paradigmatic organizational theory can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0Jc5aAJu9g>

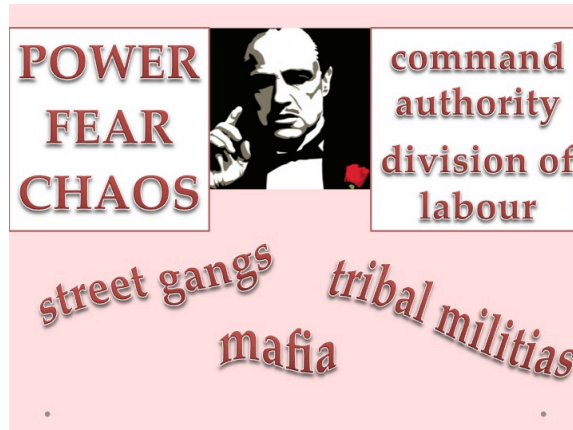
A brief introduction to his 'Teal' model is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxGGkrtKZaA>

Further explanation is documented at:

<https://agilewarrior.wordpress.com/2015/04/07/reinventing-organizations-frederic-laloux/>

b. The paradigms.

(1). The Wolf



At the base of the organizational paradigms he identifies, Laloux places command-authoritarianism as the most primitive.

This paradigm is driven by fear – people falling in behind a strong champion-leader who is seen to be able to exert power and protection on their behalf.

Additional examples also typifying this organizational paradigm might include Communist regimes led by dictators like Mao Tse-tung and Stalin, and Nationalist regimes led by figures like Hitler.

(2) The Army



Out of the chaos of systems characterized by individuals exercising organizational power by fear ('The Wolf'), Laloux identifies the emergence of a second paradigm, systems typified by army-like structures. This organizational structure might be represented by the Roman period, when stability, law and the infrastructure of roads and viaducts were achieved, and control maintained by a large, well-disciplined army.

My initial take on Laloux' schema and its connection with spirituality is at:
<https://travellingchaplain.com/2016/08/11/valuing-spirituality-in-organisations/>
and its connection with Social Work best practice at:
<https://travellingchaplain.com/2016/10/09/oasis-as-a-self-managing-community/>

(3) The Machine



The image of the factory represents the third paradigm, which emerged during the Industrial Age. Even though we see manufacturing on the wane in advanced industrial countries, the consciousness of this paradigm is probably still the most influential today, Many institutions and corporates continue to be influenced by the efficiencies typified by Henry Ford’s production line. Recent research shows that 70% of workers are disengaged from their work¹⁴ and feel like ‘cogs in a machine’, their personal aspirations subjugated to corporate goals for profit by accountability structures enforcing imposed objectives.

You may have noticed that hierarchical traditional churches with bishops and archbishops, and many of today’s public universities with executive elites, fall into the Army/Christendom and Industrial epochs.

(4) Open Source



¹⁴ For example, according to Gallup Daily tracking, 32% of employees in the U.S. are engaged -- meaning they are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace. Worldwide, only 13% of employees working for an organization are engaged.

<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/188033/worldwide-employee-engagement-crisis.aspx>
viewed December 13, 2016

The paradigm that attracted my attention in developing an organisational model for the new Oasis was the Lean/Agile paradigm of the Internet, Communication and Service Age.

My son, working as 'Head of Tech' for a large UK art-print company, introduced me to these management ideas. He had told me he would never work in a hierarchical or controlling workplace; that creativity cannot survive in such a culture.

Over the last 20-30 years this new Gen X and Y way of thinking has permeated these younger generations who live on the web and the smart phone.

This was the closest organizational model I could find to manage the new Oasis, even though it conflicted with the existing 'industrial' model of the university. However, Laloux's work, though preliminary, promises an approach that seems to me to be even more aligned to the spiritual values of Oasis.

(5) Organic Wholeness ('Teal')



This model values the aspirations of Oasis being aligned itself to the goals of religion for wholeness. Wholeness is undermined by systems that split the human person, as if religion is one bit, and health another, or that Science and the Arts are 'two cultures'; it challenges the way Faculties and Schools of the university see themselves as separate from one another. It deals with the down-side of 'bosses' by authorizing self-managing teams; it is organic, motivated by broader and higher purposes and processes that allow the organization to evolve, rather than be 'managed' from above. This paradigm takes into account the way Oasis has evolved over the last twenty years.

