TEACH[R]

A Nexus of Eyes: The praxis of chaplaincy in one faith based educational system through emerging emic perspectives

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Key words: chaplaincy, impact, fulfilment, support, burnout

> *school based chaplaincy in particular, is morphing into new forms within emerging national uncertainties, and cultural diversity*

Introduction: A nexus of war and wellbeing

The overall roles of chaplains over the centuries have always reflected socio-cultural shifts related to evolving concepts of religion and service to the 'common good'. However, these entwined notions have, up until relatively recently, been embedded in conflicts and war, with the development of corresponding cultural tropes of death, dying and suffering. Despite this long held view, the concept of chaplaincy as a practical counterpoint to the dystopian images of war embedded in many cultural mind-sets, especially European and Australasian meta-narratives, is evolving while simultaneously moving into uncharted waters of new forms and new praxes.

This is nowhere more visible than in the current Australian context where leaders in the armed forces are beginning to realise the role of military chaplaincy is one of "spirituality and character training" (Clayton 2010, p. 17). However, while the latter roles are ill-defined they at least are beginning to match the younger millennial generation's overall world view. However, it is not only in the armed forces in Australia that chaplaincy is beginning to be seen as a critical focus of spirituality, wellbeing and

character development. Political forces at both the national and state levels are seemingly enmeshed with global religious shifts, which have created a scenario where chaplains appear to be in demand in all quarters of Australian society, albeit in an acknowledged secular society. In particular, there is a federal government push to enable chaplains of any faith to become a part of school cultures.

Perhaps this new perceived need of chaplains also reflects the national view that the Australian secular metanarrative is somewhat deficient. This metanarrative arising out of the Anzac legend is also grounded in a war motif, with the deeply intertwined concepts of 'mateship', masculinity and sacrifice. However, within this cultural context of national questioning there is also a shift towards an acceptance of spirituality (Bouma, 2006), and a simultaneous rejection of organized religion.

Internationally chaplaincy as a whole, and school based chaplaincy in particular, is morphing into new forms within emerging national uncertainties, and cultural diversity. Drawing on their work in Ireland, King and Norman (2009) believe that the role of school chaplains everywhere needs to be carefully realigned and rethought. Commenting on the Australian educational landscape, Bouma (2006) has said much the same, believing that with the rapid increase of denominational schools in Australia, the "role of

school chaplains and religious education teachers in these schools is critical and needs to be taken more seriously by those who appoint them" (p. 208).

This paper seeks in part to address this situation, unpacking the initial 'emic-journey' of a three year multi-case study research agenda that seeks to holistically investigate how key stakeholders in three faith based schools understand the role and practice of school chaplains. In this instance, the stakeholders included administrators, chaplains and students. The multi-case study approach and the stratified sets of respondents were deemed to be the best 'goodness of fit' as Parekh's (2000) axiom clearly states an understanding that one group's place within an organisation needs to be considered not in isolation, but as intersecting forces that act as a "locus of identity."

The following section unpacks the 'loci of influences' in the emic decision making processes related to the key aspects of this particular research journey, ending with an unpacking of the perceived nexus or 'loci of influences' related to school based chaplains' perceived professional identity.

Nexus of Chaplaincy Identity – Inputs, aspects and avenues

Nexus 1: Meaning within the overall research base

As indicated in the previous section, the concept and practice of chaplaincy in Australia has a relatively deep historical foundational history grounded in British clerical ministry in war settings. In more recent times, while serving with the best intentions, certainly their place and role in the British context in the Great War, was initially viewed by those they aimed to serve as the embodiment of "ineptitude and hypocrisy" (Snape & Madigan, 2013, p. i). Certainly, this viewpoint changed to a large degree in the World War I conflict whereby some "found spiritual solace in their gentle admonishment", however "others were less inclined to see the possibility of divine intervention in the bloodshed and horrors of war, and ignored the clerics" (Ham, 2013, p. 520). While chaplaincy evolved into an essential component of ensuing military contexts the precepts of this original religious form and Australian skepticism appears to have created ideological and praxis tendrils of division that still carry over into many current discussions as to what actually constitutes chaplaincy. Such was, and possibly is, the uncertainty and diversity still embedded in this profession that at the turn of the century Vandecreek (2002) called for a differentiation of chaplaincy definitions believing there were professional chaplains, and those who "assisted in one or more functions attached to chaplaincy" (p. 122).

