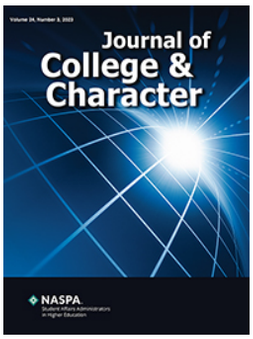

Journal of College and Character

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ujcc20

University Chaplaincy as Relational Presence: Navigating Understandings of Good and Effective Chaplaincy in UK Universities

Kristin Aune, Lucy Peacock, Mathew Guest & Jeremy Law

To cite this article: Kristin Aune, Lucy Peacock, Mathew Guest & Jeremy Law (2023) University Chaplaincy as Relational Presence: Navigating Understandings of Good and Effective Chaplaincy in UK Universities, Journal of College and Character, 24:3, 197-216, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

Published online: 10 Aug 2023.

Journal of College & Character VOLUME 24, No. 3, August 2023

University Chaplaincy as Relational Presence: Navigating Understandings of Good and Effective Chaplaincy in UK Universities

Kristin Aune, Coventry University[a]
Lucy Peacock, Coventry University[b]
Mathew Guest, Durham University[c]
Jeremy Law, Canterbury Christ Church University[d]

Abstract

Chaplains are embedded in the culture and life of many universities and are a key part of university support for religious students. Yet university chaplaincy has rarely been researched by social scientists. This article explores the role of chaplains and chaplaincy in universities in the United Kingdom (UK), investigating understandings of what makes for good and effective chaplaincy among the different groups involved or working with chaplains. Case study research in five universities, comprising interviews with chaplains, university managers and representatives from religious bodies, and a survey of students, reveals an approach to chaplaincy upon which many participants agree, based around a combination of relational skills and presence. Conceptualizing this as relational presence, the authors argue that relational presence reflects the UK's three-dimensional religious landscape, where religion is regarded as "vicarious," and reflects the values of young people who attend universities.

[a]Kristin Aune (kristin.aune@coventry.ac.uk) is professor of sociology of religion at Coventry University, UK. Her research on religion and higher education includes the co-edited book *Religion and Higher Education in Europe and North America* (Routledge, 2017).

[b]Lucy Peacock (lucy.peacock@coventry.ac.uk) is a research fellow in the sociology of religion at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, UK. Her research explores interfaith experiences and attitudes within UK education.

[c]Mathew Guest (m.j.guest@durham.ac.uk) is professor in the sociology of religion at Durham University, UK. His research focuses on the institutional contexts that frame religion within Western societies, and on the interface between religion and neoliberalism.

[d]Jeremy Law (Jeremy.law@canterbury.ac.uk) is dean of chapel at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. Alongside almost 30 years in university chaplaincy, his research examines the challenges contemporary questions pose for systematic theology.

Chaplains are embedded in the history, culture, and life of many universities across the globe, especially in institutions with a Christian history and chapel. The chaplaincy is often the first port of call for religious students arriving at university. Chaplains lead religious worship and run interfaith or social activities. Chaplains provide pastoral support and a listening ear, including to students who are nonreligious, international, or experiencing mental health crises. In the UK, the focus of this article, chaplains are in almost all universities, with an average university having around ten chaplains. Three or four of them are paid and the remainder are volunteers. Chaplains help the university respond to legal and policy challenges, which include ensuring equality and diversity and student safety and combatting extremism. University chaplaincies are often multifaith, including chaplains from a range of religious backgrounds, but who are most often led by a full-time Christian chaplain (Aune et al., 2019; Clines, 2008; Gilliat-Ray, 2000). Chaplains' religious affiliations rarely match the diversity of the students they work alongside; for example, Christian and Jewish chaplains overrepresent the number of Christian and Jewish students. Moreover, salaried chaplaincy roles are disproportionately held by Christians, while chaplains from minority religious groups are structurally disadvantaged; almost all Hindu, Sikh, Pagan, and Humanist chaplains are part-time volunteers.

The question explored in this article—how can chaplaincy be effective and meaningful for those working in and studying at universities?—is tied to other questions, including the sociological question of how social context shapes chaplaincy, and the theological question of how chaplains might help university students and staff enrich their religious and spiritual lives.

There has been limited social scientific research into chaplaincy in UK higher education (HE). Gilliat-Ray's (2000) milestone study observed that chaplains are positioned as the "expert" on religion within the university, gatekeepers to religious knowledge in relatively secular institutions. She observed that chaplains are not time-bound (tied to set hours), unlike other staff, but are willing to respond to needs as they arise. While chaplains' ethos is inclusive, Gilliat-Ray (p. 72) found that chaplaincy resources disproportionately favor Christian students. This finding reflects the late 1990s context when the research took place. Universities were increasingly attracting a religiously diverse student population, but chaplaincy resources had not caught up with this reality; our research shows how this situation has changed in subsequent years.

The role of the university chaplain has evolved in dialogue with cultural change across Western contexts throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. This change reflects how chaplains are embedded within institutional contexts—schools, hospitals, universities, the military—that are framed by secular values and the needs of shifting populations. They are called upon to serve a population defined by its contextualized pastoral needs, rather than its religious convictions (although there may be an overlap between the two). Within universities, this pattern has been reinforced by an inclination among chaplains toward liberal theological traditions, emphasizing social justice, progressive social reform and building inclusive communities, these priorities also assumed to be reflected in the values of students. Moreover, because a Christian template for the "chaplain" has been adopted and developed by other religious traditions, it has largely retained these associations, so that Muslim, Jewish, or Sikh chaplains, for example, are often expected to serve a similar set of priorities. Drawing on data from a national study of campus religious professionals in the United States, Schmalzbauer (2021) characterized the key roles of chaplains as campus prophets, spiritual guides, and interfaith traffic directors. These key roles map on to primary responsibilities undertaken by chaplains: the empowerment of social protest, the facilitation of individual spiritual formation (broadly conceived), and the enablement of interfaith dialogue within contexts of religious diversity.

An emphasis on serving the perceived social, moral, and spiritual needs of the inhabitants of university campuses was also found by Barton et al. (2020), who conducted interviews with U.S.-based university chaplains from a range of backgrounds. The emerging focus on "building bridges" and "community building"

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

underline a concern to find common cause and mutual understanding, while "tending to the soul of the university" as conceived as "creating space for students to wrestle with existential questions related to meaning, purpose, and ethics" (p. 79). The same research team analyzed a further 14 interviews to explore how nonreligious colleges and universities' institutional cultures shape multifaith chaplaincy (Van Stee et al., 2021a).

Similar values have emerged in studies of how students view the role of university chaplains. In the United States, Van Stee et al. (2021b) surveyed 1043 students from one institution to determine what factors influenced their engagement with chaplaincy services, and how this impacted their lives. Their finding that religious minority students were more likely than Christian students to be involved in chaplaincy activities suggests that universities in the global north may have become more effective in meeting the needs of religiously diverse groups since Gilliat-Ray's (2000) study. Indeed, this is reflected in her later work on Muslim chaplaincy in the UK (Gilliat-Ray et al., 2013; cf., Rajput, 2015). Possamai and Brackenreg's (2009) study of an Australian university found that students (many of them Muslim) used chaplaincy more to assist their individual practice of faith and less for group activities. Possamai et al.'s (2014) student focus group study found that chaplains' work—especially its contribution to student welfare—is valued but not paid for by universities, an arrangement they interpret through the lens of the "post-secular." The emerging picture is suggestive of a vocation that resists doctrinal specificity and fosters a disposition of unconditional service.