Those of us conditioned to the Hierarchical-Industrial model find it difficult to imagine how any enterprise of significant size and complexity could be effective without 'managers'. Yet Laloux has found some!

I was particularly impressed to hear about Buurtzorg Nederland¹⁵, founded in 2006 by Jos de Blok and a small team of professional nurses who were dissatisfied with the delivery of health care by traditional home-care organizations in the Netherlands. Together they decided to create a new model of patient-centered care focused on facilitating and maintaining independence and autonomy for the individual for as long as possible. In practice this meant starting visits with a cup of tea, changing a light bulb or whatever needed to be done, as well as attending to traditional health-care needs.

What started as a team of 4 nurses in 2006, has grown to nearly 8,000 nurses in 2014, with teams in the Netherlands, Sweden, Japan and now, the United States. A 2010 Ernst &

¹⁵ <http://www.buurtzorgusa.org/about-us/> retrieved January 6, 2017.

Young report documented savings of roughly 40 percent to the Dutch health care system, and a 2012 KPMG case study found:

“Essentially, the program empowers nurses ... to deliver all the care that patients need. And while this has meant higher costs per hour, the result has been fewer hours in total. Indeed, by changing the model of care, Buurtzorg has accomplished a 50 percent reduction in hours of care, improved quality of care and raised work satisfaction for their employees.”

c. Laloux and Maslow



A diagrammatic representation of Laloux's Paradigmatic Organisational Theory



Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs

Put side-by-side, Laloux's paradigms (left) form a kind of hierarchy, reminding me of Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs. Organisational sophistication and complexity increase, rising from the base to the apex; in Laloux, from the brute force of dictatorial power to the higher purposes of self-managing teams, paralleling Maslow, from physical and safety needs to needs for self-actualisation and transcendence.

For Maslow, higher needs are subservient to more basic ones. For Laloux, the lower, more dominant paradigm has the power to assimilate a higher emerging paradigm back into its well-established organizational system. For example, the creative freedom required for the imagination to reign freely among software developers and their commitment to an ethic of transparency and global free flow of knowledge, inherent in the Green paradigm, may be drawn back into the Orange sector. So the object of many 'start-ups' today may not be so much to 'delight customers' but for profit.

d. Laloux, Oasis and the University

Oasis has had the freedom to intuitively move toward the ‘Green’ – ‘agile/lean’ structure that emerged within the world of the Internet, while situated in an institution enculturated within the orange and yellow paradigms. The university structure has given Oasis the stability and innovative environment to explore how religious and spiritual support may be re-imagined.

The emerging ‘teal’ framework provides Oasis with a means of organization that is more likely to avoid negative organizational consequences to the human person and community, namely the violence of exclusion, coercion and bullying, which run rife in the red, yellow and orange paradigms. ‘Teal’ may be more conducive to those aspiring to personal, inter-personal and global peace and goodwill. Laloux shows that this aspiration should not be dismissed as utopian. He has discovered significant and diverse organisations that have been achieving it in the workplace.

One insight that emerges from Laloux is that regulation and education are insufficient correctives of themselves to institutional damage; radical change needs to happen *at the organizational level* if transformation for human flourishing is to be effected. Over-regulation, compulsory short courses and threats based on what might have been signed up for in enterprise agreements don’t appear to assist such transformations. They are coercive tools created from within the yellow-orange mindset, unlikely to encourage worker engagement, and probably more likely to foster cynical, resigned resentment.

Laloux’s insights contribute to those of us on the quest for the promotion of human flourishing. He exposes the inherent flaws of various systems of organization and introduces us to successful ones that have had the imagination and courage to go beyond the reigning paradigms. This provides an important corrective to the current dysfunctional milieu in which individuals are asked to do more with less, and society seems to be structured around blaming the individual for faltering under the load; while CEO’s at the top expect and get massive payouts to move them on from institutional failure and massive human damage.

3. Early Signs

Moving into our purpose-built facility in February 2016, some encouraging trends have been emerging.

a. Cultural Connections

A small group of Chinese students had had a conversation during the January break about what might have helped them better transition to study in Australia. They concluded that if they could have had one-to-one time with a local person or family, it would have helped enormously, both with confronting colloquial language and understanding the nuances of local cultural customs.

