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THE NATURE AND WORTH OF CHAPLAINCY SERVICES IN QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS

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CHAPLAINCY: A BRIEF HISTORY

Chaplaincy in state schools in Australia is a relatively new and important phenomenon, increasing "at an extraordinary rate" (Hill 2005, p. 4). The first state school chaplains were appointed to three Victorian schools in 1954. In 1982, the first three chaplains were appointed to state schools in Western Australia. Chaplains first were appointed to South Australian state schools in 1987, Australian Capital Territory in 1992, and Tasmania in 1998. The first paid chaplaincy appointment in Queensland was not made until 1987. In Queensland, as in three other Australian states – Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia - the establishment of chaplaincy services in state schools was characterised by rapid development and expansion, particularly in the first 10 years of development. In Victoria, the number of chaplains increased 7-fold in the first 10 years (Bass 1976, p.12); in Western Australia, the number of chaplains by 1993 was 44 (Berlach & Thornber 1993, p.11); in South Australia, at the end of 1977, there were 72 chaplains in state schools.

Currently, Scripture Union Queensland (SU QLD) employs the majority of chaplains in Queensland state schools. The first chaplain appointed by SU QLD was situated at Kelvin Grove State High School in Brisbane in 1990. Within a year, 10 chaplains had been appointed to secondary schools in and around Brisbane. By the end of 1994, there were 27 appointed chaplains working in secondary schools across Queensland, from Cairns in far north Queensland, Stanthorpe near the Queensland-New South Wales border, to Chinchilla in southwest Queensland. By the end of 1997, the number of chaplains was in excess of 50. At mid-2005, SU QLD employed over 170 chaplains, with over 40 in primary schools and more than 120 in secondary schools (Pohlmann & Russell 2005). Since then, expansion has continued and chaplaincy services in

Queensland state schools have become more established as an important support for staff and students in a school setting. A useful, though condensed, historical overview of chaplaincy services in Australia and New Zealand may be found in the *Journal of Christian Education* (2005).

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The basic design for the investigation was the case study (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Marshall & Rossman 1989; Merriam 1988). As the investigation proceeded, concepts and issues arose from the data and led to more refined and specific questions (Marshall & Rossman 1989; Stake 1995). The strengths of this approach derive from its focus on specific situations and people, inductive logic, concern for process, emphasis on words rather than numbers and a concern for meaning (Maxwell 1996, pp.17-20; Bogdan & Biklen 1998, pp. 4-7). The focus of the investigation (the case) was the set of chaplaincy services utilising SU QLD as their employing authority. While it was a single case, it involved a number of sub-units, or separate programs, at various sites and it was therefore a multi-site case study (Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Merriam 1988). The selection of sites was purposeful, to provide greatest potential for revealing factors that shaped the development of chaplaincy services associated with SU QLD. The sample comprised nine schools, seven local chaplaincy committees (LCCs), and 13 chaplains. Negotiations with the chaplains continued over a period of two to three years. Data were collected from chaplains, school principals, LCC chairpersons and committees, students and staff involved in, or connected with, the chaplaincy services. In summary, the investigation was a longitudinal, multi-site, qualitative case study of nine state school chaplaincy services utilising SU QLD as employing authority.

DATA TRANSFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

Data were obtained from interviews, documents and surveys. Interviews were the main source of qualitative data, and consisted of pre-arranged semi-structured formal and spontaneous informal interviews either during school visits or by telephone. Questioning was essentially open-ended in initial interviews but became more focused and direct as the investigation proceeded. Informal interviews were conversational. Most interviews were with individuals. Documents included personal (e.g., letters, notes, emails, faxes, newsletters or reports) and official documentation (e.g., internal documents, external communication from government departments, schools, churches, organisations and groups).

