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An unexpected departure from the NACC has led to a new position for new initiatives.

Anita Houghton joined the association at the beginning of the new year as director of pastoral care and certification. She will take over the certification responsibilities previously handled by Lisa Sarenac, who returned to her previous career of elementary education.

However, Anita will also be the NACC’s connection to parishes and dioceses, and over the course of the coming year, she will take the lead in creating a curriculum for parish volunteers in the basics of pastoral care.

“This is something we’ve been trying to vision with the Board,” said executive director Erica Cohen Moore. “It has to be part of who we are to have an on-ramp to chaplaincy. But in order to really grow, it had to have some staff. That’s why we took a step back to re-assess the position when Lisa resigned.”

Anita comes to the NACC from the Archdiocese of Detroit, where she was the associate director of engagement, working on parish programming and K-12 curriculum development. “I felt it was time for a change,” she said. She had no prior inside knowledge about chaplaincy, but when her father was in hospice, “I saw up close the benefit that spiritual care can have, on a patient and on a spouse.” When she saw the NACC job description, “the idea of supporting and promoting that ministry is in line with the mission I feel God has outlined for me.”

Her first career was in information technology, which will come in handy as she develops digital curricula. “God never wastes anything,” she said with a smile.

She lives with her husband Mike in the Detroit area, where she enjoys walking, biking, and golf. She will work remotely and visit the NACC office in Milwaukee roughly once a quarter.

The opening attracted many very qualified applicants, but Erica said that Anita stood out because of “her history of working in parish and diocesan life. And her computer background is really going to help with curriculum.”

“I bring naivete and a fresh perspective, and I’m open to whatever comes,” Anita said. “I’m excited to learn something new, and I realize there’s a great need for chaplaincy.”
Synod process raises hopes for positive change in the Church

NACC member Bridget Deegan-Krause has been named a delegate from the Archdiocese of Detroit to the next phase of the global Synod on Synodality. She spoke recently to Vision editor David Lewellen about the process so far and hopes for the future.

Q. What was the first phase like for you?

A. There wasn’t a ton of specific direction as to what the first consultation phase was supposed to look like, but in short order, communities around world came together and began a discernment of what the Holy Spirit is calling the church to. The resulting synthesis report released in October is quite remarkable. What’s fascinating is the consistency of themes from people around the world. Francis said he was taking a chance on letting the Holy Spirit have the mic – which is what seems to have happened. Some of the current excitement, I think, comes from just recognizing that the process is actually working.

Q. What’s the next step?

A. The goal for this next Continental Phase is for each continent to discern priorities for moving forward. I will be a delegate in a small group discernment process on Jan. 25, which is one of the last meetings. The team at the USCCB, with the Canadian bishops, has put together a process they describe as the “spiritual conversation model,” which is basically circle work – and completely familiar to me and my chaplain colleagues. The image of the church walking together and its members circling up for conversation is very horizontal, very empowering – and it’s hitting the fan in some corners right now, criticism of Francis consulting with the laity. Yet that’s exactly what the Synod calls us to.

What’s fascinating to me as I pray with the document from Rome it is the choice of title, based on scripture. “Enlarge the space of your tent” comes out of Isaiah (54:2). It’s an interesting choice, because a tent is a structure that can be expanded, flexible or be movable. A compelling challenge for us.

The Synod synthesis document for the continental phase is essential reading for every Catholic chaplain. Each of us needs to know what millions and millions of Catholics around the world have collectively discerned are the issues the Church must attend to.

Q. What are the implications for the NACC or for chaplains?

A. I am really struck how a small but mighty handful of us NACC chaplains have found our way into this process. We tend not to engage with ecclesial or diocesan structures. Lots of us, myself included, fly under the radar. Yet because of our skills as facilitators, in guiding discernment, we are practiced in the art of sacred listening. I think many of us are equipped to help others in this work. Chaplains have been engaged deeply in work of the Church for a long time. We have a strong sense
of the Church’s limitations and where it could be going. The Synod is a place for us to exercise leadership on the Church’s next steps.

