

# Chaplaincy at the Crossroads: Spiritual Care in and for a Multifaith Australia

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## **Abstract**

Even though chaplaincy has been part of Australia's history since 1788, the theology and praxis of chaplaincy has not been as discussed as it should have been in general or for the various sector chaplaincies such as military, health care, criminal justice, emergency services, educational, industrial and sports. Chaplaincy would appear to be at the crossroads. The mainstream churches have been gradually withdrawing from chaplaincy services yet, at the same time, the need for spiritual care services has been expanding, as seen in the 2019-20 bushfires, and many volunteers have come forward. As well, there has been the movement towards multifaith chaplaincy as

Australia's religious profile has become vastly more diverse over the past three decades.

This paper will deal with the confused nomenclature issue. It will then examine the challenges facing spiritual care and chaplaincy, including (i) pluralisation and integration of faiths other than Christian (Buddhist, Hindu & Muslim), (ii) chaplaincy training, and (iii) spiritual care, all as related to an underlying theological framework based around a ministry of presence, professionalism in institutional settings, and pastoral outreach and social care in multifaith contexts.

**Keywords:** chaplaincy, spiritual care, multifaith, social care, pastoral ministry, chaplaincy training.

## Introduction

Chaplaincy has been part of Australia's history since European settlement in 1788 with the appointment of Richard Johnson to the so-called First Fleet. It has a much longer history associated with military and prison chaplaincy and with personages such as monarchs, bishops and their chaplains. After this early colonial prison chaplaincy and other forms of spiritual care, chaplaincy in Australia expanded into military chaplaincy with the formation of the Australian armed forces soon after Federation in 1901 and the formation of army chaplaincy services in 1913.

Chaplaincy rarely hits the news headlines though one exception was at Ground Zero at 9/11 when the Franciscan chaplain to the New York Fire Brigade, Fr Myckal Judge, was the first officially declared victim of 9/11 when he risked his life to enter the burning inferno—there is talk of declaring him a martyr saint. He was killed by the falling debris from the collapsing North Tower, reputedly praying aloud, "God, please end this" (Daly, 2008).

Two recent UK studies have uncovered a narrative of dislocation, disconnection and lack of both support and validation by most religious bodies, but noting at the same time a significant investment in chaplaincy by secular employers (Slater, 2013; Todd, Slater & Dunlop, 2014). Slater (2015) notes its 'hiddenness' within church structures and argues that there has been insufficient theological reflection on the role of chaplaincy and its relationship both to the mission of the church and to parish ministry. Some would see it as ministering to the dispersed within society rather than a

community gathering of the faithful (Steddon, 2010). This reflects as well the reality of the Australian scene.

## **Chaplaincy in the Australian Context**

This exploration in practical theology into chaplaincy and spiritual care flows out of our own interfaith work with Religions for Peace<sup>2</sup> in Australia over the last five years, in particular, three specific initiatives.

Firstly, our monograph on *Chaplaincy and Specialist Spiritual Care in Multifaith Victoria* (Cahill & Ennis, 2017) for the Victorian Multicultural Commission where we did an audit of spiritual care services was completed. With recent developments, it is now out-of-date.

The second was our workshops with the 175 Australian army chaplains in 2017 in moving from a denominational to a multifaith chaplaincy model for the Australian Army in accordance with the dictum, “The army is the people, the people is the army”.

Thirdly, in 2020 we were again funded by the Victorian Multicultural Commission to examine multifaith chaplaincy, and this paper is partly based on the conclusions we reached from our interviews with 20 key people in the chaplaincy and spiritual care sector. Our work draws on the voluminous social science research and pastoral literature which we cannot adequately cover in a journal article. But it allows us to document and understand chaplaincy and spiritual care with its technicalities and complexities, and these developments allow us to clearly see contemporary chaplaincy as an emerging sign of the times. The aim of this paper is to suggest that, unfortunately, chaplaincy is at the crossroads for reasons which we will elaborate later in this paper. Our overall framework for the theology and praxis of religious chaplaincy and professional spiritual care, which differs from parish or community spiritual caring, is a multilayered reality with much possibility for professional and lay collaboration.