The group shared their ideas with the International Student Support team who brought Oasis into the conversation. Together, we encouraged them to form a university club, supported by the Student Association. They called it ‘Cultural Connections’. Oasis was offered as a place where they could meet.

During the year one of the Oasis team worked with them to connect them with Rotary, well known for their support of international students.

About 80 attended the last barbecue evening in Oasis; roughly half were community volunteers.

Lions club is now in the process of getting involved.

Over the year, Cultural Connections has recruited 35 volunteers and 80 students have benefitted from making connections. It's a drop in the ocean, but an outstanding start!

Cultural Connections is hoping to extend its operation in 2017. Oasis will continue to offer a home for mentoring and personal support and its significant network of connections to the central, student-led, facilitating committee.

b. Social Work Placements

About five years ago I had a conversation with a member of Social Work staff. Masters of Social Work students must do placements of 500 hours in community social welfare agencies to graduate. The member of staff was worried about the cultural difficulties of international students on placement.

We kept the conversation open over eighteen months and eventually he came up with the idea of developing a parallel placement option - a group of students placed in Oasis and supervised by a member of the Social Work staff.

In 2016 Social Work was overwhelmed by a big influx of international students. Oasis agreed to take five students each semester for their placements - preferably a mix of different religious and cultural backgrounds.

These students undertook projects suggested by their Social Work supervisor, but also came up with their own for Oasis and the university. Some helped Oasis with a regular morning tea for international women students, and all grew in confidence to meet and greet students coming in to Oasis. Members of the Oasis Team also provided mentoring and support.

The group got involved in helping Health, Counselling and Disability Services with promotions during RUOK Day and Mental Health Week.

Co-situated in Oasis, it was only natural that the Social Work group would also get involved supporting *Cultural Connections* activities.

One highlight for me during 2016 was the coming together of the first and second semester groups during the mid-semester break to become 'Conference Connectors' at a Flinders School of Education International Conference for Well Being and the Prevention of Violence. The organisers had asked Oasis to create a culture of hospitality and inclusion at the heart of the conference. The Social Work students acted as agents of hospitality and inclusion, helping with registrations, translating for international delegates with little command of English, and doing whatever tasks needed to be done. One of the students organized a student photographic exhibition for the conference on the theme, 'Places of Happiness'. This experience was a huge success for all concerned. It represented a landmark attempt to tangibly and openly place spirituality at the heart of an academic conference.

c. The Gardening Collective

In 2016 an enthusiastic permaculture gardener, who had had his own garden business, connected with Oasis. He had a dream to teach permaculture on a large piece of vacant land on the campus. The garden would produce fresh fruit and vegetables to supply the food outlets of the university.

Oasis became a congenial home for his committee meetings and one of the Oasis Team joined the committee to connect and offer support.

His entrepreneurial skills were obvious. Soon he had banded all the gardening and conservation groups on campus together. It inspired the Director of the Art Museum to begin to create a 'well being garden' just outside the Gallery, supporting the School of Biology, wanting to establish a 'teaching garden'. I thought this was a great example of enthusiasm and 'can do', rippling out and crossing boundaries to raise spiritual life around the university – a great example of social entrepreneurship, again, springing up from students with positive ideas.

Permaculture is congruent with the values of Oasis. It is a way of gardening that values wholeness and well being. It is therapeutic and encourages healthy living through nutritious fresh food.

d. Space for Dreams

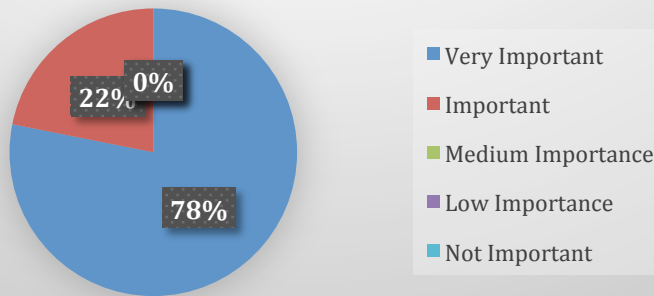
I mention these three examples of student initiative from the last six months to underline another significant aspect of hospitality. It is the creating of space for the nurturing of dreams.

Creating space for imagination, for cultural respect, for creativity, for dialogical learning, for collaborative enjoyment, for inner peace, for helping others, to meet and make friends and relax. These are what students tell us they value in the culture of hospitality and inclusion established and maintained at Oasis.