Q. What about the special section on women?

A. This is a moment for women in chaplaincy. Sections 60-64, among the largest sections in the report, call the rethinking of women’s participation “critical and urgent,” and talk specifically about the active role of women in governing Church bodies, preaching in the parishes. And it names specifically the potential call for a female diaconate. Healthcare has been hospitable to my ministry and so many of my sisters in chaplaincy. We’ve been creative in carving that out. But how much more would it mean for the Church to create pathways and spaces for chaplains to be governing and preaching and exercising the full sacramental activity of the diaconate?

I’m grateful the Vatican has handed me this beautiful solid document. Now we narrow in more concretely on what matters, real issues discerned by millions around the world that need attention. For example, the problem of being an exclusive church came through loud and clear in this document.

Q. What do you think of the theory that religion in general is being chaplainized, that most of the “nones” won’t find religious interaction until they meet a chaplain at a time when they need it?

A. As chaplains, we are closer to that reality than anyone, because we serve on the margins so often, dealing with folks in crisis situations, who no longer feel connected to institutions. As a hospice chaplain, for example, I did a lot of funerals for people who were no longer connected to a church. Also we have been called into new creative places in our ministries. For example, I’ve mentored a chaplain who does racial justice work in her community. She asked, “Why me? I’m a white woman.” But she has facilitation skills and listening skills and has been recognized for her leadership charism. You could talk to any chaplain and they could tell you a story of creative ministry to the margins.

Q. Couldn’t one goal of this process be to attend to those on the margins?

A. Yes, very much so. And of course, on the margins is just where Jesus is! The whole synod process is intended, as stated in the foundational document, to help bring the periphery to the center. In the first phase, the dioceses were instructed to preference women and other marginalized voices, and they did.

Q. It’s ironic that this is such a big institution, but Jesus wasn’t institutional.

A. He was called rabbi. He wasn’t an anointed official of his church, yet depending which gospel you pay attention to, he was about the wider institution of community and navigating it to new reality. Maybe this will force me to focus inward a bit and love our institution in a little different way.
Q. Any final thoughts?

A. A whole other piece, for us as chaplains, is stepping into peership with our bishops, recognizing and owning our pastoral authority. Bishops are laying track as they go. This process has been very iterative, yet we chaplains are iteratives. We roll with that because we have to be creative and figure it out. Not for our own sake, but for the sake of the folks on the margins.

This process has helped me keep an eye on the bigger picture, the world church. That’s our catholicity. I feel less preoccupied and bothered now with the divisions in the American church when I know I get to be part of a bigger conversation. At first I was like, “oh gosh, another Church thing that will get talked about and nothing will happen.” But something is happening here that could result in some sweeping changes. The diaconate is one of them. We’ve got to be ready. We could quickly see a bunch of our ranks discerning diaconal ordination, but we haven’t been taught it’s safe to even dream about this.

1 The Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) of the 2021-2024 Synod: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission may be found at: www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continenteale-EN.pdf
Proactive outreach by chaplains can raise their institutional profile

By Jennifer Paquette

In her review of Professor Wendy Cadge’s most recent book, *Spiritual Care: The Everyday Work of Chaplains*, Anne Windholz noted¹, “While understanding the multivalent power of presence, Cadge doubts that it will promote institutional investment in chaplaincy. She instead urges spiritual caregivers to shake off their invisibility …”

Those are hard words to read, especially when chaplains believe in the centrality of spiritual care in the life of the institution. Yet, in all too many cases, it is true.

Similarly, a CEO once remarked on the invisibility of chaplains, “You’re too self-isolating.” Our offices are often close to the chapel, a long walk from the hospital core. While the chaplains are wherever patients are, they may not be evident in the daily flow of hospital traffic. But at the same time, hospital executives, isolated on “executive row,” are not typically visible in the daily flow. Their advantage is that their names and pictures are associated with public references to the institution.

Moreover, we do not share a common language. Executives speak in the language of the needs of the business. Chaplains speak in the language of the needs of the soul.

How can chaplains claim a more prominent role for themselves in the life of the institution? It is unlikely that the hospital leadership will take up theology to help things along. It is easier and much more obvious for us to take up hospital leadership language.

To begin, become conversant with the published mission, vision, and values statements of the institution. These reveal the organization’s beliefs and intentions about itself. Every new initiative is vetted through these lenses. The mission statement conveys what the organization professes to be today. The vision statement, by contrast, is intended to convey the future, what the organization is becoming. In a well-integrated organization, the key words and phrases from these statements will be found – and lived out – at the departmental level, including Spiritual Care.