## **Sector Chaplaincy and Recent Initiatives**

Sector chaplaincy and spiritual care is exercised in institutional or business settings such as:

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<sup>2</sup> Religions for Peace, founded in 1970, is the world’s leading interfaith organisation working for peace and social cohesion. The Australian chapter is one of 96 national chapters, and has branches in the ACT, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania with observers from the Northern Territory and Western Australia. See [www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au](http://www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au)

- 1 the military (army, navy, air force),
- 2 health care (hospitals, hospices, mental health, aged care),
- 3 educational (schools, colleges, universities),
- 4 criminal justice (police, courts, prisons),
- 5 emergency services (fire, ambulance, disaster, critical incidents),
- 6 industrial (factories, airports, seaports, railway stations),
- 7 sports contexts (cricket, football, Olympic/Commonwealth Games).

Another emerging area is business chaplaincy whereby chaplains are called to serve in corporate enterprises where the research suggests that the availability of a chaplain increases workforce productivity and happiness and allows the ethical dimension in business to flourish (Wallis, 2010; Webley, 2014). Stewart-Darling (2017) has drawn attention to how chaplains can support business organisations and their employees but it is not strong in Australia. In the US, there is a business-aligned organisation called Divinity Consultants! Other developments are worth noting. In Melbourne, Chaplains without Borders provides chaplaincy services to Myer and Target outlets together with Crown Casino Entertainment and the Southern Cross railway station, Melbourne's largest.

Another more contested development is the arrival of humanist or secular chaplains or spiritual carers as in the New Zealand and Dutch armies. Also contested is the arrival of the interfaith minister or chaplain with notions of interspirituality and double belonging such as being a Buddhist-Catholic or an Anglican-Buddhist. The New Seminary for Interfaith Studies founded in 1979 in New York is the oldest interfaith centre for ordaining interfaith ministers through training now delivered online.

The World Health Organization (WHO), as documented by Carey and Hodgson (2018), has divided the various chaplaincy services into five categories: Spiritual Assessment, perhaps using spiritual screening scaled instruments; Spiritual Counselling, Guidance and Education; Spiritual Support; Spiritual Ritual; and Allied Health Intervention-Spiritual Care.

### **Functions and Activities of Sector Chaplains**

Regarding the activities and functions of the chaplain, in summarising the social science literature, especially the work of Carey and Rumbold (2015) in their study of Salvation Army hospital chaplains, there seem to be six that institutional chaplains

perform within their particular organisation. Firstly, chaplains act as spiritual listeners and counsellors to people, often in distress, bringing their actual religious presence and hospitality into the institution and bringing spiritual care and healing to people in workplace contexts or frontline situations. Secondly, chaplains design and lead religious ceremonies of worship and ritual for their own community and for multifaith occasions. Thirdly, chaplains are bridges and mediators within their own work setting between their own faith community and the real world of people, families and work. Fourthly, chaplains are professionals working collaboratively and creatively with their fellow staff colleagues and the members and clients of their organisation whether they are soldiers, patients, students, workers or sportspeople. Fifthly, chaplains are ambassadors and the public representatives of their faith tradition in a particular work setting or frontline situation within multifaith and secular humanist contexts. Lastly, chaplains are reconcilers, whistleblowers and ethical advisers in contexts of complexity, ambiguity and conflict, such as in end-of-life situations in hospitals or on the battlefield.

## **Towards a Multifaith Theology of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care**

It would seem that our foregoing reflections, our practical and research experience and our reading of the literature have resulted in a relatively simple framework that chaplaincy can be organised around three constructs in framing a theology of a multifaith ministry of chaplaincy and spiritual care. These intersecting constructs are (A) a Multifaith Ministry of Love, Service and Presence (B) Ethical Professionalism within Institutional Settings and (C) Pastoral Outreach and Social Care in Multifaith Contexts (see Figure 1).