In her study of chaplaincy in the United States, Sullivan (2014) found a common orientation toward the chaplain's role, captured in the term "a ministry of presence." Identifiable across forms of chaplaincy—from military to hospital to university chaplains—this motif captures ideas of accompaniment, of simply "being there," especially in times of suffering or struggle. The chaplain is, first and foremost, a companion who embodies a distinctive religious presence oriented around care, support, and unconditional support to all who need it. The ministry of presence, according to Sullivan, derives its meaning from Christian traditions of sacramental and pietist theology, which stress incarnational immanence, of living out Christ's presence among the needy (Sullivan, 2014, pp. 177–181). But its emphasis upon practical service and indiscriminate care—rather than more instrumentalist interventions aimed at converting others—also enables its comfortable appropriation by other religious traditions and lend it a resonance with interfaith initiatives.

The present article analyzes interview data from chaplains, university managers, representatives of religious organizations, and students, collected for a study of the role and impact of university chaplains in the UK. It investigates the views of these parties on the role and effectiveness of university chaplaincy. Collecting perspectives from multiple stakeholders is useful in providing robust and triangulated findings and helps generate understanding of chaplaincies and universities as complex institutions, negotiating complex needs.

We formulate an analysis that, following Sullivan, reveals a variant of the "ministry of presence" distinctive to UK higher education. We call this "relational presence" because of the centrality of relationality and presence to our research participants' perceptions of good chaplaincy. "Relational presence" is about chaplains offering a presence that is more than simply "being there," but that seeks to connect with people, to build relationships, to build bridges and forge connections among individuals, groups, or institutions across what Forster-Smith (2013, p. xvii) called "secularity and the sacred." Relational presence involves being and relating across the human and the sacred; it involves embodying, recognizing, or connecting the sacred with the often seemingly secular university. It will look different in different settings, but might include, to use examples from Forster-Smith's (2013) volume of essays by chaplains in U.S. universities, creating interfaith dialogues, mentoring, helping students build bridges with and advocate for local migrant populations in trouble, creating a *bayit* (house, in Hebrew) for secular and religious Jewish students to celebrate festivals together or "creative loitering . . . making connection with someone" (Kugler, 2013, p. 14).

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

Framing Contexts of University Chaplaincy in the UK

University chaplaincy, and the "relational presence" we identify, operates not in isolation but in relation to the UK's wider cultural and religious context. In characterizing this context, we focus on three particular aspects: the UK's "three-dimensional" religious profile, its distinctive orientation to the public purpose of religion, theorized as "vicarious religion"; and young people's social and religious values, which shape a major part of university life. Together, these constitute contextual forces that influence how chaplaincy is conceived and practiced.

The Three-Dimensional Religious Context in the UK

Weller's (2005) depiction of the UK as a "three-dimensional" society in relation to religion—Christian, secular, and religiously plural—offers a useful framework. According to Weller, the UK's heritage is mainly Christian, its attitudes and organizations are predominantly secular, and it is increasingly religiously diverse, with significant Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and other smaller religious populations. These three dimensions are reflected in its HE sector, but with some qualifications.

The proportion of the UK population self-identifying as "Christian" has declined over recent decades. Different sources suggest different degrees of change but agree on the overall direction. For example, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey, between 1983 and 2018, the proportion of Britons identifying as Christian declined from 66 to 38%, the "nonreligious" increased from 31 to 52%, and the non-Christian religious population increased more than fourfold, from 2 to 9% (Voas & Bruce, 2019, p. 5). Christian decline has produced a situation in which the status of religion within the UK is ambiguous or unclear. Despite the decline in self-identification, Christian tradition continues to inform the nation's institutional life, undergirding its sense of shared memory. Christianity has also expanded in meaning as an identity marker, encompassing not just religious conviction and practice but also cultural identity, overlapping with expressions of Britishness (Day, 2013). Concurrently, long established minority communities—especially Hindus and Muslims who trace their heritage to the Indian subcontinent—display a distinctively British expression of religious pluralism. While these make up relatively small proportions at a national level, they are growing. Patterns of migration during the 1950s and 60s have led to high concentrations of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs within particular urban areas, communities now in their fourth or fifth generation and established within British culture. This cultural-religious diversity has been met with an uneven and troubled response over time, but in the 21st century, the recognition of a multicultural and multifaith Britain has made its way into government policy. A milestone was the Equality Act (Day, 2010), which lists "religion and belief" alongside eight other "protected characteristics," including race, disability, age, and sexual orientation.

The message of nondiscrimination conveyed by equality legislation is readily affirmed by universities, which often foreground an ethos of diversity and inclusion. This ethos of diversity and inclusion is not uncontested, however, and recent research has uncovered patterns of exclusion and prejudice—including gender-based, racially driven, and religiously focused—that challenge this popular image (Ahmed, 2012; Back, 2004; Phipps & Young, 2013; Scott-Baumann et al., 2020). Universities also share in the traditions of post-colonial hegemony that blight the histories of all of the UK's dominant institutions, a recognition that is inspiring critical and reparative initiatives across the higher education sector (Bhambra et al., 2018). The fact that resources for chaplaincy privilege Christian over non-Christian traditions reflects this power imbalance, and the historical relationships that uphold it. While the work of chaplains in the 21st century often pushes

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

back against this arrangement, there is no denying the Christian-centric scaffolding that still shapes the opportunities available to those working within this field.

Notwithstanding this post-colonial heritage, universities are culturally and religiously more diverse than the national UK population. In the 2018–2019 academic year (prior to being distorted by the COVID-19 pandemic), 32.6% of students at UK universities identified as Christian, 9.3% as Muslim, 2.5% as Hindu, 1.3% as Buddhist, 0.9% as Sikh, and 0.5% as Jewish. Another 3.2% identified with another religious or spiritual identity, while 49.9% said they had no religion (Advance HE, 2020, p. 220). In aggregate terms, while 9% of the population identify with a religion other than Christianity, the figure among students is 17.7%. This difference is in part attributable to differential age profiles among religious communities—for example, birth rates are notably higher among Muslims (Hussain & Sherif, 2014). It also reflects the presence of international students (between 10 and 15% undergraduates domiciled elsewhere than the UK, with much higher proportions among postgraduates—Advance HE, 2020, p. 18), many of them from parts of the world in which religion holds greater significance.

Our telephone interviews with lead chaplains at 99 universities, compared with Clines's similar research in 2007, revealed that chaplains are becoming more religiously diverse, reflecting to some degree the religious diversity of the student population (Table 1). From 2007 to 2017 there was a rise in the proportion of chaplains who are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Baha'i, humanist, interfaith, or Pagan. The Christian proportion fell from 70% to 63%.