A typical mission statement from a faith-based hospital: “To provide high-quality health care that delivers the best value to the people we serve in a spiritual environment of caring in association with teaching and research.” This statement embeds an appreciation for chaplains by calling out “a spiritual environment.” But it also specifies “teaching and research” as essential. As an indicator of its relevance, Spiritual Care must ask itself how it can contribute in those areas.

Teaching may be as simple as training Spiritual Care volunteers for the hospital, perhaps including education for home visits for volunteers from local churches. Or Spiritual Care may offer monthly brown-bag lunches for clinical staff on the signs of spiritual distress.

And research? Consider your own observations among staff or patients. For example, track the monthly data of patient satisfaction gathered for the hospital. What can be discovered in the anomalies?
Contributing research need not be complex to be useful. Find out who sits on the Institutional Review Board for your hospital and approach them with questions or ideas.

Last, but central to Spiritual Care relevance, are relationships with hospital leadership. Like the patients or staff that chaplains serve, the institutional leadership carries burdens, both professional and personal, about which we may know little. The ability of the chaplain to create sacred environments of trust, where another can feel comfortably vulnerable, is core to our training and our ability to deeply know another human being.

A few examples on beginning a leadership relationship:

- Invite the CEO to come to your department for morning coffee. (Meet at her office to walk with her to yours at the appointed time.) The chaplains gathered should be no more than a few. This is not a time to lecture her about what chaplains do. Rather, it is a time to begin building a relationship, listening. Relaxed, open, conversational, as you would do with a patient. Create a friendly seating arrangement, with no table separating you. This is not an interview. She should be comfortable in offering critique, good and bad, if she chooses to do so.
- Do the same for other leadership, one at a time. As you come to know one another and over time, use their institutional knowledge to explore how you can become more relevant in that setting. (Don’t overlook the Security Department.)
- Who puts out departmental newsletters in your institution? Nursing? Environmental Services? Being included in the “Messages from the Leadership” are the best. Offer to provide a column every month specific to their need. Monthly newsletters are always looking for column material.

Once the relationships have begun, continue the gatherings periodically. Through the leadership, you will learn the primary influencers across the institution. They teach other departments what success looks like in this setting. In time, the leadership will look to Spiritual Care as essential in achieving the institutional mission and vision and representing, implicitly, the values of the organization.

Jennifer Paquette, DMin, BCC, is “retired in Seattle.”

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¹ Anne’s review appears in this issue of Vision.
How do Catholic women use their gifts in the Church? It’s complicated

In December 2022, Tricia Bruce and Bridget Deegan-Krause presented an NACC webinar, “Contribution amid Constraint: A Sociological Look at Women’s Work in Catholic Spaces.” The presentation, and the following article, was based on Tricia’s 2021 report “Called to Contribute: Findings from an In-Depth Interview Study of Catholic Women and the Diaconate.” Elsewhere in this issue, we will share how the findings resonated with Bridget’s experience in ministry.

By Tricia Bruce

Women comprise the majority of U.S. Catholics and the majority of lay ministers in the U.S. Catholic Church. While the ordained diaconate remains the exclusive realm of men, women engage in expansive service that overlaps core diaconal functions in word, liturgy, and charity. Many women feel specifically called to be deacons or express an openness to discerning such a call should the vocational path become available to them.

Deacons are ordained ministers called to preach, teach, and proclaim the Gospel. They perform baptisms, lead prayers, and witness marriages; they preside over funeral and burial services; and they bring the support and resources of the Church to meet needs and respond to injustices in their local communities.

At present, the Roman Catholic diaconate is the exclusive realm of men. But without a pathway to the diaconate, how do lay women minister? What does their service and loyalty signify about who women are, who the Church is, and what both mean for the future of Catholicism?

Changes to canon law introduced by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009 reinforced the distinction between deacons and the ordained priesthood. A 2019 Amazon Synod of Bishops reasserted the “urgent” matter of women’s ministry in regions underserved by priests. Pope Francis appointed a commission on the question of women and the diaconate in 2020.