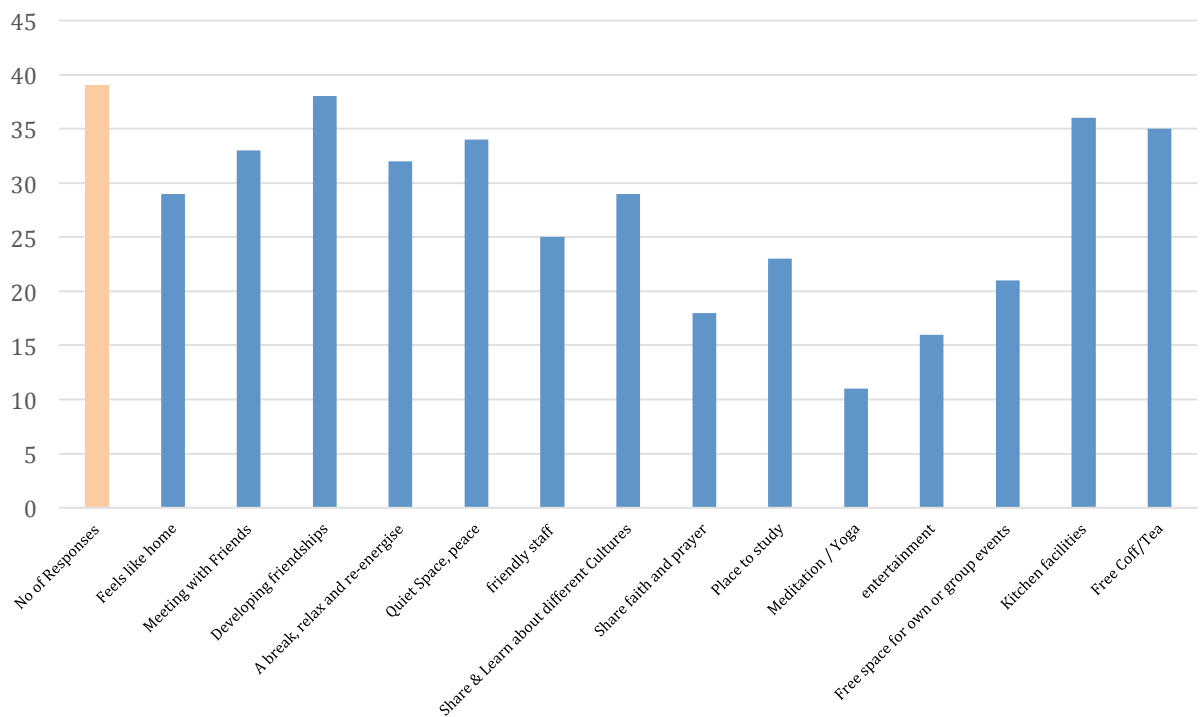
6. Results of a short student survey (November 14 -25, 2016)



On a scale of 1-5, how important is Oasis to you?



Why is Oasis Important to You?



Selected Comments

- *I can't be happier, good place to meet friends and share your faith and studies*
- *It's part of my motivation to come to Uni*
- *We all can participate*
- *Oasis is the place - fuel up and go back to your study*
- *Much clean toilets*
- *Best location on campus building which has great look and backyard, which is relaxing and energising me*
- *A place of peace and learning*
- *A place which helps to open my mind*
- *If it were not for oasis Uni life would be a bit boring*
- *Oasis can be my second study space, kitchen or even home because I come here almost every day*
- *Every Friday sale of Indonesian Food*
- *A great place to relax ourselves from pressure of school studies*
- *My children also love to stay here- like at home*
- *A safe place for confidential chats is important to sharing cross-cultural into action. Very important talking about the system works*

- *Oasis is really a cosy place that makes me feel comfortable. besides meeting friends, break, relax, sometimes*
- *Oasis is a really good place for me to be myself. The staff here are so friendly & nice that I feel they are my relatives.*
- *The staff are really friendly. When I sad or face difficulties, they always ready to help me. Without them I might cannot survive here*
- *I have started using the Centre this semester. I come to prayer when I have classes or doing assignments in the weekends*
- *Oasis is a symbol of peace and friendship*

In an educational institution, set in a pluralistic society, these results and comments reflect the new face of 'meeting the religious and spiritual needs' of its students: an ever-evolving Oasis, overtaking what was previously thought of as pastoral care to religious groups, maintaining the spirit of chaplaincy's founder, while responding to the new challenges of religious and cultural pluralism.