Vicarious Religion

The UK's three-dimensional religious context includes a distinctive role for its Christian heritage, which demands special comment. Here we use Davie's concept of "vicarious religion" to capture what Christian heritage means for the UK population. Davie (2015) argued: "By vicarious is meant the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but appear to approve of what the minority is doing" (p. 6). Vicarious religion assumes a smaller group of religious "professionals," such as priests, Sunday school leaders or religious broadcasters, on behalf of a larger group, who count themselves as religious even though they leave most of the religious activities to others. Davie (2015) identified four characteristics of vicarious religion:

> churches and church leaders can perform ritual on behalf of others (at the time of a birth or a death for instance); if these services are denied, this causes offence—the more so amongst those who do not attend church with any regularity. Church leaders and churchgoers believe on behalf of others and incur criticism if they do not do this properly. Once again it is, very often, the occasional churchgoer who articulates this disquiet most clearly, and the more senior the church leader, the worse the problem gets. Third, church leaders and churchgoers are expected to embody moral codes on behalf of others, even when those codes have been abandoned by large sections of the populations they serve. Churches, finally, can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies (p. 6).

The concept of vicarious religion is not without its critics. Bruce and Voas (2010) are unpersuaded that nonreligious people using churches means that they appreciate the religious aspects: "non-churchgoers' appreciation of the secular utility of religious organizations is largely dependent on those activities being conducted in a secular spirit" (p. 254). Rather, they argue, the UK's primary religious trajectory is secularization. Davie (2010) responded that she intended the theory to apply not to everyone in the UK, but "to the religious habits of a section of the population that remains loosely attached to the mainstream

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

Table 1

The Religious Profile of UK University Chaplaincy, 2007 and 2017

Tradition	Number of HE chaplains in 2017	% Breakdown in 2017	% Breakdown in 2007
Christian	648	63	70
Muslim	98	10	7
Jewish	82	8	8
Buddhist	55	5	3
Hindu	39	4	3
Sikh	22	2	2
Baha'i	19	2	1
Other	68 (incl. 16 humanist, 14 interfaith, and 14 pagan)	7	6
Total	1,032	101 (due to rounding)	100

churches of Europe" (p. 262). Thus, vicarious religion can sit alongside trajectories such as the growth of nonreligion and minority religions linked to migration (Davie, 2007, 2010). Within the context of chaplaincy, vicarious religion becomes important because chaplains are often treated as custodians of this heritage and religious resource, as we will explore later on.

Young People's Values: The Importance of Relationality

The relational aspect of our term *relational presence* both emerges from our data and reflects a common observation in literature on young people's religious and social values. Recent scholarship has noted how young people coalesce around certain values, irrespective of their different religious traditions. In the United States, based on their survey research, Smith and Lundquist Denton (2005) coined the term *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* (MTD) to describe the religious perspective most common among young people. MTD is characterized by belief in a creator God who watches over humanity but is rarely involved in it; this God wants people to be happy and kind to each other. MTD's God can be accessed as needed, not center-stage: as one teenager interviewed said, "he doesn't talk back" (C. Smith, 2010, p. 43).[1] Smith argued that the tenets of MTD are often "mixed with elements of more traditional religious faiths" (C. Smith, 2010, p. 43) and are also found beyond the United States.

[1] The National Study of Youth and Religion team conducted four waves of surveys with the same group over 10 years, moving from mid-teens through the college and university years into "emerging adulthood." Later publications return to the concept of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Denton and Flory (2020) find this still to be relevant but the God they believe in has become more distant. They refer to the "back-pocket God": "MTD 2.0 is really more of the comfortable feeling that emerging adults have when they know their Pocket God is with them, close at hand but safely stowed out of sight" (Denton & Flory, 2020, p. 233).

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

In the UK, fewer young people identify as religious or practice religion, but similar patterns exist. Day interviewed 25 young people, asking what they believed, being no more specific and steering away from specifically discussing religion. She found they "are guided by social authority that they feel transcends religious authority" (Day, 2010, p. 102), and suggests this preference for social authority reflects a decline in racial prejudice and growing acceptance of religious plurality among younger people.[2] Tolerance of religious diversity was also found in the Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity surveys of 12,000 young people (Ap Siôn, 2017). Day (2010) identified "believing in belonging" as what young people most care about: close, authentic personal relationships with family and friends; Collins-Mayo et al.'s (2010) study echoed Day's findings The importance of relationships above religious affiliation also emerged in Australia: Mason (2010) found young people's Christian adherence had declined over the years, and young people prioritized close relationships with family and friends, helping other people, personal happiness, and care for the environment. Katz et al.'s (2021) *Gen Z, Explained* covered similar themes for the "digital age."

Methods

The project on which this analysis is based aimed to provide new empirical evidence about the role and efficacy of university chaplaincy across the UK and explore how perceptions of the purpose of chaplaincy differ across chaplains and HE stakeholders. The authors all work in universities: Aune, Peacock and Guest are in research and/or teaching roles, with academic backgrounds in theology or sociology of religion, while Law is the lead chaplain in his university. Aune is a mainstream Protestant Christian, Peacock is an agnostic who is unaffiliated with a religious tradition, Guest is a Quaker, and Law is an Anglican Christian. The project comprised two main stages: a national mapping exercise to identify university chaplains and faith advisors across the UK (resulting in telephone interviews with 374 chaplains), and case study research in five universities. The mapping exercise used questions adapted from Clines (2008) study, while the case study interview questions focused on the stakeholders' experiences of chaplaincy work, chaplains' relationships with those they worked with, and their attitudes and approaches to chaplaincy and its place in the university. These questions were crafted based on our understanding of themes in existing literature and Law's longstanding experience as a university chaplain. They are informed by an overall aim to map the work of chaplains and trace how this work is perceived and understood by different stakeholders, including chaplains themselves. This article analyzes data from the case studies.

The case study research comprised 55 interviews with chaplains and faith advisors, university managers (including senior management, student services staff, and students' union representatives), and representatives from local and national religious bodies responsible for oversight of university chaplaincy. Additionally, 188 undergraduate and postgraduate students who used chaplaincy services were surveyed. The universities—four in England and one in Scotland—were chosen to represent institutional diversity within UK HE, based on a typology developed by Guest et al. (2013) and building upon Gilliat-Ray's (2000) work. There was one "traditional elite" university (research-intensive with a history shaped by Christian tradition), one "red brick" university (established in the

[2] However, while a more recent analysis largely supports this, it points to a specific problem of prejudice against and hostility toward Muslims (Storm et al., 2017).

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

19th and early 20th centuries in major cities), one "1960s campus" university (established in the wake of the 1963 Robbins report, which endorsed expansion of the HE sector), one "post-1992" university (also known as "new" universities, generally previous polytechnics granted university status after 1992), and one "Cathedrals Group" university (a group of 16 founded in the 19th century as church colleges).

We recognize limitations to our methodology. Looking at our case study sample, compared to the national picture described in the literature (Advance HE, 2020, p. 220), Christian students were significantly overrepresented: 132 students (71% of our sample) told us they were raised in the Christian tradition; a much higher proportion than the 32.6% reported by Advance HE. While our Muslim population was generally representative of the UK picture, students from other religious traditions were underrepresented in the data. We recognize that our findings thus lack some student voices. Despite the universities we worked with promoting the survey online to all their students and, in some cases, chaplains encouraging students they worked with to complete it, our previous experiences researching universities led us to expect that students from minority backgrounds would be less likely to participate. If we were to repeat the research, we would do more to encourage nonreligious and minority religious students to participate in the survey, for example, by attending meetings of student organizations, religious and otherwise.