Largely absent from these conversations, however, are systematic examinations of Catholic women who feel called to the diaconate or who are currently involved in diaconal ministry. Therefore, in 2021, I led a sociological study of women whose ministry in the U.S. Catholic Church approaches that of ordained, exclusively male deacons. However, opportunities to live out their call fully are constrained without ordination. The 40 women whom we interviewed in depth are diverse in age, race/ethnicity, marital status, parental status, region, language, and length and type of ministry involvement. Interviews lasted 75 minutes on average and were recorded, transcribed, translated into English when necessary, coded, and analyzed.

Major findings of our report, “Called to Contribute,” are as follows:

1. Catholic women feel called to the diaconate – or would discern such a call, if the diaconate were open to them.

Interviewees describe how gender barriers inhibit their imaginations for how they might serve the Church and restrict their subsequent realities. Some women feel an explicit call to ordination (often kept hidden), noting in particular gifts in preaching, accompaniment, and serving marginalized peoples. Most reconcile themselves to available vocational paths, but long for opportunities to discern different roles for themselves.
2. Catholic women feel constrained in how they use their gifts, respond to ministry needs, and live out their calls as Catholics in the U.S. Church.

Interviewees navigate their vocation within the context of constraint. Specifically, women describe how their calls lead to repudiation, how contingency dictates their access to ministry functions, and how the lack of title, recognition, and authority conferred through ordination results in ambiguity.

3. Catholic women adapt to live out their call by operating as “de facto deacons,” engaging in strategic deference, strategic dissent, and emotional management.

Interviewees approach their ministry through a “do it anyway” mentality, many of them functioning as “de facto deacons” with neither title nor Holy Orders. To do so, women strategically defer to priests and bishops, strategically dissent using tactics such as code-switching, and habitually manage their own and others’ emotions (e.g., mitigating disappointment and discordance as well as assuaging those who feel “uncomfortable” around women in leadership positions).

4. Catholic women contribute substantially to the U.S. Church through service that is noticed and needed, while biding for roles that better align with their calls, increase their legitimacy, and portend the long-term vitality of the Catholic Church.

Women’s labor fills Catholic ministry needs that are exacerbated by the shortage of ordained priests and deacons. Lay Catholics respond to women ministers as capable, qualified, and gifted in serving the Church. But even as women serve willingly, most are biding: (im)patiently waiting, uncertain, and cautiously wondering when and whether women will be welcomed to the ordained diaconate. Most feel it is unlikely in their own lifetimes but retain hope for the future.

Lay Catholic women are an invisible linchpin in Catholic ministry, but an inherently precarious one. Women willingly commit themselves to “deacon-like” service, but the Catholic Church does not guarantee circumstances to fulfill that call. Inevitable disconnects between gifts and opportunities mean that women shoulder a high emotional, professional, and financial burden as a cost of entry.

Over time, this leads a substantial portion of women to reorient or pull back from ministry commitments, to question whether the Catholic Church is able to use their gifts, and to dissuade young women from embarking along a similar path. The end result is a U.S. Catholic Church that is inherently fragile and rife with inefficiencies. But it still has an opportunity to respond to the realities of diaconal ministry.

**Tricia C. Bruce, PhD,** is a sociologist of religion with the University of Notre Dame’s Center for the Study of Religion and Society.

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¹ More information at www.nacc.org/education-resources/nacc-webinars-and-audio-conferences

² Available to read or download at www.calledtocontribute.org

³ Bridget’s article, “Church needs to fully recognize the gifts of women in ministry,” appears in this issue.
Church needs to fully recognize the gifts of women in ministry

Last week, we shared Tricia Bruce’s summary¹ of her 2021 study, “Called to Contribute: Findings from an In-Depth Interview Study of Catholic Women and the Diaconate.”² Below, workshop co-presenter Bridget Deegan-Krause shares her reactions to the work – and where we go from here.

By Bridget Deegan-Krause

I am excited to have shared with the NACC a groundbreaking study about us – about women in ministry.

When I first read Tricia Bruce’s study through the Discerning Deacons³ project, when I read the careful accounts of other women in ministry, sounding so much like my own, the tears flowed. (In fact, I will warn those of you who have not had a chance to read the study, to have a box of Kleenex close by.)

But the tears were nicely complemented by curiosity. This study offers concrete words, concepts and frameworks that for me accurately described this complex reality of being a woman called to ministry in a church that doesn’t always know what to do with my gifts.