With definitional debate still evolving, in more recent times the notion of chaplaincy has morphed into an interdisciplinary set of practices in many other fields and workplace sites such hospitals, prisons, residential care facilities, airports and schools. Hospital chaplaincy has demonstrated its legitimacy by working effectively with healthcare professionals over a long period of time, with chaplains showing their worth as valuable members of the healthcare professional teams, with clear professional requirements and training. It is this latter point, which appears to be a missing element in many of the chaplaincy roles.

In regard to appropriate training and the roles school based chaplains are asked to perform, interestingly it is Johnstone's (1997, p. 13) early warning that "each school must look at its own special situation and needs, and develop the model of chaplaincy that best meets those needs" that has begun to emerge as perhaps being the most accurate assessment. Johnstone's comment perhaps went unheeded as at that time school based chaplaincy existed only in pockets in some denominational school based sites. Without any apparent negotiation with the field, and the research clearly ambivalent at best regarding the efficacy of religious instruction (Hughes, 2004), in 2006 the Howard-Liberal government introduced their initiative for school chaplaincy. Since then, the number of chaplains in all schools, including Adventist Schools Australia, has increased exponentially. However, the experience of many chaplains seems to have mirrored my own, where there was little, if any, dedicated training, and no explicit role, guidelines, job description, or real understanding of what it is that makes for successful chaplaincy. In order to achieve this an evidence-based research base would provide the starting point in order to deliver a high quality and valuable service.

What research currently exists falls into three main categories: academic research into the role of the school chaplain (Salecich, 2002; Pohlmann, 2010; Caperon, 2015), evaluation of the effectiveness of the role of school chaplains, subsequent to the implementation of the Howard government's National School Chaplaincy Program (Loza & Warren, 2009; Hughes & Sims, 2010), and publications by different denominational school systems (Catholic Schools - O'Malley, 2008; Anglican Schools Australia, 2011).

Salecich's (2002) pioneering research clearly identified the frustrations experienced by chaplains, the tensions that existed between the various stakeholders and the resulting lack of clarity over the chaplain's role. Pohlmann (2010) extended Salecich's work and, using case studies in Queensland schools was able to identify a diversity

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of different models:

- a pastoral care model, where the chaplain's role is to minister to staff, students and the wider community
- a peer support model, where the chaplain is seen as role model or friend to the students, building relationships which may give opportunity for meaningful interactions
- an educational model, where the chaplain is primarily involved in teaching religious education and related topics
- a liturgical model, encompassing ceremonial duties – church services, worship programs, Bible studies
- a community development model – an extension and broadening of the pastoral care model where the chaplain reaches out more into the school community.

> **"**
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> **"**

The findings of Loza and Warren (2009) and Hughes and Sims (2009) indicated that chaplains had an apparent strong positive effect on the pastoral care for students, staff and families through the development of interpersonal relationships, moral foundations and values (Hughes & Sims, 2009). To these points, the National School Chaplaincy Association (cited in Theilking & MacKenzie, 2011) asserted that "school chaplains are in the prevention and rescue business" (para. 14). However, given the diversity of students in schools at this point in time, three key questions remain: Is this really the case? What are students to be rescued from? And how this rescuing is to be undertaken?

O'Malley's (2008, p. 6) "ideal map of chaplaincy", considered the roles and school structures needed to be effective in schools, identifying the central importance of interaction and negotiation between chaplain and school leadership. Foord (2012) and Lowe (2012) also found this to be the case, coming to the conclusion that chaplains had to also navigate different stakeholder understandings, all of which had differing viewpoints regarding chaplain's roles and responsibilities. This notion of navigation amongst various layers of a school culture is also another common thread which might be described as "being" or "presence" (Monahan & Renehan, 1998, p. 13; Caperon, 2015, p. 56). Many writers in the field, have spoken of the importance of the presence of the chaplain "journeying with" students (Collas, 2006, p. 20; Newitt, 2011, p. 105), describing it as "journey[ing] with people as they ask big questions." Within the Catholic tradition, Greely (2004, cited in Finlay, 2007, p. 73) has described the journeying in a more holistic sense believing it's a relational scaffolding process that commences with "the simple faith of a child to the sophisticated faith of an adult."