Survey and interview questions were designed to capture perceptions and experiences of chaplaincy from four groups' perspectives: university managers, chaplains, students, and religious organizations. Thematic analysis was conducted on the responses to several questions about what makes chaplaincy effective, what good chaplaincy looks like, and what works best about chaplaincy in their context. Data were coded using NVivo. The flexibility afforded by this analytical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) enabled us to identify between 30 and 40 codes relating to "good" and "effective" chaplaincy work. These codes were grouped to form five themes, each capturing an orientation to chaplaincy that assessed its value according to particular functions or benefits. These may be summarized as: (a) *Relational skills*, (b) *Presence*, (c) *Chaplains' religious role*, (d) *Working with the university*, and (e) *Supporting students*. Two comments, both from religious organizations, were initially categorized as a sixth theme, "long-term vision," but because these were just two short comments, they did not merit a separate theme. The *Relational skills* theme concerns the relational skills seen as underpinning chaplaincy: being approachable, open and nonjudgmental, and compassionate. *Presence* includes physical presence: availability, accessibility, and visibility. *Chaplains' religious role* concerns chaplains' work having explicitly religious content, including being open about their religious identity, running religious worship or activities, and providing religious guidance. *Working with the university* covers chaplains' working with other parts of the university, for example, with support services or participating in university committees. *Supporting students* covers responses about chaplains providing a social and pastoral service to students. However, while *Relational skills* and *Presence* were included in responses of all four groups, themes 3 to 5 were articulated only by certain groups. The overarching orientation to chaplaincy upon which all participants agree combines relational skills and presence. The next sections illustrate these two themes, and the third section illustrates the remaining themes.

Findings

Relational Skills Underpinning "Good" and "Effective" University Chaplaincy

Survey respondents and interview participants agreed that underpinning "good" chaplaincy work were relational skills, understood as being approachable, open, and nonjudgmental, and compassionate. These

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

descriptors were characteristic of the short survey responses many students gave when asked, "What would you say makes a good chaplain?" A typical response was "friendly, warm hearted, approachable" (Jewish, EU student,[3] traditional elite). This sentiment was mirrored by interview participants, who praised chaplains' ability to form relationships. Chaplains were described as "Friendly, welcoming, trustworthy" by a Cathedrals Group students' union officer, and a representative of a religious organization near a post-1992 university reflected, "What seems to make a difference is the chaplain's ability to form friendships that are warm and affectionate across a wide range of people."

For students, it was important that chaplains were open to faith traditions different from their own; typical survey responses described a good chaplain as "not biased, welcoming to all peoples of all faiths, ages, genders," and so forth (Muslim, home student, post-1992). Similarly, in response to a question on "what works best" about chaplaincy in their universities, over 40 students explicitly referenced an "openness," such as "The fact that it's open to anybody, even to somebody like me who does not have any faith" (nonreligious, international student, traditional elite), "open to all" (Muslim, home student, 1960s campus), and "It's completely nonjudgemental and open to absolutely everybody" (Christian, home student, red brick).

A 1960s campus disability support manager framed their description of "good chaplaincy work" around the notion of chaplaincy being "free":

> [A service] that is approachable, accessible in every sense of the word and free for all, and I don't mean free as in non-payment, I mean free as in anybody could go and anybody could talk to any chaplain, regardless of their faith, which is what we're trying to achieve.

Responses to the interview question "What makes chaplaincy effective?" mirrored this manager's description, with a national-level Muslim leader describing "the core of chaplaincy" as an "openness, to their own denomination [and] other faith communities." The 1960s campus university Roman Catholic chaplain described chaplaincy as a potentially transformative space where users become open to living and working alongside those from different religions:

> A good chaplaincy would be a place where lots of people can gather, and be together and get on with each other, support each other, and I think it's a place where people from different cultures and different faiths can be alongside each other and learn from each other.

A Methodist leader responsible for chaplaincy at a red brick university cautioned that such a transformative space necessitates a cohesive team of chaplains from different backgrounds, and flexibility on the part of the chaplain:

> any chaplain or faith advisors now need to be sympathetic to everybody . . . . You sit in a room as we do every six months, and [see] the Jewish chaplain and a Muslim chaplain, and a Catholic chaplain and the Anglican chaplains, and the Buddhists and the whole range, I think there are eighteen separate groups altogether, is an amazing thing to behold. [But] [t]hat does influence what the chaplains need to be because no longer can we afford to have a chaplain that's Methodist or Anglican or so on. When they're on site,

[3] In student quote attributions, the following terms are used to describe the location of students' permanent home addresses prior to studying at a UK higher education institution, with *home* students based in the UK, *EU* students based in the European Union, and *international* students based internationally in a non-EU country.

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

> they need to be sympathetic to everybody whatever their own traditions. Clearly there's a slight struggle between carrying their own rules and responsibilities but also being open to people.

He alludes to a tension between chaplains' own "rules and responsibilities" and their openness to others of different faiths. This reflects Gilliat-Ray's (2000) remark that as chaplains operate in an increasingly multifaith environment, they are expected to serve those beyond their own faith community, and Schmalzbauer's (2021) description of U.S. campus chaplains as "interfaith traffic directors" responsible for nurturing relationships between those with different religious backgrounds.

Compassion was a further aspect of the relational skills associated with good chaplaincy. A typical student survey response was "A good chaplain . . . understands to some degree the struggles and nature of student life in the modern day" (Christian, home student, red brick). Another student linked a chaplain's compassion to their role as a critical friend, describing a "good" chaplain as "Being kind, compassionate and open to listening. It can also mean telling people things they don't want to hear" (Christian, home student, traditional elite).

Chaplains recognized the integral role that compassion plays in relationship-building. A Cathedrals Group university Free Church chaplain reflected on their position as a "friend" to provide emotional support to students who were otherwise excluded from friendship groups:

> Chaplaincy is a lot of the time working with vulnerable people, it doesn't often attract the stable, the collected, because they have groups of friends that they hang out with. So you're living your life with these people and if you have to draw the line between friendship and chaplaincy that may be missing the point. That they can just be your friends for three years and then just disappear, I think that's okay.

University managers who communicated chaplains' effectiveness in terms of compassion tended to have a direct link with the student body. The students union president of the traditional elite university reflected:

> The personal touch, definitely . . . I think [of the chaplain] as an individual and the fact that when [the chaplain] offers support, it's not support of some random person or some student; it's [the chaplain's] own personal, "I will create an hour for you in my diary, and we can chat about whatever you want" . . . . [This] is very effective . . . .

Compassion, then, plays a fundamental role in relationship building, particularly between chaplains and students. Collectively, compassion, alongside being approachable, open, and nonjudgmental, were seen as underpinning the relational skills required for good chaplaincy. Moreover, chaplains' creation of space for open-ended dialogue is noteworthy in an institutional environment that has become more utilitarian and goal-oriented in recent years; this creation of space for open dialogue connects to the next theme, presence.

Presence as "Being There": Availability, Accessibility and Visibility

Alongside relational skills, all groups referred to "presence" as underpinning good and effective chaplaincy work. "Presence" was conceptualized as a physical presence, as simply "being there" for chaplaincy users and the wider university. We identified three key aspects to physical presence: availability, accessibility, and visibility.