In a remarkable way, I felt seen. And I felt valued as I realized that my complex reality as a Catholic woman in ministry would be worthy of scientific, sociological study.

Tricia’s study has shown me there’s a word for various versions of “you couldn’t possibly be called.” Or for what happens when I am patronized. Or when someone demeans my ministerial contributions with some reductionistic convoluted theology. It’s called Repudiation.

And there’s a word for being beholden to the good graces of my Jesuit brothers, or working at the whim of a clerical man, or counting on a letter of recommendation from someone who does not have my education or skill or experience and really no idea of the powerhouse he is dealing with. It’s called Contingency.

And there is a name for that “what are you?” or the ridiculously long explanation that I have to give, defining myself by what I am not, or the need to constantly prove and re-prove myself. It’s called Ambiguity.

The study has words for the ways I respond to these constraints, in creative and sometimes exhausting ways that are damaging or even demeaning. These constraints even lead me sometimes to do things that aren’t good for anyone, like playing small or not rocking the boat. There’s a name for that: It’s called Strategic Deference.

Or my creative workarounds and codeswitching – like the U.S. Catholic Church calling it a reflection when it’s really preaching. It’s called Strategic Dissent.

As I clench my teeth. As I work twice as hard. As my household makes serious sacrifices, both financial and emotional. As I put off other opportunities and wait while people my age, my level of education and influence, run the world. As my children and nieces and political scientist spouse watch this talented woman’s reality denied. As I invest mightily in my career and well-being, enlist the help of spiritual directors and a good therapists and a whole lot of wonderful colleagues – and lots and lots and lots of prayer – to be able to live with the cognitive dissonance. It’s called Emotional Management. Something I have become very good at.
My workarounds, my overcompensating, my playing small, my working and reworking – it takes its toll on me. But it also takes its toll on the Church. When gifts are squandered and the dreams and realities of far too many are denigrated. When women and girls are told implicitly and explicitly that their bodies do not belong in the sanctuary. When you don’t hear me preach, you don’t hear my unique take on the gospel. The Church loses out.

The word that sociologists like Tricia and others use to describe institutions like ours is Precarious.

We are wise as a church to take seriously the social science and analysis of Tricia and others as we consider the future and discern the way forward together, as we have been called by Pope Francis to do in the Synod on Synodality (see the Vatican’s extraordinary synthesis report⁴, released in October, especially paragraphs 60-64 on the participation of women).

We are wise as chaplains to think together, to strategize on how we thrive in these constraints, and continue to offer our rich diaconal ministry to a church so in need of what we have to offer.

In 30 years of professional ministry, I am now learning to trust my instincts, my call, my voice. To take it to my prayer and the prayerful feedback of others. This study, and the conversations it has engendered, have made me feel more powerful. It has given me a way to talk about my experience. It has helped me set better limits and be self-aware about what I am experiencing, and the importance of good structures of support. It has made me grateful for the NACC’s gold-standard peer certification process, and most importantly for the community that supports me and holds me accountable.

Tricia and her team have given us a sturdy framework and categories for our own ministries, male or female. We are in good company with our brother in ministry Jesus – who knew repudiation and ambiguity, who had to be wise in his words, who engaged the hard conversations. Who knew his call even when the world denied him. Who served and was served by women time and again – in what the New Testament calls diakoneo, the root word of “deacon.”

So, my colleagues in ministry, let’s tell our story – as scary and at times as unwelcome as it is. We can practice with each other. Let’s try to get clear on who we are. Please stop calling it lay – we are professionals. It’s preaching, not a reflection. It’s presiding, not facilitating. It’s diaconal, in the model of Jesus the servant, bringing the Gospel to the margins. And it deserves to be recognized, celebrated and sanctified. Not just for my sake and your sake, but for a church that can no longer afford to squander its best resources.

It starts with sharing our truth, telling the story of our ministry, even when it feels a little risky. We can start with each other.

And for God’s sake – let’s stop playing small.

Bridget Deegan-Krause, BCC, is a formation consultant for Catholic institutions and national advisor for the Discerning Deacons project.

