



# Report from **Synod Chaplaincy Commission**

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## Context

Chaplaincy is a community-centred form of ministry. This means it needs to be entrepreneurial and flexible to respond to the changing and emerging needs of the community.

The focus of the Chaplaincy Commission in the last 18 months has been on developing innovative strategies to reimagine and redesign the way we meet as a committee and the goals and aspirations of the commission.

We used the *Together on the way* process of the Queensland Synod as our guiding framework for the development of chaplaincy services in Queensland. Our planning and strategic thinking was captured into the following goals:

- Organised for mission
- Leadership
- Working for Christian unity
- Engaged in authentic community relationships
- Reaching out and speaking for justice and peace
- Confident in sharing faith.

# Our identified priorities

Response to the identified priorities of the 31st Synod:

## **Worship gatherings that can include people who have never attended worship or belonged with church**

This is the mission field of chaplaincy services.

We gather in community across a range of different contexts and with a range of different people, many of whom have little or no faith. However, the stories of chaplaincy are stories of how worship occurs in the most unexpected and unlikely places. From the weekly gathering of a congregation of 30 people in an aged care home, to the biannual services recognising the grief and lament of people who have lost a newborn child.

Worship gatherings take place where and when the context requires. Worship is part of beginnings and endings, and celebrations along the way. Worship needs to be accessible, easy to attend for those unused to the language and culture of church, and with a focus on themes appropriate to the setting.

## **Making faith sharing a priority for the Uniting Church**

In agency settings, the nature of chaplaincy is the sharing of faith through the ministry of presence and deed. We find that people long for the places and spaces that can be provided that allow them to grapple with the nature of life and death.

Chaplains share faith with staff, clients and patients and their families. As a result, ministry in a public setting is an extraordinary opportunity to witness appropriately to the love of Christ.

The demand for these services across the community has not diminished.

## **Church planting**

We have established a new chaplaincy service at the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital, and another is about to commence in an industrial setting, the Wesley Linen Service Laundry. Chaplaincy in Indigenous settings continues to grow.

## **Developing church planters – pioneers and entrepreneurs**

Those who exercise ministry in a chaplaincy setting find themselves in locations that demonstrate high levels of organisational capacity and a commitment to providing the best service possible to clients with the resources at hand. Most chaplains are able to properly navigate their way through appropriate governance structures and models. A focus on future training and leadership in the chaplaincy area will better capture these organisational gifts for the benefit of the wider church.

## **Holy Spirit as defibrillator**

What an apt metaphor for hospital chaplaincy! Chaplaincy works as a team within our agency settings. We never walk alone but work and find the Spirit leading in all contexts.

## **Formation for ministry**

We regularly provide support services and mentoring for those who are undertaking their POD. Potential chaplains who complete the Certificate 4 in Pastoral Ministry may find that these steps are the first on the pathway to pastor and ordained ministry studies.

## **Resource sharing urban/rural**

Chaplaincy services tend to be funded by the host industry. This means we need to be creative in looking for the sources of funds to support chaplains. We work with agencies across Queensland to try to bring a ministry presence to communities through a range of different means. Creative partnerships between agencies and congregations provide extra ministry presence in smaller communities.

## **Children, youth, young adults and family ministry as a priority**

We have chaplaincy services in schools across the state. In addition new chaplaincy opportunities have been developed into the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital and Shalom Christian College in Townsville.

# Report

As a commission in the last 18 months we determined to properly direct our funding toward new missional opportunities and to try to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the community.

Our commitment as a commission was to be future-looking; make sure our meetings were prayer-filled, maintain strong liaisons with other parts of the church, appropriately oversee training and development opportunities, develop the appropriate structure for the commission to allow for agility, and plan and use technology effectively to implement our marketing strategy.

To assist us to do this, we made a submission to the general secretary to reinstate the funding for a chaplaincy executive officer, whose role it is to provide executive support to the Chaplaincy Commission, undertake specific projects, manage chaplains, and develop and drive innovation to fulfil the strategic intent of the commission. This funding was successful and we recruited the Rev Keren Seto into the role in March 2016.

Our commission structure has undergone some review with the retirement of several longstanding members, and the recruitment of different people to fulfil our regulatory obligations. This process is still in train.

Training options for chaplains are growing, with Trinity College Queensland providing many online and distance learning options through its digital learning platform.

Another challenge for on-the-ground chaplains has been to work within rapidly changing environments. Almost 50 chaplains work as part of UnitingCare Queensland in aged care, hospital and community service settings. UnitingCare Queensland is undergoing a significant restructure which will continue across the next year, providing a sense of uncertainty in the various services. In such a climate, chaplains provide invaluable support for staff, residents and families in their respective settings.

## **Key achievements/initiatives**

- Recruiting Keren Seto, who brings vast experience to the role of executive officer
- Looking for opportunities in new settings.

## Challenges/risks as we progress

Part-time work: most organisations fund part-time work for chaplains, and for some of these chaplains the percentage FTE is very small. Some chaplains are assisted to create a more substantial or even full-time role, but this means they are providing services across a range of facilities, making prioritisation difficult

Peer support: most chaplains work alone and this can lead to isolation and potentially lack of cross-fertilisation with new ideas and means of working, especially in a time of rapid change and dynamism in the work environment. It can be difficult to find occasions for chaplains to meet together and find support and new learnings.

## Issues to be addressed

- Addressing chaplaincy approaches in theological training for ordained and non-ordained ministries
- Adding leadership and facilitation skills to chaplaincy training.

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