This notion of a 'relational chaplaincy presence' has clearly emerged in multiple research findings as two 'conceptual metaphors' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Firstly, what is clearly a "source-path-goal" schema or metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 40). Pohlmann (2010) has identified five different models of ministry being used by chaplains, with the one commonality being the perceived need of chaplains to 'get to know' students, staff and parents. Newitt (2011, p. 105) sees this chaplaincy path and relationship as "walking alongside, … facilitating a journey of exploration." It is this notion of 'facilitations' that is perhaps the most contentious and unexplored chaplaincy domain. In unpacking this ideal, Hunt (2009) believes that facilitation should be the instigator of both the journey towards meaning, and the energising process for lifelong learning and states:

> The metaphor of journey connotes an ongoing exploration, an unending task, a lifelong quest, of never having arrived, and of ever reaching further towards the unreachable. The metaphor of journey also speaks of the matter of attitude as of aptitude for the journey (Hunt, 2009, p. 646).

The second 'conceptual metaphor' arising in chaplaincy literature is one of 'being as a container.' Caperon (2015) found that the majority of school chaplains considered that their own identity and being were core to their chaplaincy, and described their role as "making Christ present in school". The aim of this 'contained presence' within chaplaincy is "all the time being the one seen as the 'God person', the one whose presence … makes the reality of God and the love of God visibly and actually present in the community" (Caperon, 2015, p. 56). Caperon does not see the chaplain's role in a purely selfish light, but continues the 'container metaphor' in a privilege light, believing the chaplain's role as a "privileged position of holding others' stories … - as the 'God' person" (Caperon, 2015, p. 55).

Nexus 2: Meaning within the research literature related to the 'case'

From the limited research available, it would appear that the Adventist system has been slow to adopt or see the necessity for chaplaincy training and it is regrettable that we, as Christians who espouse the care of the individual, have not put into place a relational system whereby we have focused relational training for the people who are going to guide the children in our schools (Rieger, 2009). Nevertheless, what research there is arising out of the Adventist system suggests that chaplains have

made a difference (Gane, 2012). The Valuegenesis II study (Gane, 2012), which was a follow-up to the Valuegenesis survey of 2000, indicated that there was a significant increase in faith maturity, orientation to religion, improved views of God and Christian commitment with the presence of a school chaplain.

As further research generates clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Adventist chaplain, it will be possible to help those who work in that field to have a better understanding of the issues they face and how they can enable the students they serve.

Nexus 3: Meaning within the research design
It should be clearly noted that the previous literature did not drive this project, but it is an emergent and responsive initial reflection on initial embryonic findings. In response to concepts of relationships and conjoint journeying, this study has begun with the employment of an 'Inside-Outside' research design (Bak, 2015). Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, this approach allows for the reflective and pragmatic movement and interplay between both the researchers and the respondents as 'insiders', while also providing reflective and methodological 'outside spaces.' This interplay was facilitated through the use of a bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of data gathering methods that included a quantitative survey adapted from the work of Hughes and Sims (2009) followed by qualitative in-depth interviews, and in "that the potential for enrichment lies" (Bak, 2015, p. 108).

Nexus 4: Sites and respondents
Although very much in the 'emic stages', preliminary data gathering has been carried out with a small

Figure 1: Types of ASA schools

sample of school chaplains from one regional area of Adventist Schools Australia (see Figure 1). The chaplains were invited to complete a survey regarding their perceptions of their role and responsibilities that was generated from the work of Hughes and Sims (2009). An ensuing focus group discussion was then held in which these chaplains spoke freely about their roles, experiences and reflections.