¹ Tricia’s article, "How do Catholic women use their gifts in the Church? It’s complicated," appears in this issue.
² Available to read or download at www.calledtocontribute.org
³ discerningdeacons.org
⁴ The Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) of the 2021-2024 Synod: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission may be found at: www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf
The total breadth of chaplaincy:
Wide-ranging, undefined, and uncredentialed


By Anne M. Windholz

In *Spiritual Care: The Everyday Work of Chaplains,* sociology professor Wendy Cadge provides the first comprehensive study of how chaplains function across the varied sites where they serve.

Cadge is already well known in spiritual care circles for her 2013 book *Paging God* and her pivotal role at the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab of Brandeis University. Her new book confines itself to Boston: its prisons, municipal organizations like police and fire departments, colleges, and healthcare facilities. Interviewing 66 chaplains and embedding herself as much as possible in their work, Cadge provides panoramic coverage, including a valuable historical overview of chaplains’ role in some of the city’s most painful and violent events. Her analysis of “religious ecologies” (how religious organizations, formed in a given environment, are impacted by social and economic systems) is astute – and her prognosis for what she calls a “slippery, hard to define profession” is sobering.

Perhaps most unsettling is her observation that, basically, *anyone* can call themselves a chaplain. Less than a third of her 66 interviewees were “officially certified or credentialed as chaplains.” Although the Joint Commission and Medicare require that spiritual care be provided to healthcare patients, neither organization demands that the caregiver actually be a chaplain, however loosely defined.

Among the cohort Cadge studied, most chaplains had a theological education – which she acknowledges may reflect Boston’s abundant academic opportunities rather than any requirement. Just over half had “completed some CPE” (emphasis added). Many are simply local clergy doing chaplaincy on the side. She notes the dubious prevalence of quick online training, but she also criticizes elaborate certification programs like ACPE and its affiliates NACC, APC, or NAJC (though she stops short of naming them). She labels such programs overly “bureaucratic” and (worse) “archaic and discriminatory.” No money? No time? No certification.

The lack of any recognized standard across organizations (military, civic, healthcare, educational) can be attributed to the disparate communities that chaplains serve. Indeed, Cadge argues that chaplains often work in a kind of “cultural fog,” a liminal space where expectations are frequently unclear and exactly what a chaplain does (think “measurable outcomes”) is hard to define – making justifying positions and higher pay difficult. Despite raising the profile of chaplains, COVID did not alleviate this confusion, and as society moves in a “post-religious” direction, the rites and ceremonies that were once bread and butter to ordained chaplains have become less central.

Cadge’s book raises cross-institutional awareness and identifies some unifying best practices. But she primarily presents the contemporary chaplain as an improv artist, no matter where they serve: able to adapt to the needs of any person regardless of background; adept at providing safe space for mourning or meaning-making; and skilled at “code-switching” religious rhetoric as needed. Discourse becomes neutralized to fit all comers; presence is the primary practice. As one chaplain summed up, “We are silently there and do what needs to be done.”

While understanding the multivalent power of presence, Cadge doubts that it will promote institutional investment in chaplaincy. She instead urges spiritual caregivers to shake off their invisibility; to advertise their agility when
dealing with universal human needs; to simplify training and embrace research as a unified group; and – not least – to nurture their own emotional and spiritual health.

Catholic chaplains will likely have a mixed reaction to this assessment. Presence is arguably central to our faith. Emmanuel – God with us – is the greatest gift of incarnation, the essence of Eucharist. To be utterly present is to love utterly. In a world of cruelly policed borders, love thrives in the liminal. Precisely because chaplaincy has been ill-defined, women denied ordination in the Roman church have been able to live out their priestly vocation as chaplains – albeit without title or sacramental license. Deacons, too, have found an additional niche for their call.

But as an institution based on hierarchy and orthodoxy, Catholicism is primed to confuse spiritual fluidity with syncretism. To stay in the institution’s good graces, Catholic chaplains must walk that fine line between a public emphasis on non-judgmental presence and a sincere, private religious motivation. Remaining relevant will demand adaptability: a willingness to abandon entrenched historical interpretations of spiritual care (often tangled up in patriarchy, racism, and clericalism) while making a commitment to open hearts and minds.

Even if it focuses only on Boston, Cadge’s new book widens our horizons. Read and savor it, including her information-rich appendix. Then do what chaplains do best: Listen and incline the ear of your heart.