Data analysis for qualitative data used QSR NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data, Indexing Searching and Theorising). NUD*IST served to set up a case study database (Yin 1989) or case record (Merriam 1988). Its document system stored imported (on-line) documents (e.g., the text of an

interview) and external (of-line) documents (e.g., the text of a newspaper article). Its index system stored categories (nodes), and text units (e.g., a single interview question or paragraph) were coded by assigning them to categories. Nodes were organised into a flexible hierarchy or 'tree', facilitating a logical approach to data management. NUD*IST also enabled the qualitative procedures of describing, classifying and connecting (Maxwell 1996; Dey 1993)

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1. Campaigns and advocacy

Campaigns to place chaplains in the schools were all initiated by one or two individuals from the local churches in conjunction with one or two individuals from each school. The success of these campaigns depended, first, on leadership – the ability of one person to influence others (Sanders 1981, p.19) - by significant individuals with a clear empowering vision, and, second, on the cooperation of the various stakeholders at the local level. The vast majority of campaigners – both campaign leaders and advocates – were Christians who attended local churches. It is a common practice for church attendees (inclusive of teachers, students, and other community members) to be involved in their community, particularly in social and social action groups (Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Hughes, & Castle 1997, p.40), and to play a significant role in the community (Kalder, Bellamy, Moore, Powell, Correy, & Castle 1995, p.25). With vision and action, the establishment of chaplaincy services at each of the sites was based on a 'partnership' between the schools, a number of local churches, and the employing authority (SU QLD).

2. Documented and *in situ* aims of chaplaincy services

All stakeholders of chaplaincy services considered aims to be of utmost importance. The Department of Education stipulated that a prerequisite for the establishment of a chaplaincy service was a consensus within the school community about the nature and aims of a chaplaincy service in the school. Consequently, the first task of an interim local chaplaincy committee (LCC) was to formulate a general statement of aims of the proposed chaplaincy service, in response to local needs, and consistent with Department of Education policy and procedures. The Department also required that the employer of chaplains provide a statement of general chaplaincy aims, showing how these aims related to the overall mission, goals and policies of the organisation. The Department of Education's emphasis on documented aims underscored the importance of chaplaincy service aims in relation to the nature and development of chaplaincy services in Queensland state schools. Tables 1 and 2 summarise documented and *in situ* (relating to praxis) chaplaincy service aims expressed by LCC and school personnel, SU QLD staff and Chaplains.

Table 1 Summary of documented chaplaincy service aims

LCCs	Department of Education	SU Queensland
	A chaplaincy service is to focus on	
*provision of support (especially pastoral care)	*provision of support (educational, pastoral, peer)	*provision of support
*RE (optional)	*RE (optional)	*provision of RE
*whole persons (including spiritual dimension)	*spiritual, ethical, and religious matters	* spiritual, ethical, and religious matters (from A Christian perspective)
*all members of the school community	*all students	*all members of the school community
*the whole of school life	*the whole of school life	*the whole of school life
	*partnerships	*partnerships

Table 2 Summary of in situ chaplaincy service aims

LCC Personnel	School	SU QLD staff Administrators	Chaplains
Mission To provide a recognised Christian presence In the school.	*Mission* To provide an important additional support service for students, and for staff and families.	*Mission* To provide a recognised Christian presence in a state school.	*Mission* To serve God and people in a vocational way through a recognised Christian ministry.
Focus *communicating and demonstrating the Christian faith.	*Focus* *high quality service	*Focus* *communicating and demonstrating the Christian faith	*Focus* *modelling, then teaching the Christian faith.
*relationships	*relationships	*partnerships	*pastoral care, then evangelism
*provision of generalised support	*high ethical standards	*relationships	*students, then staff and families
*pastoral care and Christian counselling	*pastoral care	*localisation of services	*people over programs
*all individuals and the organisation	*high visibility	*pastoral care and support for all	