Chaplains at the 1960s campus, Cathedrals Group and red brick universities referenced availability in response to the question "What makes chaplaincy effective?"

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

> I suppose availability and being known and being seen around for me would be the most important thing for a chaplain (Red brick, Anglican chaplain)
>
> I think it's … that our main job role is to be available to people. I think people are often surprised that … actually yes, we do have time, this is our job and I think sometimes students often laugh, "Surely it can't be your job to sit down and have a cup of tea with me," and I'm like, "Well, it actually kind of is" (Cathedrals Group, Methodist chaplain)

What makes a chaplain effective presupposes what you think a chaplain is and I will summarize it again in, you know, educative support and just being available to help. (Red brick, Jewish chaplain)

For an Anglican leader local to the red brick university, it is not just availability, but availability now that characterizes "effective" chaplaincy:

> I asked … our wonderful administrator, what she thought the answer was [laughter] and she's absolutely direct; it's availability and availability now because there are very, very few people in the university who are available now. So, availability [to] all staff and students … what most of them want is time and simply a sympathetic ear and there are not many in the university who can do that. Now, wellbeing is good, got lots of time for wellbeing [services] and the way it's set up, but they're overwhelmed.

Here, chaplaincy's instant availability distinguishes it from other university services. It is not just students who take advantage of this. The red brick university Head of Biology explained:

> From my personal experience of talking to colleagues […] being able to just go and see a chaplain was something that was absolutely key in helping them deal with what they were trying to deal with.

The conviction with which the participant spoke demonstrates the extent to which the immediacy of chaplaincy contact can be an integral element of staff support.

For students, access to chaplains and chaplaincy was key. In response to the question "what works best about chaplaincy at your university?" students simply referred to "Anyone can access it at any time" (Christian, international student, traditional elite) and "Their doors are always open for a chat if anyone needs it!" (Christian, home student, 1960s campus). Students appreciated the accessibility of physical space, praising "physical access and hours" (Christian, international student, traditional elite), and commenting on how the chaplaincy building is "easy to find and go to during a busy uni day" (Muslim, EU student, traditional elite).

Students especially appreciated chaplaincy-organized events and opportunities to socialize. Chaplaincy space was made available for religious student societies, faith-based activities, and nonfaith-based events, suggesting either that "effective" chaplaincy has broadened since Possamai and Brackenreg's (2009) finding that students use chaplaincy primarily for individual religious practice, or that the UK situation is different from Australia.

University managers echoed students' emphasis on accessibility. An academic registrar from the 1960s campus university, commenting on "what makes chaplaincy effective?" stressed accessibility whilst positioning chaplaincy as a university "service":

> I think it's ensuring that people of faith who require access to chaplaincy have it at the right time. It's part of the broader range of services that we offer is what I'd say, and making sure it's accessible and included but it's also not seen as something that people have to do.

For the Head of Student Support at the same university, accessibility extends to providing a range of faith representatives to whom students can be referred for "religious guidance" reflecting their

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

own religious identity. This manager described this provision using the language of "pathways," evoking widely held assumptions about the existence of channels of communication between chaplaincy and other student services. These responses raise questions of how "good" and "effective" chaplaincy is positioned alongside wider university service provision. We revisit these questions later.

Lastly, associated with availability and accessibility is visibility. Chaplains themselves recognized that to be perceived as approachable, they must be visible. For an Anglican chaplain at the 1960s campus university, walking their dog was a way to engage with students:

> I am an extrovert, but it's funny how it's easy to just stay in your office and actually not force yourself to go out and walk around. When I've got the dog, I have to … take [her] out and go for a walk. I do walk and talk … students can come and say, "Can I walk your dog with you?"

The post-1992 Sikh chaplain positioned visibility as a gateway through which students come to meet with chaplains:

> I think visibility is very important, I think, you know, once, once somebody actually meets any of the chaplains what, what kind of vibration, what kind of response are they getting from that and if it's very loving and very warm, it's not going to go far wrong.

Christian students especially appreciated chaplains' visible presence on campus. Typical answers to the question "What works best about chaplaincy in your university?" included "the chaplain is a very visible presence at university events, formal and informal" and "Open and obvious presence, but not obtrusive." These two students used chaplaincy weekly and monthly, respectively, so they might be expected to be more aware of their chaplain's campus presence. Others applauded chaplaincies' visible presence despite only using chaplaincy "occasionally" or "once or twice ever." These students praised "[the chaplaincy's] integration into student life—lunches, events, continuous presence," and "the involvement of the chaplain in student events. He is there and people recognize him as a religious man, but he does not push faith on students." In these cases, students liked chaplains to be present and visible, even if students chose not to interact with them.

The traditional elite university's director of student services admired the chaplain's physical visibility as a way for the chaplaincy to achieve "buy-in" from the wider university:

> [The chaplain] is physically visible apart from anything else which is helpful actually. But he has really worked very hard at making himself visible in a non-faith or a faith way. Otherwise, you wouldn't have that buy-in from everybody.

An Anglican leader local to the 1960s campus university similarly alluded to a profile-building agenda; the outcome was the creation and sustainability of student-focused initiatives. This leader described an "effective chaplain" as somebody who is "known and trusted by a whole range of people within the life of the university," someone who is a "confidante," "companion," an "initiator of projects." He referred to a successful series of international links initiated by a previous chaplain which have been developed and extended by the present one, student-focused projects that have helped give the chaplaincy a profile.

Visibility, then, achieves a twofold contribution: a physical yet discreet visibility on campus allows students to feel comfortable with chaplaincy, perhaps, being a form of vicarious religion, with chaplains performing campus-based religious duties on students' behalf, and explicit profile-building provides opportunities for chaplains to leverage support from university managers.

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

Additional Components of "Good" and "Effective" Chaplaincy: Chaplains' Religious Role, Working With the University, and Supporting Students

The findings so far represent general consensus: relational skills and presence are key components of "good" and "effective" chaplaincy work for all groups. However, three themes arose from the data that were only articulated by certain groups: chaplains' religious role, working with the university, and supporting students.

Despite chaplains' religious role being a comparatively small theme, it was very important to some students, chaplains and religious organizations, but less to university managers. Students, when asked, "What would you say makes a good chaplain?" expressed that they valued the fact that chaplains had religious integrity. For Christian students, the chaplain must be someone "who is not afraid to be honest and speak boldly about the Gospel, but who will do so with sensitivity" (Christian, home student, Cathedrals Group). Chaplains should be "able to provide services to students of any faith or lack thereof while staying true to their usually specific religious beliefs" (Christian, home student, traditional elite). Ultimately, chaplains "must also have faith" (Christian, home student, traditional elite). Here, the chaplain offers something distinct from other university services.

Students valued the religious nature of the pastoral support chaplains provided. Asked "what works best about chaplaincy in your university?" students emphasized that "professional services may not share one's religious faith-based assumptions" (Christian, EU student, traditional elite).

There were anomalies. One student said that what "works best" about chaplaincy was when "The chaplain and the chaplaincy do not present themselves as Christian or religious in front of students in many cases (I guess literally all cases except church services) but merely a supporting department of the University." Notably, this student identified as "not religious, but spiritual." The responses above that commended chaplains' religious integrity and religious guidance were exclusively from Christian students, who appeared more comfortable using overt religious language than were students from other backgrounds.