This resulted in two lines of emergent findings: firstly, through quantitative analysis of the survey instruments, and secondly through a general coding of their comments from the discussion. These findings will serve to further hone my guiding questions for subsequent level two interviews (Charmaz, 2006).

While the respondents as a "convenience sample" (Creswell, 2013) of n = 11 represent an even spread across ages, eighty-two percent of them were male, and eighteen percent were female. All chaplains in this sample worked in only one school. The survey included chaplains working in K to 6 schools, K to 12 schools, and chaplains who worked solely in high schools in New South Wales. Over half of the participants had worked in school chaplaincy for an average of more than eight years.

Nexus of Identity arising from within the case: Initial aspects and avenues
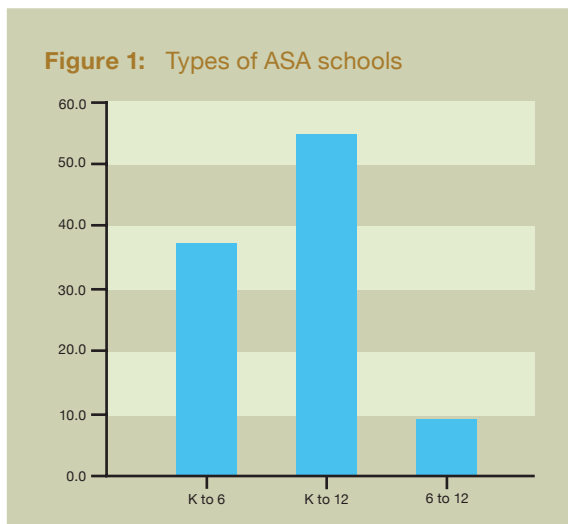#### Quantitative Perspective: Chaplains' perceptions of overall impact
Chaplains felt that they had a significant impact on their communities through helping students to think about 'big picture' issues of life, spirituality, God, and/or principles of life; contributing to the positive morale of the school community; facilitating social inclusion and building community in the school; impacting student moral values and responsibility; offering support to students with significant problems and providing opportunities for students to talk through issues of concern to them (see Figure 2).

The survey explored issues raised by either students who voluntarily seek out the chaplain, or students referred to the chaplain by staff. Referrals (when students are referred to the chaplain by staff members), which occurred most often, were related to spirituality and 'big picture' issues of life and faith, family relationships, behaviour management, including anger management and academic issues or personal achievement.

Respondents were given twenty emergent issues that were raised by students or staff referrals, and as can be seen in the following figure (Figure 3) these were shown to be occupying a significant amount of their time (scored as happening often or several times in an average two-week period).

Referrals … related to spirituality and 'big picture' issues of life and faith, family relationships, behaviour … academic issues or personal achievement

Figure 2: Chaplains' perception of their impact

Figure 3: Issues raised by students, or by staff referral

Percentage identifying these as occurring often or several times over an average two-week period