2.1. Chaplaincy as Christian ministry

In practical terms, LCC personnel, school administrators (those who were Christians), SU QLD staff and chaplains, viewed chaplaincy as a Christian ministry (Avis 1999; Legood 1999; Tiller 1988). Chaplains provided a recognised Christian presence (Legood 1999, p.137) in the school, a form of service authorised by the local churches, as well as offering a service to God and people. The concept of chaplaincy as a Christian ministry was not stated, though clearly implied, in LCC and SU QLD documented aims but notably, and understandably, was absent from Department of Education aims. School administrators had high expectations for a chaplaincy service, as indicated by their focus on high quality service, high ethical standards and high visibility. These aims reflected Department of Education and school aims which focused on high quality, professional services that were fair and just, effective, accountable and available to all individuals. On the other hand, SU QLD was concerned for integrity and relevance in all its dealings with people, whether young or old, and irrespective of race, colour, gender, language or social position. Most school principals in the study viewed SU QLD as having a good 'track record' of Christian ministry in Queensland state schools, ensuring high quality ethical standards in chaplaincy services.

2.2. Chaplaincy as support service

School administrators particularly viewed chaplaincy services as an important additional support service in the school, important because of the increasing and complex demands being made on schools and teachers alike (Rogers 1992). This view corresponded to written chaplaincy service aims. It reflected the trend in Queensland state schools to develop and enhance a school's student support structure, by providing a range of support personnel to cater for the many and varied needs (e.g., cognitive, affective, social and spiritual) of all students (a social justice principle). In particular, non-academic support staff might now include guidance officers, community education counsellors, youth workers, social workers, school-based nurses and police officers. As school administrators seek additional support for students and staff, a school chaplaincy service offered by churches in the local community was seen to complement these other services. Chaplains and LCC personnel, like school administrators, considered a chaplaincy service as beneficial in providing an additional support person in the school. The chaplains at the nine sites believed that they were responding to God's call to Christian service to provide a ministry of healing and reconciliation to all in need in both secular and Christian communities (Osborn 1995). The Chaplains were willing to provide support in the school wherever and whenever the need arose. As such, it was regarded more as a calling than a career such as that of a Guidance Officer.

One notable difference between the documented policy and *in situ* aims concerned the nature of support a chaplain provides. Department of Education and SU QLD written chaplaincy service aims specified a focus on spiritual, ethical and religious matters or needs relating to individuals or groups, while, in practice, workplace demands necessitated the chaplain having a much wider focus, both in scope and nature. A chaplaincy service provided support in a holistic way, in relation to both individuals and the whole school. Wholeness (McLaughlin 1996) refers to comprehensiveness (broad and balanced) and integration (coherence or unity) of persons and the school. The Christian view of persons and the world is one of wholeness, inclusive at least of the two referents mentioned. The chaplains provided support for individuals or groups and, as well, the school as an organisation and a community. Provision of support in these areas was important and desirable and needed to be kept in balance (Legood 1999).

2.3. Chaplaincy as relationship building and modelling

The findings show that these chaplains were more people-oriented than school-focused. Their ministry was more directed towards individuals or groups than the school as an organisation, and the support given included both spiritual and secular dimensions. One of the major problems faced in schools, and therefore by chaplains, is the phenomenon of fragmentation plaguing society. As Osborn (1995, p.109) notes, the rampant privatisation and individualism reinforced by the media are two important roots which feed this fragmentation. At a social level, fragmentation tends to divide rather than unite, to weaken rather than strengthen. At the individual level, it tends to destabilise a person's sense of identity and to suppress his or her individuality (Osborn 1995). The chaplaincy services provided a service to redress this tendency towards fragmentation, both in the school as organisation and community, and in the lives of individuals and families.