7. Afterthoughts

1. Situation – the University

Typically, Universities are organized around three themes - research, teaching and community service. University 'support services' provide support for these three inter-related endeavors.

2. Motivation – the World

The motivation behind the evolution of Oasis could well have been articulated in the question that motivated me from the beginning of my chaplaincy at Flinders: *how are we all going to live together, in spite of all our differences?* – a much broader question than, *how are we to go about providing religious and spiritual support for students?* - but one that embraces the other.

From 1997 to 2007, by invitation and hospitality, religious chaplains, responsible for religious and spiritual support to the university, transitioned from separate sectarian entities, to multifaith (diversity), to interfaith (pluralism). This also represented a move from solo ministry to a community of cooperative, supportive practice.

3. The Institutional Difficulty of Wholeness and the Amorphous

While the university placed Oasis within Student Services, it has evolved beyond these and other boundaries. It is ahead of its time, inherently crossing borders in its quest to model and promote wholeness – a prime aspect of spiritual health.

a. Research?

The progressive, pioneering commitment to experimentation and innovation, attending to existing scholarship and open dialogue, implies that Oasis is a community of cross-disciplinary research through praxis. How Oasis may more formally connect with the research community at Flinders is yet to be explored.

b. Teaching?

As for teaching, Oasis drew a line in the sand between the 'formal' teaching of the Academy and 'informal' learning in the warp and woof of social contact – though Oasis has responded from time to time to invitations to provide seminars on various topics within the Academy. A significant number of the Oasis Team have been teachers, who understand the importance of motivational transformation in a person's life, unleashing energy for formal learning.

c. Community Engagement?

Community engagement has always been implicit because of the way chaplaincy has been organised in universities from the beginning - chaplains appointed by religious communities are also contributors to those appointing communities. Oasis relies on its networks in the wider community to maintain its volunteer team.

The cutting edge nature of the Oasis project, while challenging to many religious communities, has always been accepted by them as a valid pursuit, even if controversial, because of the role of universities in innovation and cultural transformation. The situation of Oasis in a university has enabled it to have a global purview and to speak confidently into the world, particularly engaging with public agencies grappling with new contexts requiring religious and cultural inclusion.

4. Toward a vital future

The journey of Oasis might be described as moving away from the in-house concerns of religious maintenance, the ‘church away from the church’, to the formation of culturally competent global citizens (‘culture’ also embracing spirituality and belief). By offering relational hospitable space, Oasis interferes with fundamentalisms by fostering radical ‘shalom’ – right relationships and wholeness, for the individual, society and the world.

The key to the paradigm shift Oasis represents has been the adoption of Nouwen’s concept of hospitality as its central concern, and secondly, the creation of an organizational structure that provides freedom for responsible self-management, evolutionary purpose and wholeness.

8. Recommendations

LESS

- Solo
- Mono-
- Multi-
- Sickness
- Counseling
- Religious Privilege
- Defensive Silos
- Directive
- Private – Closed
- Job status
- Bureaucratic
- Competition
- Profit Motivated

MORE

- Community
- Multi-
- Inter- (connected)
- Wellness
- Hospitality
- Secular Inclusion
- Wholeness
- Responsible Self-managing
- Public – Transparent
- Wider Purpose
- Creative-Reflexive
- Compassion
- Generosity

9. Appendix – From the website: ‘What is Oasis?’ (www.flinders.edu.au/oasis)

Welcome to Oasis

A faith friendly home away from home

Oasis offers hospitality, promotes well-being and fosters inclusive spirituality - inspiring a culture of care at Flinders University and in the wider community.

Oasis does this by providing a safe, inclusive drop-in centre, facilitated by a team of volunteers who enable interpersonal, intercultural and interfaith respect and understanding.

In this friendly, informal environment, students can meet, make connections, find friendship and support and create initiatives that advance the Oasis ethos.

Oasis also supports initiatives by staff, hosting inter-disciplinary, inter-cultural, and inter-religious endeavour in keeping with the Oasis ethos.

Oasis offers its experiences of innovation and transformation to the wider local, national and international community.