> *Chaplains expressed the lowest levels of agreement for … any extra effort on their part was recognised by the school, and … there being appropriate structures to resolve problems in the school*
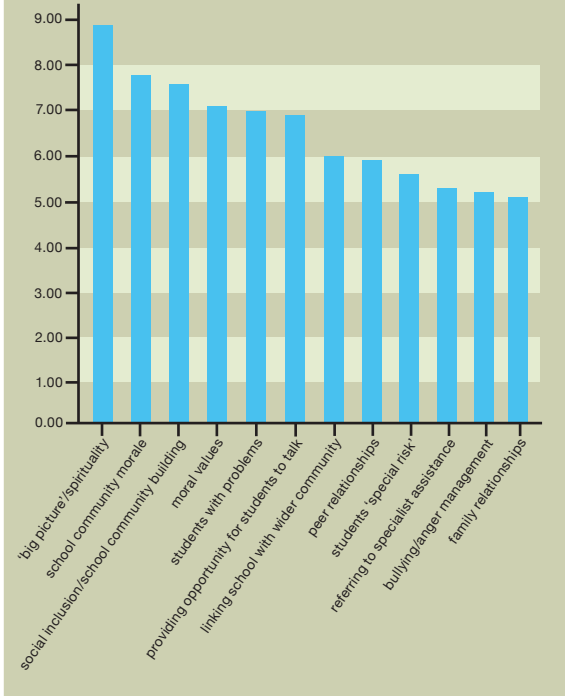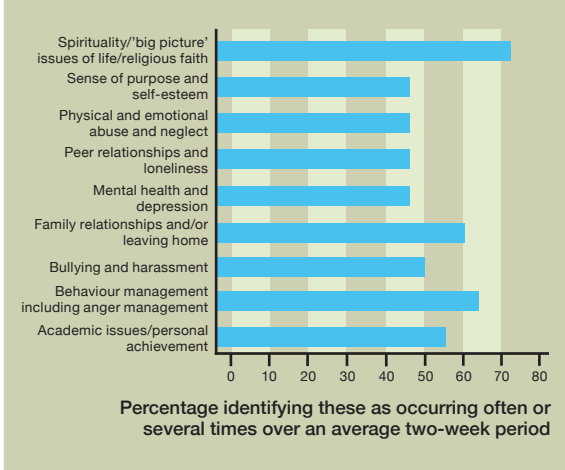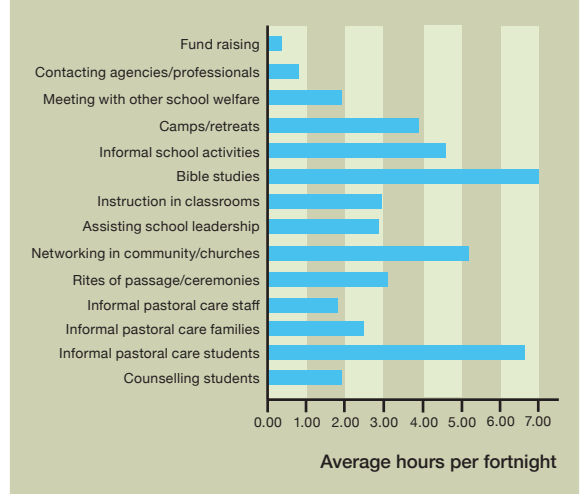
Figure 4: Chaplain's responsibilities (average hours over two weeks)

Average hours per fortnight

Chaplains were surveyed regarding the way their time was allocated during an average two weeks (see Figure 4). Most of the findings in Figure 4 mirror those of Hughes and Sims (2009), however the hours spent in Bible studies and networking with churches was not included in their survey, which was targeted at State schools. In that context, it could raise the question of whether this was actually part of the role of the chaplain. However, probably these results are found in the research being discussed due to the parochial religious school system, where the expectation would be that Bible study is part of their core business. Networking with churches would also be expected, given that the schools are all often closely allied to local churches. As well, it is becoming clear that chaplains spend a large percentage of their time on pastoral care. They spent the majority of their time in engaging in Bible studies, the pastoral care of students, making off-site visits and contacts with parents and care-givers, providing needs-based small group work in areas such as anger management and addressing bullying, as well as leading out in special school events and ceremonies.

Quantitative perspective: Perceptions of underlying challenges

There is moderate to high concurrence (5.5-7.5 on a Likert scale of 1—no agreement to 10—total agreement) with the following statements that assert the local churches support the chaplain's work, their 'professional expertise [is] recognised by the school' and that their 'input in school life [is] taken seriously' (see Figure 5). Chaplains expressed the lowest levels of agreement for the statement claiming that any extra effort on their part was recognised by the school, and only marginally higher for there being 'appropriate structures to resolve problems in the school'.