Chaplains and religious organization representatives used similar language to the Christian students. The Anglican Bishop advising the Cathedrals Group university acclaimed chaplains' religious integrity as integral to mission:

> We're in a situation where confessional adherence is very slender . . . . there is a sense in which one purpose of our chaplains is to commend the faith and that simply being there loitering with intent is not sufficient. I think therefore good chaplaincy is something where the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel is manifest, it doesn't have to be preached, and it certainly doesn't have to be proselytized, but is evident and visible, not in the sense of a man with a dog collar sitting in a refectory, but in the sense of a community which is behaving differently.

A Buddhist chaplain at the traditional elite university valued staff and students' desire for authentic religious and spiritual guidance:

> [Good chaplaincy means] I suppose being able to offer something that helps enhance a sense of wellbeing in staff and students, that comes not from the perspective of psychiatry or medicine or those kinds of professional avenues, but from the perspective of the particular religious or philosophical position and practice [of a chaplain] and I think that's what differentiates it from those other services, wellbeing, and student support and so on.

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

These reflections uphold theological models of chaplaincy, supporting M. Smith's (2015) argument that chaplaincy's service must be inherently theological to distinguish it from university well-being provision.

Indeed, the Church of England national representative encapsulates the sentiment:

> What makes chaplaincy effective is firstly the integrity of the chaplain as a person of genuine faith, who loves and understands the institution which they serve. And I deliberately phrase it that way because ineffective chaplains and ineffective chaplaincy … is so concerned to be part of the institution that they forget that they are there as what [Archbishop] Ramsey used to call, "a representative Christian person," that they have a representative role, they embody the faith community which they come from … people become so embedded in the institution itself, they cease to have any religious function whatsoever.

Chaplains' religious role was rarely recognized by university managers when asked what makes chaplaincy "good" or "effective." Rather, managers position chaplaincy as a service provider. The *Working with the university* theme was articulated by managers and religious organizations. At the 1960s campus university, the students union officer said, "there should be representatives from the chaplaincy at working committees," committees about students' experiences and mental health. Religious organizations emphasized moving beyond focusing on the immediate needs of individuals to serving the university's wider needs. A Roman Catholic Bishop, who was supporting and advising a Cathedrals Group university, said, "Good chaplaincy is … where there is a vision that chaplaincy is not simply about student pastoral care, it is perhaps a vision of service to the whole university community."

Managers were also keen to see chaplaincy work captured within a clear and explicit framework, especially with respect to student welfare. Some felt the absence of a clear framework contributed to uncertainty about what the function of chaplaincy is. The head of welfare at the red brick university framed "supporting students" as providing clear social and pastoral support initiatives. When asked, "What needs to be done" to enable effective chaplaincy, they responded,

> Good hospitality, a good center, lots of social support, pastoral care initiatives, which could range from meals to lectures on how to look after yourself … . I just … don't feel it's in a coherent framework. What's the key vision for the service? For my service I know I want to do preventative work, I want to do promotional work, I want to do interventions. So I've got three strands of provision. I don't know what their strands of provision would be. If they just came up with a framework and a model and then delivered on it to those areas we would all understand it.

These statements echo Robinson's (2004) "student services" model of chaplaincy, in which the chaplain is "primarily a pastoral resource" operating under clear objectives and "directly accountable" to the university (p. 42). They contrast with the theological language employed by those for whom chaplains' religious role is significant.

The religious organization representatives highlighted that chaplains' awareness of other groups' expectations and agendas may be just as important in enabling effective chaplaincy. According to the Anglican bishop overseeing the 1960s campus, "our understanding is that we are there to serve the university and chaplaincy has that kind of service element to it." However, he emphasized that "We are wanting to serve the institution. But, at the same time, we're in a constant conversation with the institution not just about chaplaincy, and I think that's really important." The recognition that chaplains' unique perspective can enhance university-wide conversation again reflects a student services model of chaplaincy that "does not take away from the religious functions of the chaplain" (Robinson, 2004, p. 43) but positions chaplaincy as primarily user-oriented.

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

Similarly, the Church of England national representative recognized that chaplains may utilize a student services model of chaplaincy to navigate their institutions and satisfy their own agendas:

> They're institutionally smart, they learn how the organization works, they understand that most universities are really large complex entities and [the importance of] being well informed about how things work, who you need to speak to in order to get things done, what really concerns people at different levels.

The previous section described chaplains capitalizing on their visibility, and we see it again here; a strategic adoption of chaplaincy as a student service may help chaplains "get things done" without compromising their religious integrity. Being "institutionally smart" is not just a matter of knowledge but also of location. The chaplain's position among and across university structures empowered them to speak into spaces not readily available to others. It also reflected the confidence in which many chaplains were held because of their capacity to navigate complex institutions.

This section has illustrated various expectations of "good" and "effective" chaplaincy. While chaplains' religious role remained integral to chaplains and some students who employed language echoing theological models of chaplaincy, managers' aspirations for chaplaincy reflected a student services model in which chaplains worked alongside university support services as a pastoral and well-being provider. The religious organization representatives argued, however, that chaplains, as "institutionally smart," had the potential to navigate managers' expectations and take advantage of their position as service providers whilst retaining a religious role.

Discussion: University Chaplaincy as Relational Presence

The support we found, among all groups concerned with chaplaincy, for what we call "relational presence," reflects university chaplaincy's social context. Students, chaplains, university managers, and religious organizations all believe that relational skills—being approachable, open and nonjudgmental, and compassionate—underpin "good" chaplaincy. They also referred to presence as underpinning "good" and "effective" chaplaincy work. Presence is about physical presence, "being there" for chaplaincy users and the wider university. It has three aspects: availability, accessibility, and visibility. As Sullivan (2014) noted, presence is a key theme in theological literature on chaplaincy, connected to theology of incarnation. Dunlop (2017) identified presence, which she called "being there," as a key way in which UK-based chaplains in all sectors can understand their role in the public sphere. Williams (2018) explored chaplaincy as "accompanying presence," with chaplains "in relationship both with the university, with the individual student, and with God" (p. 19). Presence as a theological concept may or may not have overlapped with the conceptions of presence held by our participants. However, whatever nuance "presence" has, there was a conjunction between what chaplains sought to offer and what chaplaincy's stakeholders saw and received as important about chaplaincy. Sullivan observed something similar in the United States among chaplains in diverse sectors. Chaplaincy as ministry of presence is "religion stripped to the basics" in contexts where proselytism is discouraged or proscribed, but it also carries a Christian influence: "it both resists specific theological elaboration and is deeply rooted in a specifically Christian theology of the Incarnation" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 174).

Relational presence is an approach to chaplaincy that emerged from our research with chaplains, students, university managers, and religious organizations. In the relatively secular context of UK higher education, relational presence is an approach that goes beyond "being there" and seeks to build relationships through which the sacred and human can connect.

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

Relational presence, we argue, reflects the UK's three-dimensional religious landscape, which involves religion being regarded as vicarious, and reflects the values of the young people in universities. Thus, chaplaincy is not, or not only, religiously distinctive, but it reflects its wider social context.

