CREATING PLACES OF WELCOME:
PASTORAL CARE AND WORSHIP IN A MULTIFAITH SOCIETY

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The Wake Forest University School of Divinity identifies expertise in the multi-faith contexts of ministry as one of its foundational educational goals:

“Through theological reflection, critical inquiry, and ministry formation, the school encourages students to explore diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic perspectives within both national and international contexts. To ensure the fulfillment of this goal, all M.Div. students are required to take at least one course in a non-Christian religion.”

Our goal for this grant was to develop curricular “opportunities for students to practice ministry in multifaith contexts and so to engage in practice and reflection on the Christian ideal of love of the stranger” (from the grant proposal). In the project, we focused on two pastoral practices—pastoral care and worship—as focal points to accomplish this goal. Two M.Div. courses—multi-cultural clinical pastoral education and a worship course on liturgy and sacred time—were designed to attend specifically to the questions of how we conceive and practice Christian ministry, and so offer Christian hospitality, in multifaith contexts.

Activities Funded by the Grant

• Guest presentations in the two courses: Drs. Jensen and Crainshaw each incorporated into their respective courses presentations by academic and community leaders who encounter in their work issues of Christian hospitality in multifaith contexts. Students also had opportunities to meet with and/or hear presentations from Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist religious leaders. Faculty working group: Drs. Crainshaw and Jensen met on several occasions with persons on the faculty who also address in their courses and scholarly work issues of multifaith contexts. The aim was to ensure that integration of multi-faith perspectives and practices of Christian ministry were incorporated in the design of the courses and were not simply add-ons.

• Visits by classes to multifaith sites for contextualized learning about diverse worship practices.

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Community luncheon: At an end-of-semester luncheon, students and faculty from both courses discussed their learnings about Christian hospitality and the practices of pastoral care and worship in a multifaith society. Respondents included School of Divinity faculty members and a Medical School staff person.

Resources: Faculty leaders recognized early in the grant period that the school and medical center lack adequate resources for multifaith spiritual care and worship planning. Grant funds were used to purchase resources for future use and to provide individual CPE students with a text, *Interfaith Spiritual Care*, that had been useful them in their work and learning.

What We Learned (what worked and what didn’t work)

In the case of chaplain interns doing CPE, we multiplied the effect of the grant activities by pairing some presentations and activities with chaplain residents at the medical center, and inviting others from the medical center to attend. For example, we brought in a local rabbi for a Sukkoth service and opened it to the medical center community. As another example, we brought in a local imam to make a presentation on pastoral care with Muslim patients/families. The grant made funds available to pay these persons. Also, having a Buddhist student in the CPE intern group enhanced the experience in manifold ways. This student had fine capacities for dialogue and feedback. In the second semester, we were able to purchase books on interfaith spiritual care. Chaplain interns made presentations on chapters they selected. Two things were effective: 1) students became teachers, not just passive recipients or responders; 2) students grappled and found anchoring within their own faith tradition for hospitality as value and skill. In the CPE intern class, the capacity to reflect on actual interfaith encounters enhanced learning, moving it from the theoretical to the concrete, from theological values to ministry skills.

In the case of Divinity students enrolled in a course focused on “worship in sacred time,” most effective were student discussions generated by course topics, assignments, and readings that 1) introduced in very basic ways non-Christian religious calendars, 2) invited student dialogue about how Christians can be good hosts and guests in multifaith contexts, and 3) encouraged students to reflect together about how to maintain a Christian identity while showing hospitality and welcome to those whose identity is different. Grant funds enabled us to invite several guest lecturers to visit the course. Students responded favorably to presentations provided by a Jewish colleague (and professor at the North Carolina School of the Arts) who discussed with students her experience of practicing her faith in a predominantly Christian society, and by a...
local clergy person whose scholarly work emphasizes embodying world religions. Students were encouraged through a course assignment to visit several non-Christian worship places. Also, funds were used for the professor to travel to hear students in the course who were preaching sermons in local internship settings. Because the course emphasized religious calendars and because we were liturgically in the Christian season of Lent and the Jewish season of Passover, student worship services and sermons generated lively theological discussions about Christian identity and core beliefs as they relate to differing religious beliefs. Students reported their surprise at how many Christian worship practices originated in or are similar to practices in other religions, especially Judaism and Islam.