Further, there was also lower agreement that they had adequately defined job descriptions, with seventy-two percent scoring 5 or less on a Likert scale of 1 to 10; or sufficient 'opportunities for
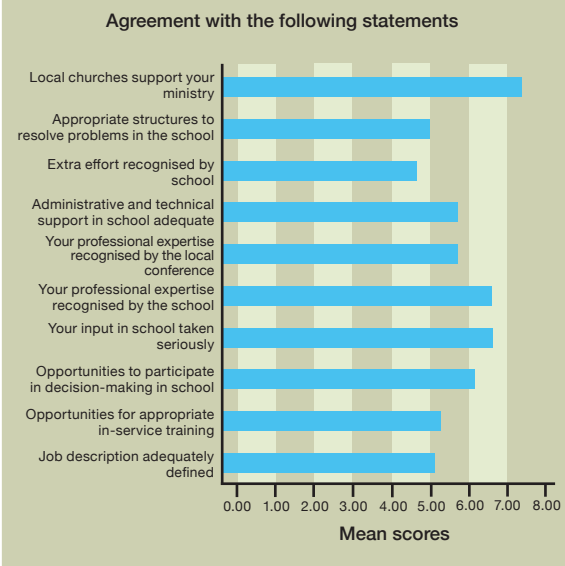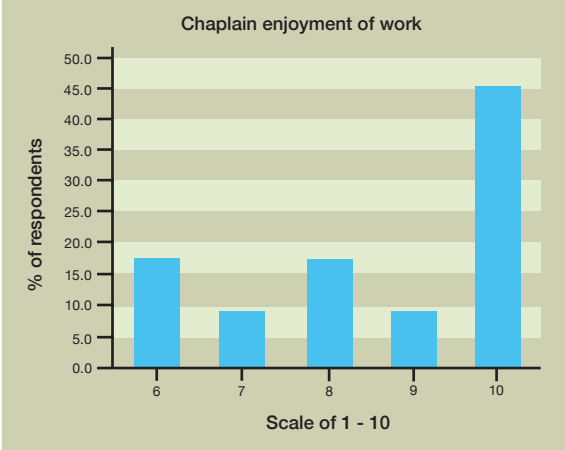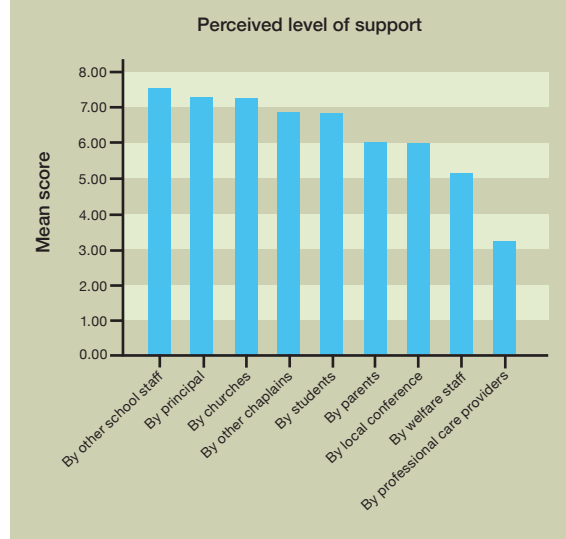
Figure 5: Chaplains' perceptions

Agreement with the following statements

Figure 7: Degree to which chaplains feel supported

Perceived level of support

Figure 6: Fulfilment levels

Chaplain enjoyment of work

> *When asked to score how much they enjoy their work … the mean score was 8.5, with fifty percent of respondents rating a 10 for this item, and no one scoring less than 6 on the scale of 1 to 10*

appropriate in-service training'. All these issues with lower agreement scores emerged as challenging concerns within group and individual discussions.

Despite the fact that I entered this study with a presupposition that chaplains were not finding fulfilment or job satisfaction, the results are quite surprisingly positive. When asked to score how much they enjoy their work as a chaplain (see Figure 6), the mean score was 8.5, with fifty percent of respondents rating a 10 for this item, and no one scoring less than 6 on the scale of 1 to 10. These results must been seen in light of the fact that their extra effort is not well-recognised, there are not clearly defined structures for resolving issues, and

72% of respondents scored 5 or lower, on the matter of an adequately defined job description.

It is my contention that the significant level of fulfilment and job satisfaction expressed by many chaplains may correlate quite highly with their perceived level of support in their role. Most chaplains indicated that they felt well supported by other school staff, by their principal, by local churches, other chaplains and by students. They also expressed good support by parents and local conferences (see Figure 7).