The chaplaincy services focused on relationships that developed and fostered positive relationships among all members of the school community. Consequently, these chaplains focused much more on people than programs, and more on modelling than teaching the Christian faith. A chaplain's ability and willingness to relate well to individuals representing all groups in the school community is crucial, since it lies at the heart of Christian ministry (Lamdin 1999, p.144). The Christian faith is profoundly *relational*, and Christian sociology should reflect Christian theology (Pippert, 1979, p.76). The chaplains also provided pastoral care and support to individuals and groups in the school community. Pastoral care comprises the two tasks of nurture and guardianship (Avis 1999, p.9), but it should not be confused

with professional pastoral counselling. Pastoral care is the offer of a loving relationship by a Christian caregiver to a person whom he or she seeks to help (Campbell 1985, p.1).

2.4. Chaplaincy as pastoral care

The context of pastoral care in a public school raises two important issues. First, public schools, as agencies of the state, operate according to public or consensus values and norms. Moreover, in a secular society, these public values and norms are, in essence, theologically neutral. The process of secularisation has effectively freed the public sphere of the decisive foundational influence of religious ideas and institution (Guinness 1998). Second, state school communities mirror their local communities and society at large in that they are pluralistic with respect to religion, worldviews and ideologies. These two issues impact heavily on the social dimension of pastoral care in state schools. Importantly, as evidenced by the chaplains at the nine chaplaincy services sites, a Christian chaplain does not try to disguise the fact that his or her acts and words of care are grounded in the Christian faith. Knowing this, people are able to make a choice whether or not to seek help from the chaplain. If they do seek a chaplain's help, then they probably expect to be provided with a religious definition of the situation (Furniss 1994).

3. The role of state school chaplains

Several key issues emerged from the data analysis on the role of state school chaplains. On the whole, the role of chaplains was defined fairly loosely. On the positive side, this allowed for greater flexibility in the nature and scope of the role, in recruitment, the school's and the LCC's deployment of the chaplain, and the occupant's development of the role. Negatively, chaplains were ambiguous about the best ways to carry out their duties. In practice, the status of chaplain depended very much on the occupant's personal qualities, abilities, experience, knowledge and understanding of the LCC's aims and expectations and commitment to them, and successful adaptation to the role in the social context of the school. This means that the status of chaplain was subject to change as chaplains come and go, and though establishment may have occurred, some instability nevertheless remained. At some of the sites there was a surprisingly high turnover of personnel.

As pastoral carers, these chaplains experienced a degree of role conflict. Schools tended to focus more on the social dimension (a social worker), while churches tended to focus more on the spiritual dimension (a missionary). As well, chaplains were supervised by three groups, the school administration, the local chaplaincy committee, and Scripture Union Queensland, the difficulty being

that supervisory roles were not clearly delineated (e.g., no one group is assigned final responsibility for the professional development of chaplains), management roles are somewhat ambiguous (e.g., finance), and the issue of ownership needed greater clarification. The chaplains loved their work, but most did not last long in the job. The work of chaplains was both personally rewarding and extremely demanding, and did not come without stress. On the whole, chaplains tended to work alone, and much was expected of them. Data analysis of the sites revealed that funding was problematic, and most chaplains left for family reasons (e.g., insufficient family income, work-family conflict).

Ambiguity about the role and the high turnover of personnel indicated that the occupation of chaplain in Queensland state schools was poorly institutionalised. That is, expectations about a chaplain's proper role were not shared to any great degree among chaplains, stakeholders and role-partners, and commitment to these expectations was not great. This included the expectation that state school chaplaincy is, or should be, a long-term career. Institutionalisation (Hammond, 1966) may be addressed as four areas: recruitment, training, motivation, and adaptation. First, recruitment at each site appeared to be adequate, and chaplains were perceived to be professional in their approach to their position. Nevertheless, not every recruit was well prepared for the chaplaincy role. Second, training was inadequate at several sites, leading to role ambiguity (Spector 1997) and consequent frustration. Third, motivation tended to commence at a high level and wane over the passing of time. The chaplain, role-partners or stakeholders failed to develop an enduring commitment to the chaplaincy, which became a major impediment to institutionalisation, and may result in chaplains leaving their positions. Fourth, adaptation was a major impediment to institutionalisation at each of the sites. Even when competent, knowledgeable, and motivated to carry out their responsibilities, these chaplains experienced role conflict (Furniss 1994) in the social context of their work. Role conflict was difficult to overcome because of the complex role set that chaplains encountered on a daily basis, inclusive of: SU Queensland staff, LCC members, clergy and local church personnel, other chaplains RE teachers, guidance officers, parents, school ancillary and office staff, teachers, students, principals and other administrators, social worker, youth worker, Department of Education personnel, and community education counsellor.

