

MULTIFAITH SPIRITUALITY - THAT'S HOSPITALITY!

Modbury Hospital, April 3, 2012

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SPIRITUAL CARE IN AN AGE OF PLURALISM

This presentation, first delivered to *Spiritual Care Australia (SA)* in February 2012 and at Flinders University *Friday at the Library* public lecture series in March 2012, extracts some of the broad principles presented Geoff's book, *An Improbable Feast: The surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy (2010)*.

Spiritual care is not simply the province of chaplains or those in the caring professions; it is an essential practice for a harmonious society and harmonious institutions.

Traditionally, and particularly in *honour-shame* societies, spiritual care has been mediated by a common, trans-national understanding of hospitality, the family, clan and village providing the basic social context; however the rise of the *Hospitality Industry* within modern western culture has placed hospitality within a consumerist setting, reducing its spiritual dynamic.

Nouwen's concept of hospitality as "making space" provides an accessible model for a recovery of *traditional hospitality* and a means for practising spiritual care in an age of pluralism.

A copy of the full presentation *Spiritual Care in an Age of Pluralism* may be found at www.geoffboyce.com/my-papers/

An Improbable Feast – the surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy is available as an eBook or as a paperback at <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/geoffboyce>

SOME BIBLICAL RESOURCES

The Abrahamic Model of Hospitality

The phrase “entertaining angels unawares” comes from the Bible, and refers to a particular story about the patriarch Abraham. It is the seminal story of what hospitality should look like and the way it ought to be practised, for Jews, Christians and Muslims. It is the story of the hospitality of Abraham to strangers in the desert, which, as a result, brings blessing. (Genesis 18)

The story is immediately followed by one which is meant to show the consequences of *in*-hospitality – the story of Sodom and Gomorrah – which ends in horror, suffering and death.

The Abrahamic paradigm of “entertaining angels unawares” permeates Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditional practice and forms the basis of much contemporary practice in law and culture: and particularly relevant today, refugee law.

The Dynamic of Hospitality

In the *Exodus* story, central to the history of the Jewish people, Pharaoh in Egypt typifies the *bad host*. He oppresses the people of Israel living in Egypt by making them work harder and harder, doing more with less. They cry out to Jahweh, their God, for freedom. Jahweh promises liberation and a new home. His chosen leader, Moses, leads the people of Israel out of Egypt. Now they are free of their bad host, but find themselves strangers in the desert. Who will be their host now? *Jahweh will be their host* and provide for them. So the experience of the stranger being made guest by a gracious host creates the spiritual bond between the people of Israel and Jahweh. The memory of it lives to this day, and forever.

The 23rd Psalm – “The Lord is My Shepherd” is an example that reflects the spiritual dynamic of hospitality. The psalm finishes:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies (the host offers hospitality)

You anoint my head with oil (a custom to show honour – raising the status of the guest to that of royalty)

My cup overflows (the extravagant generosity of the host)

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life (the experience of hospitality engages the imagination as a continuing experience, a living memory)

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (gratitude for hospitality creates an eternal spiritual bond).

This is not magic! The same surprising spiritual connection that results from the experience of true hospitality, as today’s tourist is taken into the home of a relative stranger in a foreign land, is the same dynamic at work among a whole people and their conception of the sacred.

HOSPITALITY AS “MAKING SPACE”

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

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.

Oasis



Tired travelers in the desert are searching for palm trees in the distance. They are looking for promised rest and refreshment. They have a more distant destination, but their gaze is intent on the hope that lies immediately ahead.

As they come near the oasis, they are anxious for the welcome and acceptance they need for rest, and for cool, clear waters of refreshment for themselves and their caravan. They hope that desert protocol has been maintained. For without it, travel in the desert would be well nigh impossible.

But they are also looking beyond mere survival on their journey. When the camels have been watered and the tent has been pitched there will be celebration with food and music and the swapping of stories under the bright night sky. Strangers become friends. Important questions are discussed. Knowledge of the desert is as vital to survival as the waters of the oasis itself. They will stay a while and then move on. But while their tent is pitched beside the still waters they themselves will receive other weary newcomers and provide the necessary hospitality that ensures the ongoing viability of desert travel.