Anne M. Windholz, MDiv, PhD, BCC, is a member of NACC and notes after reading this book that her credentials are “ironically superfluous.”
Anthology identifies universal competencies for good spiritual care


By Paula J. Teague

Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo begin their anthology with an illustration of two chaplains. The two contexts are different, and the needs vary, but the mission is the same. Each one is providing care to those in their deepest moments of pain and suffering. Far from the traditional definition of a chaplain (someone who provides religious services in a private setting), these two people are present in their worlds, creating space for not only interpersonal support but also systemic understandings and pushes for justice and equity.

This opening provides the context for this volume: that chaplaincy has evolved and is continuing to progress. Those who come to chaplaincy do so on many paths. And though the settings might differ, and the demands may have advanced, there is much in common as well.

In the present moment, chaplains face social justice issues as never before, while also facing the disasters of a pandemic and social isolation. The fabric of our political system, as well as the many understandings we have about truth, power, and communication have been tested in the United States.

Within this context, it is foolish to think that the work of chaplaincy could be static. Spiritual care practitioners need to address the new layers of pain and suffering and to stand present in public spaces in new ways as advocates, the voices of justice.

Cadge and Rambo lay out the book “to feature the work of chaplains and to offer a resource for those exploring and preparing to be chaplains.” Regardless of the path toward chaplaincy or the function of the chaplain, they identify three necessary competencies: Facilitating meaning-making and navigating worldviews in public settings; interpersonal competencies; and navigating systems and organizations.

Throughout the book, various real chaplains and chaplain educators are featured. This gives a much fuller sense of the faces of chaplaincy. It was a pleasure to read about the journeys and experiences of so many doing the work of chaplaincy.

Each chapter has a simple introduction and then reflection questions and recommended readings at the conclusion. The writing is consistently clear. As an educator, I found myself thinking of how various chapters fit into the curriculum for our CPE program. The book also encouraged me to expand theories behind the work of chaplaincy, especially in the chapters on spiritual trust and organizational understanding.
The three competencies are illustrated with case studies, plentiful examples, and concrete tools. Here are a few highlights:

- Dagmar Grefe, Pamela McCarroll, and Bilal Ansari offer foundational understanding of meaning-making in the face of crisis, trauma, and loss. They focus on presence, spiritual assessment, and spiritual care interventions.
- Leading and facilitating spiritual reflection: Victor Gabriel and Duane R. Bidwell share their own stories briefly and note that it is in self-knowledge that one can facilitate while not imposing on others. They define key terms and outline capacities for spiritual reflection.
- Meaning-making through ritual and public leadership: Rochelle Robins and Danielle Tuminnio Hansen provide information on five competencies for facilitation of rituals. This is laid out in a way that provides a structure and process for rituals that is inclusive and theologically sound.
- Interpersonal competencies: Carrie Doehring and Allison Kestenbaum focus on spiritual care alliances and how these interconnections provide healing and offer an understanding of spiritual trust.
- Thomas St. James O’Connor and Michelle Kirby outline interpersonal competencies for spiritual care, which they see as integral for building spiritual trust. Their inventory of helping styles could be useful for chaplains’ self-understanding.
- Richard Coble and Mychal Springer expand interpersonal competence to understand dynamics of power so that spiritual care is socially just. Their case study is illustrative.
- Organizational competencies: Barbara McClure and Mary Martha Thiel expand the understanding of chaplains into the realm of change agents in the dismantlement of the “isms” in systems.
- Facilitating resilience: Nathan H. White plugs into the post-pandemic world of chaplaincy as embodiment of well-being, creating opportunities for organizations to sustain changes that are just and equitable.
- Surviving, thriving, and leading organizations: Su Yon Pak sees chaplains as optimizers of human flourishing. He uses the ideas of “frames” as an important theory to do this.
- Emotional undercurrents of organizations: Laurie Garrett-Cobina visualizes how chaplains can build organizations that promote justice, equality, and moral integrity. She uses her personal experience of navigating “troubled waters of racist, sexist, and classist insults and invalidations” to explicate how chaplains must walk that boundary of personal authority and speaking up/out from their experience.
- A commissioning: Trace Haythorn and Jason Callahan close the book by outlining the focus for the future.

I highly recommend this volume to anyone preparing to become a chaplain, as well as those who are old souls on the journey of chaplaincy. Let us grasp anew our mission in this new day. This book will help us do that.

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