Chaplaincy reflects the changing religious landscape. It remains majority Christian, with acknowledgment of nonreligious beliefs via Humanist chaplains and of religious pluralism via Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and pagan chaplains. University chaplaincy is often organized around a multifaith model, where volunteer chaplains of many faiths serve under the auspices of a full-time coordinating chaplain who is often Anglican. Therefore, chaplaincy is simultaneously predominantly Christian and multifaith.

What does the three-dimensional religious context have to do with the notion of chaplaincy as relational presence? A great deal, we believe. Relational presence has a logic reflective of the three-dimensional religious context. Chaplaincy today must recognize this context: it cannot anymore just be Christian; it must serve nonreligious and differently religious students and staff. Yet it remains structurally Christian: nearly two-thirds of university chaplaincy roles are occupied by Christians, and almost all lead or coordinating chaplain roles are Christian (Aune et al., 2019). Chaplaincy also operates in universities that have a Christian heritage—this is most true for the traditional elite and Cathedrals Group institutions, but it is so to some extent for the other three university types. The history of the UK reinforces an inherited sense of Christian hegemony, reflected in the organizational advantages Christian chaplains enjoy compared to their non-Christian colleagues. But the three-dimensional religious context requires a form of chaplaincy that caters for all students and staff, and relationality and presence are themes common to the diverse religious and nonreligious worldviews young people hold.

University chaplaincy operates in a way that connects with Davie's four aspects of vicarious religion. First, in relation to churches "perform[ing] ritual on behalf of others," it runs regular acts of worship open to all students, but with very few attending. Over 80% of the 99 lead chaplains interviewed said their university chaplaincy ran at least one weekly act of Christian worship, for example, an Anglican Eucharist or Catholic Mass; three-quarters said an imam or Muslim chaplain led weekly Friday prayers. Chaplains often lead prayers at graduation or celebrate religious festivals. These acts of worship are valued by students irrespective of whether they attend them. When asked, "What works best about chaplaincy in your university?," a traditional elite university international student responded, "the daily morning prayer," but indicated that they had only engaged with chaplaincy "once or twice ever." A home student at the red brick university described their relationship with the chaplaincy as "nonexistent" yet said that what works best about chaplaincy is the "structured services." For these students, chaplains perform religion on their behalf; they value this.

Second, as for churchgoers and leaders "believ[ing] on behalf of others and incur[ring] criticism if they do not do this properly," this partly relates to our findings on the importance of chaplains' religious role and religious integrity. We did not hear students criticize chaplains for not expressing the religious aspect of their role; we did observe students appreciating the religious identity of the chaplain, not just their pastoral or welfare role.

Third, in relation to churches being "expected to embody moral codes on behalf of others, even when those codes have been abandoned by large sections of the populations they serve," students expect chaplains to embody moral codes, but these codes are changing. Today's students want nonjudgmental, approachable, inclusive chaplains with communication skills, rather than chaplains upholding traditional moral codes concerning sexuality and marriage, as an older generation would have expected. Students'

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc

moral codes are embedded in university governance through the 2010 Equality Act prohibiting discrimination and harassment on the grounds of "protected characteristics" such as sex, race, and sexual orientation.

Finally, chaplains "can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies." While Davie referenced public debates on sexuality, which is not what is going on within chaplaincies, we did observe chaplaincy acting as a forum for navigating social conflicts and tensions. Chaplains in their interfaith work sought to intervene by forging relationships between student religious and ethnic groups who often self-segregated. As the Muslim national representative said, chaplains provide a space for debate not present in mosques: "chaplains can help young people, guide them, not to go to extreme, this is the place where they can be open to debate and discussion; mosque[s] will not allow that." The assistant Roman Catholic chaplain at the post-1992 university made a similar point. However, debates organized by chaplaincies were generally not well attended.

As Davie (2015, p. 78) noted, vicarious religion is a concept most relevant to those with a residual connection to the established church and less likely to be found among younger generations. However, Collins-Mayo et al. (2010) found the concept still somewhat relevant for "Generation Y," especially those facing their own or family members' death or points of crisis (Davie, 2015, pp. 84–88). Given that the students turning to chaplaincy often do so because they needed support at times of vulnerability (Aune et al., 2019), perhaps chaplaincy emerges as a key remaining example of vicarious religion among the UK's younger generation.

Implications

There are many religious—and, increasingly, spiritual but nonreligious—understandings of and approaches to chaplaincy. Relational presence is just one that we offer based on our analysis and reflection on university chaplaincy in the UK. We offer this concept as one that may help chaplains, faculty, and student affairs professionals to reflect on and develop their work, one that may help them to understand what students and university managers most value about their role.

The concept of relational presence can help preserve the integrity of chaplains' self-identity. The one defining aspect of a chaplain is that they both inhabit and represent a particular religious or belief tradition; they stand for something. Their appointment will depend on demonstrating such a connection, and their public identity will commonly derive from it. And yet, as we demonstrate, though a chaplain's integrity of belief is important to some, for most within the different constituencies we interviewed, what makes chaplains "good and effective" is a range of other attributes, foremost being relational skills and presence. In the potential tug between personal identity and perceived relevance to the university, we commend the notion of relational presence as a description of chaplains' work and value precisely as one through which chaplains can creatively explore this tension. Relational presence is capable of being grounded in a range of theological and philosophical beliefs. For example, in the Christian tradition this is likely to be via the notions of Trinity and incarnation. Yet these convictions are mediated in practice through the experience of being human, of being present with and for others, through availability, accessibility, and visibility. Thus, relational presence can hold together the sacred (the particular of being set apart through an identifying tradition) with the secular (the common human experience of desiring relational flourishing in the world). In other words, relational presence can mediate both identity

  http://journals.naspa.org/jcc doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

and effectiveness. For similar reasons, it can serve as an orienting structure for interfaith dialogue, a common value and a means of furthering a conversation.

Utilizing the conception of relational presence would enable managers of chaplaincy to more authentically comprehend the motivations and identity of chaplains. This is because, while being visible within managers' preferred perspective of a "student services" model, relational presence cannot be exhaustively understood within this framework. Rather, it pushes beyond the category of performance to embrace the notion of gift. Chaplaincy is not just a way of delivering a particular utility that universities require and value. But before this, and above this, chaplaincy constitutes the gift of the relational presence of a particular tradition of wisdom that aims to enhance life. Chaplaincy does not necessarily, therefore, easily accommodate itself to the contemporary notion of performance management; it speaks a different language.

Relational presence captures what students (and staff) deserve from their chaplains. They require someone approachable who shares their basic set of values, yet they warrant a genuine dialogue partner who offers more than an echo chamber for their own views. Thus, in mediating identity and relevance, relational identity also brings within accessible reach of students a nonjudgmental but alternative way of viewing themselves and the world.

Chaplaincy as relational presence can be adopted in a variety of contexts, but its highest realization entails certain resources. Attractive physical plant, close to high footfall areas, not only provides space for encounter but acts as a sign of chaplaincy presence. The wherewithal for imaginative engagement with social media is advantageous. But the most important resource is time. The practice of relational presence requires investment; it cannot be achieved through snatched sporadic episodes. Given the distribution of resources between different faith and belief traditions, previously highlighted, this has significant equality implications.