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There is no doubt that these Christian chaplains fulfilled an important and unique role in the provision of support and care in their schools. In view of the suggestion that the main problems facing young people and families today are problems of

relationships with emotional and spiritual roots (Vimpani 1998), the chaplains provided an important component of a whole-school approach to building a supportive and caring environment. Most chaplains operated according to a *relational* model of ministry. Relationships formed the basis of the chaplain's caring role, and they regarded it important to befriend people and to build meaningful relationships with them. Such a relationship potentially provided a base for the political and prophetic skills of relating across the natural divides in the school and raising issues that no one else could (Lamdin 1999, p.143).

1. Chaplains as connectors

The data indicated that a chaplain's effectiveness as a pastoral carer seemed to depend more on possession of certain natural and supernatural abilities than on abilities and skills acquired through study or training. Persons who succeeded as chaplains in the area of pastoral care possessed an ability to relate well to people of all ages and backgrounds and, importantly, a supernatural ability – the spiritual gift of help (or mercy) (Romans 12:8). In addition to possessing and using these abilities, chaplains likely to be more effective in pastoral care were those who were older and more experienced in life. It appears that a certain maturity of experience is necessary as well as skills. The chaplains did not consider themselves to be experts. For them, pastoral care was a way of *being* rather than a way of *doing* (Campbell 1985, p.73).

The chaplains provided a link between young people and the school. They were able to help students – especially those who felt alienated in some way – to gain a sense of connectedness to the school. School-connectedness is a key protective factor in the lives of young people (Blum & Mann Rinehart 1997). From this study, two main reasons emerged concerning why chaplains were able to fulfil this role. First, students generally regarded the chaplain as being more friendly than other adults in the school setting, and one with whom they could establish a significant relationship based on trust, respect, open acceptance of the other, and genuineness. Second, some students found the chaplain someone with whom they could identify. Like themselves, the chaplain was someone "on the edge", as Moody (1999) posited it, a "resident alien". As non-government employees, chaplains may be considered to be outsiders, but outsiders who are able to create what Cotterell (1996) calls "niches", miniature environments in the school tailored to the needs of particular students. These social niches provide a setting and structure for interaction between the chaplains and students so that these students gained a sense of belonging, affiliation and identification with the school. Chaplains, therefore, play an important non-authoritarian role in behaviour management in some schools.

2. Chaplains as mediators

The Christian Chaplains in these schools, perhaps more than anything else, were mediators rather than 'gladiators'. As well as connecting young people to the school, the chaplains sought to connect individuals to each other and to God. On the first level, the chaplains sought to establish, maintain or restore harmonious relationships between students and their peers, students and teachers, students and parents, between teachers and their peers, teachers and parents, and so on. In order to fulfil the role of mediator, the chaplains endeavoured to be objective and impartial. On the second level, the chaplains sought to connect individuals to God and the Christian community through their ministry of care. Pastoral care has a social and a spiritual dimension and is a distinctively Christian activity. These chaplains offered hope for the future and a meaning for life to the individuals they encountered, especially those who were overwhelmed by cynicism or despair, a loss of personal identity and feelings of insecurity or uncertainty, or feelings of helplessness.