Qualitative perspective: Chaplains' perceptions of overall impact

The respondents to our survey attended a chaplains' retreat, where informal discussions in the form of a focus group were undertaken. A critical point of discussion centered on what were perceived to be the core functions of chaplaincy.

Given that these were chaplains from a parochial religious school system there was considerable focus on the importance of leading students into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and studying the Bible. However, other core functions were identified as caring for the principal and staff, in addition to students; and building bridges between school and the community. This discussion extended into the role of the chaplain in staff spiritual growth. There was a consensus that everyone in a school has a calling to minister to all members of the school community, to carry out the core spiritual values of the school, which are grounded in the school motto, vision and mission statements, and that the chaplain should journey

alongside the staff.

This led into discussion of what factors were essential for best practice in school chaplaincy. There was agreement on the fact that the chaplain needed to be a spiritual person who connected on various levels with students and staff. They needed to be individuals that people found easy to talk to. Discussion also gravitated to the advantages and disadvantages of chaplains with educational and theological backgrounds, and the benefits that they bring to the table. Chaplains with an educational background are likely to fit into the school climate more readily with clear understandings of the education 'business', tensions, stress points in the school, the importance of fitting into the school timetable and respecting the school bell (and all that that means), and how to work around teaching staff requirements (?) in the most cooperative manner possible. Chaplains from a theological background bring skills in planning a 'spiritual year', a different set of resources, skills in organising worships, spiritual and ceremonial programs and in conducting Bible studies.

Another key area of concern discussed by the chaplains was the issue of burnout. Whilst not directly questioned about this in the survey, the issue of the sustainability of the roles and responsibilities of the chaplain was acutely in the mind of the researcher, based on personal experience and numerous individual conversations. It was interesting to note that whilst a high level of personal fulfilment had been expressed in the surveys, and the fact that ninety percent of the respondents saw themselves continuing in the field of school chaplaincy in the long term, the focus groups indicated that the issue of burnout is significant. This qualitative investigation revealed this to be a matter of significant concern. In Adventist Schools Australia there is a changing landscape, with many schools beginning to operate campus churches to serve as a spiritual home for students. This has added another layer to the responsibilities of the school chaplain. The expectation is that the chaplain will also be actively involved in these churches, as a bridge between school and church. Given that the churches function outside of the five day working week, chaplains have expressed concern that these new expectations will exacerbate their already demanding workload, and lead to further burnout. Through further discussion I discovered from the focus group that three of the main contributory factors to their burnout were the competing expectations of different stakeholders, lack of adequate job descriptions and a "conflicted" chain of command; each demands exploration.

Conclusion

An initial examination of the preliminary quantitative and qualitative data raises a number of issues that deserve commendation, are worthy of further attention, and demand action.

In contrast to my expectations, the data suggests that the majority of school chaplains find fulfilment in their roles. Given the emerging nature of school chaplaincy, their lack of specific training, and the ambiguity of the chaplain's roles and responsibilities, the high level of job satisfaction expressed by the respondents is laudable. A major contributory factor to this would appear to be the degree of support they experience from the principals and staff of their schools, the local churches and the school community as a whole.

An area that apparently demands action is the need for clearly defined job descriptions and an "unconflicted" chain of command. Initial coding of the data supports the findings of Foord (2012) that chaplains feel conflicted about serving "two masters", or more, and all the concomitant, sometimes conflicting expectations. Inevitably this impacts their ability to adequately fulfil their roles, and may contribute to lowered efficiency, and burnout. Up to this time, within Adventist Schools Australia, there has been no consistent national standard for chaplains with regards to chain of command or job description.

Another key matter demanding further attention is the area of chaplain burnout. This requires the identification of causal factors, and then the implementation of strategies to address them.

In the Adventist system, huge strides forward are being made, with chaplaincy being recognised and significant resources being employed to remedy many of the problems that exist. However, whilst progress is being made in some areas, changing landscapes create new challenges to be addressed. Although some administrative regions are experiencing rapid change for the better, a unified approach is yet to be achieved. Thus the story is ongoing.

> the main contributory factors to their burnout were the competing expectations of different stakeholders, lack of adequate job descriptions and a "conflicted" chain of command

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