The notion of relational presence represents a common currency of exchange concerning the value and effectiveness of chaplaincy because it emerges from the relational skills and presence that were recognized as of worth by each of the constituencies we interviewed. Potentially intelligible to and appreciated by all concerned with university chaplaincy, relational presence constitutes a common ground on which those with varying perspectives and beliefs can meet in profitable dialogue. Ultimately the value of relational presence as a concept will be tested contextually, as chaplains and others engage with it.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Advance HE. (2020). *Equality and higher education: Students statistical report 2020*. https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2020.

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Ap Siôn, T. (2017). Seeing how we see each other: Learning from quantitative research among young people in the UK. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, *38*(3), 305–317. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2017.1317524

Aune, K., Guest, M., & Law, J. (2019) *Chaplains on campus: Understanding chaplaincy in UK universities*. Coventry University, Durham University & Canterbury Christ Church University. https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/publications/chaplains-on-campus-understanding-chaplaincy-in-uk-universities

Back, L. (2004). Ivory towers? The academy and racism. In I. Law, D. Phillips, & L. Turney (Eds.), *Institutional racism in higher education* (pp. 1-16). Trentham Books.

Barton, R., Cadge, W., & van Stee, E. G. (2020). Caring for the whole student: How do chaplains contribute to campus life? *Journal of College and Character*, *21*(2), 67–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2020.1741392

Bhambra, G., Gebrial, D., & Nişancıoğlu, K. (2018). *Decolonising the university*. Pluto Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Bruce, S., & Voas, D. (2010). Vicarious religion: An examination and critique. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, *25*(2), 243–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537901003750936

Clines, J. (2008). *Faiths in higher education chaplaincy: A report commissioned by the Church of England Board of Education*. Church of England Board of Education.

Collins-Mayo, S., Mayo, B., & Nash, S. (2010). *The faith of generation Y*. Church House Publishing.

Davie, G. (2007). Vicarious religion: A methodological challenge. In N. T. Ammerman (Ed.), *Everyday religion: Observing modern religious lives* (pp. 21–35). Oxford University Press.

Davie, G. (2010). Vicarious religion: A response. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, *25*(2), 261–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537901003750944

Davie, G. (2015). *Religion in Britain: A persistent paradox* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Day, A. (2010). Believing in belonging": An exploration of young people's social contexts and constructions of belief. In S. Collins-Mayo & P. Dandelion (Eds.), *Religion and youth* (pp. 97–103). Ashgate.

Day, A. (2013). *Believing in belonging: Belief and social identity in the modern world*. Oxford University Press.

Denton, M. L., & Flory, R. (2020). *Back-pocket God: Religion and spirituality in the lives of emerging adults*. Oxford University Press.

Dunlop, S. (2017). Is 'being there' enough? Explorations of incarnational missiology with chaplains. *Practical Theology*, *10*(2), 174–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1291228

Forster-Smith, L. (Ed.). (2013). *College & university chaplaincy in the 21st century: A multifaith look at the practice of ministry on campuses across America*. SkyLight Paths Publishing.

Gilliat-Ray, S. (2000). *Religion in higher education: The politics of the multi-faith campus*. Ashgate.

Gilliat-Ray, S., Ali, M., & Pattison, S. (2013). *Understanding Muslim chaplaincy*. Ashgate.

Guest, M., Aune, K., Sharma, S., & Warner, R. (2013). *Christianity and the university experience: Understanding student faith*. Bloomsbury.

Hussain, S., & Sherif, J. (2014). Minority religions in the census: The case of British Muslims. *Religion*, *44*(3), 414–433. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2014.927049

Katz, R., Ogilvie, S., Shaw, J., & Woodhead, L. (2021). *Gen Z, explained: The art of living in a digital age*. University of Chicago Press.

Kugler, S. (2013). My dreamsicle job: Good humor and becoming a chaplain. In L. Forster-Smith (Ed.), *College & university chaplaincy in the 21st century* (pp. 3–15). SkyLight Paths Publishing.

Mason, M. (2010). The spirituality of young Australians. In S. Collins-Mayo & P. Dandelion (Eds.), *Religion and youth* (pp. 55–62). Ashgate.

Phipps, A., & Young, I. (2013). *That's what she said: Women students' experiences of "lad culture" in higher education*. National Union of Students.

Possamai, A., & Brackenreg, E. (2009). Religious and spirituality diversity at a multi-campus suburban university: What type of need for chaplaincy? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *31*(4), 355–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600800903191989

Possamai, A., Sriprakash, A., Brackenreg, E., & McGuire, J. (2014). Chaplaincies in a "post-secular" multicultural university. *Fieldwork in Religion*, *9*(2), 147–165. https://doi.org/10.1558/firn.v9i2.16454

Rajput, A. H. (2015). The role of Muslim chaplains in higher education: Should they be doing what they are doing? *Practical Theology*, *8*(3–4), 227–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2015.1126688

Robinson, S. (2004). *Ministry among students: A pastoral theology and handbook for practice*. Canterbury Press Norwich.

   doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573

Schmalzbauer, J. (2021). Campus prophets, spiritual guides, or interfaith traffic directors? The many lives of college and university chaplains. *Journal of College and Character*, *22*(2), 156–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2021.1898984

Scott-Baumann, A., Guest, M., Naguib, S., Cheruvallil-Contractor, S., & Phoenix, A. (2020). *Islam on campus: Contested identities and the cultures of higher education in Britain*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, C. (2010). On "moralistic therapeutic deism" as US teenagers' actual, tacit, de facto religious faith. In S. Collins-Mayo & P. Dandelion (Eds.), *Religion and youth* (pp. 41–46). Ashgate.

Smith, C., & Lundquist Denton, M. (2005). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, M. (2015). Does university Christian chaplaincy need a theology? *Practical Theology*, *8*(3–4), 214–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2015.1127551

Storm, I., Sobolewska, M., & Ford, R. (2017). Is ethnic prejudice declining in Britain? Change in social distance attitudes among ethnic majority and minority Britons. *British Journal of Sociology*, *68*(3), 410–434. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12250

Sullivan, W. F. (2014). *A ministry of presence: Chaplaincy, spiritual care, and the law*. University of Chicago Press.

van Stee, E. G., Cadge, W., & Barton, R. (2021a). How do colleges and universities support multifaith chaplaincy? The causes and effects of different institutional approaches. *Journal of College and Character*, *22*(2), 134–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2021.1898981

van Stee, E. G., Winfield, T. P., Cadge, W., Schmalzbauer, J., Steinwert, T., Rambo, S., & Clifford, E. (2021b). Assessing student engagement with campus chaplains: A pilot study from a residential liberal arts college. *Journal of College and Character*, *22*(3), 215–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2021.1939721

Voas, D., & Bruce, S. (2019). Religion: Identity, behaviour and belief over two decades. In J. Curtice, E. Clery, J. Perry, M. Phillips, & N. Rahim (Eds.), *British social attitudes: The 36th report* (pp. 1–28). The National Centre for Social Research.

Weller, P. (2005). *Time for a change: Reconfiguring religion, state and society*. T&T Clark.

Williams, R. C. (2018). *A theology for chaplaincy: Singing songs in a strange land*. Grove Books.

doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2023.2224573 http://journals.naspa.org/jcc