3. Chaplains and community development

State school chaplaincy services in Queensland is a community development activity arising out of community concerns for the well-being and future of young people and families in the community, and for the well-being of the community in general. The community development activity probably provides chaplaincy services with its greatest strength. Local input and local ownership of state school chaplaincy services are considerable and growing. This study found that these voluntary services were able to raise the human spirit (Greenleaf 1977, p.172) as an outworking of community development (Andrews 1996, p.164). However, it was also found that the success or failure of chaplaincy services depended on the extent to which the community (particularly the LCCs and local stakeholders) as a whole embraced the vision for state school chaplaincy services over a period of time.

4. Chaplains and school ecclesial ministry

Chaplaincy services are able to develop and maintain contact with young people, something that churches are finding more difficult to do. This study found that the focus of chaplaincy in Queensland state schools was ministry to individuals, particularly young people, with an emphasis on pastoral care and relationship building. Schools were embracing and owning chaplaincy, as were many local communities touched by the work of chaplains in these schools. From the study, it is clear that schools need chaplains, and school communities and school administrators want chaplains. Parents' and Citizens' Associations provide funds so their schools can have a chaplain. On the whole, schools and local

communities that had chaplaincy services worked extremely diligently to (at least) maintain the current level of service. Some communities were seeking expansion into more primary schools, and this expansion is now occurring in Queensland. The chaplains in this study saw their primary role as caring for people, being fully aware that, in the main, they themselves had enormous community support.

5. Chaplains and social capital

The state school chaplaincy movement in Queensland contributes greatly to the accumulation of social capital (Cox 1995, p.15) in schools and their local communities. Chaplaincy services require the contribution of many people, mainly volunteers, who give freely of their time, energy, and financial resources. The growth of chaplaincy services in Queensland, during a time when volunteering in Queensland is generally declining (Lyons & Fabiansson 1998), demonstrates the worth of, and high regard for, these services, and the significant contribution that they make to the good of Australian society (Fife-Yeomans 2001). As noted by Baum, Modra, Bush, Cox, Cooke, & Potter 1999), the 'willingness of members of a community to volunteer can be seen as an indicator of a cohesive society and possibly of the strength of social capital within a community'. State school chaplaincy also provides a significant opportunity for local churches of many denominations potentially to work together in the community. Chaplaincy provides these churches and the community with a project focus, a reason to work together.

CHAPLAINCY SERVICES: AN ASSURED FUTURE IN STATE SCHOOLS

The future of chaplaincy services in Queensland state schools seems to be assured. As a sector ministry, they have demonstrated their worth to schools and their communities, and their very nature is to serve and help schools and communities to become more supportive and caring. Churches would do well to make these services a priority in their local communities, since they must recognise that, in the future, their ecclesial ministry to young people is more likely to occur in education settings than in church settings. Chaplaincy services, however, are not immune to the effects of time on a complex interdependency among local churches, schools, SU QLD, Department of Education, and other stakeholders. There is the ever-present risk of chaplaincy becoming simply a government-controlled ('bureaucratised') social welfare service and nothing more (cf. Rawson 1990, p. 41). It is in the best interests of schools and communities not to allow this potential threat to eventuate, and to support chaplaincy services as they continue to meet essential needs of students, staff, and community members.

It is beyond doubt that chaplains make a significant positive contribution to schools and their communities. Embedded and embodied in the very nature and aims of chaplaincy services, chaplains provide a unique and valued support service, and provide students with a significant adult role model. Chaplains cater for the spiritual, ethical and personal needs of a wide range of individuals and groups. From the data analysis of the nine chaplaincy services, it is important to note that the independent and voluntary nature of school chaplaincy services needs to be retained. Perhaps there is some validity in stating, however, that Education Queensland (at state level) and schools (at local level) need to continue to provide greater public recognition and validation of the work of chaplains, in line with the public recognition accorded to school-based nurses and police officers. The work of chaplains is highly respected in many local communities, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that local churches and people in the wider community are willing to fund chaplaincy services. Chaplains, it seems, provide a 'public service' that is valued in local communities, not because they are highly paid or necessarily highly qualified, but because of the quality of their work and the community 'good' they are perceived to be doing.

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