There is a small band who stay in this place. They are holders of desert wisdom. But they do not hold it to themselves. They have gathered knowledge from the many travelers who have told their stories of desert life over time, whose stories have proven life giving to jourmeyers of all time. This oasis community acts as host for the ongoing sharing of wisdom that ensures survival in the desert. The respect won by these sages is a moderating influence against the ever-present threat of waters being muddied by ignorance or greed, and wisdom distorted by the self-important purveyors of mischievous mis-information.



The travelers pack their camels to continue their journey. They have been safe here. They are grateful for rest and refreshment. But now they must risk new adventures. They mount their camels holding deeply memories of storytelling under a cold starry night. Life long friendships among once strangers have been cemented. The wisdom of the sages has supplemented their desert wisdom, informing their ongoing journey.

They point their camels toward the next destination with confidence and gratitude. The sages offer their blessing and the caravan departs into the glare of the future.

A MULTI-FAITH MINISTRY CHARTER

A multi-faith ministry is informed by the following principles:

1. Principle of Mutual Recognition

A multi-faith ministry recognises the right of all faiths to meet the needs of their respective members in any given community.

2. Principle of Mutual Concern

A multi-faith ministry intends to meet the pastoral concerns of, rather than convert, members of the various faiths.

3. Principle of Mutual Understanding

A multi-faith ministry seeks to understand the values and beliefs of each faith in a given community rather than to pass judgement on them.

4. Principle of Mutual Service

A multi-faith ministry is committed to serving the spiritual and personal needs of each member of each faith tradition in the community.

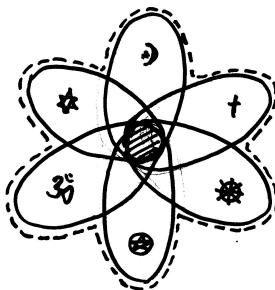
5. Principle of Mutual Advocacy

A multifaith ministry is committed to advocacy for people of other faith traditions in terms of what is known to be in the best spirit of each tradition.

6. Principle of Mutual Deference

A multifaith ministry encourages direct contact with authentic sources of information rather than mediating in any investigation of one faith tradition by a member of another.

A HOSPITALITY MODEL OF MULTIFAITH CHAPLAINCY



A FAITH FRIENDLY CHARTER

An Australian Society of Openness and Respect

The Vision

In this pluralist society, people of all cultural backgrounds, religious faiths, spiritual persuasions and world views are open to each other and respect each other.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Democracy

Australia values democracy, the equality of all individuals before the law, human dignity and the freedom for all citizens to explore ideas and debate openly.

Diversity

Australia values a diversity of cultural backgrounds, religious faiths, spiritual persuasions and world views, including those of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as significant contributions to a rich Australian ethos.

Equality

Australia values fairness and equality in a context where all individuals and groups are free to choose and practice their beliefs, faiths and points of view in a tolerant society.

Education

Australia values those agencies of the community which enable individuals, young and old, to gain an understanding of the diverse faiths, beliefs and points of view in our society and the requirement to act responsibly and ethically.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHARTER

Principle of Mutual Respect

A faith friendly community seeks to respect the diversity and differences of faiths and beliefs of all in the community.

Principle of Mutual Understanding

A faith friendly community seeks to learn about, and so understand, the values and beliefs of world religions and diverse spiritualities.

Principle of Mutual Concern

A faith friendly community provides opportunity for individuals and groups to meet their religious and spiritual needs and to work in harmony for the common good and a sustainable world.

Principle of Mutual Responsibility

A faith friendly community has a responsibility to facilitate a context of goodwill in which individuals and groups are free to differ peacefully, choose an alternate spiritual path or practice a traditional faith with integrity.

ACHIEVING THE VISION

Endorsement

Businesses, companies, educational bodies and other institutions endorse the Faith Friendly Charter and explore appropriate ways of developing policies within their respective contexts that would enable faith-friendly communities to emerge.

Implementation

These same bodies introduce specific vehicles to enable each faith community to celebrate its respective rites and practices within the relevant work, educational or social contexts.

Support Services

The necessary support services needed to implement these policies and practices be the responsibility of the company, educational institution or other relevant community rather than the individual faith communities as such.

A FAITH FRIENDLY BLESSING

May the pulse of life
that animates our planet,
the dream of peace
that sustains her peoples
and the spirit of hope
that inspires her faiths,
create within her children
a desire for friendship.

THE FAITH FRIENDLY CHARTER WORKING GROUP

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October 2010