In the case of both courses, the luncheon in which class members from both our classes, and the larger divinity school community (including other faculty) sparked energetic dialogue and provided an opportunity for students to summarize and integrate some of what they had learned through the grant project. In general, students who had direct, one-on-one encounters with persons from other faiths, most often through CPE, seemed better equipped to reflect theologically about Christian hospitality and in multifaith contexts.

The faculty planning lunches, while generating some conversation, seemed to be the least productive of the activities we undertook.

Insights and Challenges
The grant emphasis is very important for ministry in today’s world. Students in both courses were committed to the core ideas of the grant. In the case of the worship course, a primary challenge and insight emerged. Though many, if not all, of the 18 students in the course were interested in and concerned about multifaith realities and Christian hospitality, for the most part, they were not knowledgeable enough about the Christian year (beyond the major festivals of Christmas and Easter) and general Christian worship practices effectively to engage non-Christian concepts of sacred time with much depth. While students did learn some basic elements central to Jewish and Muslim religious calendars, they wrestled more critically and reflectively with theological and practical meanings of various parts of the Christian calendar. Emphasis on non-Christian sacred time contributed to the reflective work students did related to their own traditions but that emphasis did not result in shaping students who are fluent as regards non-Christian calendars and ritual meanings. What seemed most to ignite student interest was a course emphasis on what it means to be a “good guest” in
diverse worship contexts. The discussion about this was lively and students benefitted greatly from an assignment that invited them to practice being guests.

Challenging overall were efforts to engage other faculty who are engaged in their own projects and academic year requirements.

**Recommendations**

Most beneficial in this grant project were the opportunities provided for students to engage the grant questions and themes in real ministry settings where encounters with persons from varied faith traditions is possible. Also beneficial were conversations with resource persons from the community and opportunities where students were encouraged to share their stories with peers.

**Questions and Implications**

A benefit of this project emerged as students approached multifaith questions through pastoral practices rather than solely through classroom lectures and readings about non-Christian religions. This approach equips students with skills foundational for effective religious leadership in many different contexts.

A question that emerged and lingers has to do with how persons from one tradition or another can hold to an exclusivist understanding of their personal faith and engage hospitably with those of other faiths. This is a lively question that can fruitfully energize future conversations about what it means to minister as a Christian in multifaith contexts.

Students who were most engaged by the activities of the grant were often Christian (in a clear majority, or culturally dominant position in our context), but whose life stories included experiences of exclusion or marginalization because of some other aspect of their social identity—ethnicity, race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. In our context (and we would guess the contexts of other grant recipients), the wounds of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism interweave with the challenges of hospitality related to multifaith issues. Discussing and seeking to practice hospitality across major faith traditions without acknowledging the pain and presence of these other cultural divides runs a certain risk of avoiding lingering and highly charged issues that persist across the communities in which we live and serve. It may, in fact, be easier to discuss reaching out to Hindu neighbors than facing other painful divides among communities that all claim the Christian tradition. The pedagogical (and pastoral) challenge becomes
one of creating spaces where all of these experiences of “the other” can be named and explored.

_How we hope to sustain the progress made through the project:_

By using the practices of pastoral care and worship as focal points for questions of Christian hospitality, the grant enabled us to identify pedagogical practices and community partners that we can continue to use as resources. We also identified and now have available a number of resources and texts related to multifaith worship and pastoral care. This grant has sparked interest in additional initiatives that we believe will expand and deepen our school’s curricular and program work overall in the area of multifaith concerns. First, we want to invite leaders of other faith communities to speak to our new class of chaplain interns in CPE. As with last year’s events, these will be open to chaplain residents and staffs at the Medical Center. Second, we plan to retain a work study student to assist us in capturing for the school’s website some representations of our work around this theme for the benefit of the larger community. We may invite students to reflect in student blogs, or record video interviews with community leaders when they visit our campus as guest presenters. Third, we plan to design a luncheon panel of local clergy who can speak about the challenges they have faced and insights they have gained leading their faith communities in our increasingly pluralistic context.