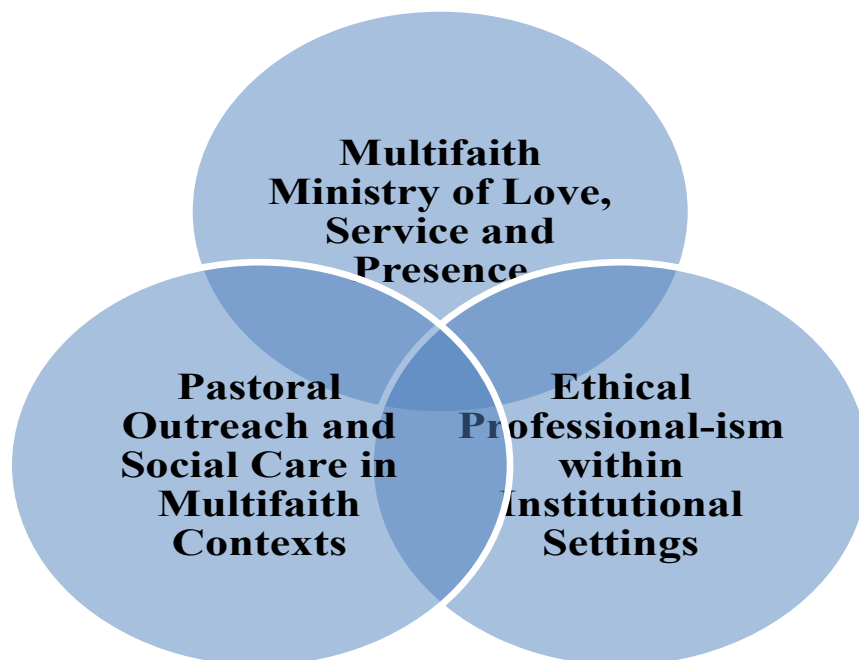
In a Christian context, Archbishop Rowan Williams (2018) and others insist that chaplaincy is rightly embedded in an incarnational or sacramental theology with the emphasis on presence. Increasingly chaplaincy and spiritual care are becoming the primary meeting point between religion and society (Ryan, 2018). Andrew Todd writes that chaplains in their work come across those disenchanted with the institutional Church as well as those with no religious background or commitment at all:

Chaplains encounter those wrestling with what is sacred in their lives, and how to mark that in ritual ways, in acute settings such as

healthcare, prisons and military operations, and in more everyday settings like the workplace, town centres, the retail industry and education (Todd, 2018, p. 162).

This paper insists upon the notion of the chaplain as a professional but it is a spiritual and ethical professionalism A chaplain's presence helps cover the ethical gaps that are emerging from secular institutions such as banks, armies and a backward-looking Church unengaged with the real world.

### **Figure 1. Framework for a Multifaith Theology of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care**



This framework can possibly assist in developing a more sophisticated and elaborated theology. On the basis of their data, Carey and Rumbold (2015) have enumerated the desirable personal qualities for a good chaplain as (1) good listener and good communicator, (2) interested in the development and encouragement of others, (3) able to build rapport with a variety of people, (4) interested in community and organisational development, (5) having both humility and confidence, (6) broadminded and flexible in temperament, (7) gracious, non-judgemental and non-discriminatory while tolerant of others' circumstances, (8) able to think and act holistically, creatively, opportunistically and courageously, and (9) able to think and act justly and ethically.

In terms of education and training, the professional chaplain and spiritual carer ought (i) to have a good and broad knowledge base in both secular and religious/spiritual matters, (ii) be qualified at the undergraduate level in both secular and religious/spiritual degrees, (iii) be qualified at the postgraduate level in either secular or religious/spiritual degrees, (iv) be trained in Clinical Pastoral Education or an equivalent training program or deep relevant experience, and (v) be specialist-trained for the particular context (welfare, prison, universities, schools, military etc.) (Carey & Rumbold, 2015). However, the reality, as our interview data shows, is that, except in the armed forces and in hospitals, the chaplaincy and spiritual care training system is pitifully inadequate.

Multifaith chaplaincy is a multilayered reality operating differently in sectoral settings but where there is the possibility for unique collaboration with professionals in the various sectors and with colleagues from other faith traditions. For Rowan Williams, chaplaincy in multifaith contexts challenges and is challenged by narrow, exclusivist and absolutist theologies of faith. In Christian discourse, he calls chaplains “embodiers” of the Word (James 1:2) (Williams, 2018). Within their institutions, where they have a poverty of power, they provide an embedded presence, a deep stabilising reference point as well as an anchorage point (Whipp, 2018). They are brokering a new relationship between religion and the world.

## **Chaplaincy at the Crossroads**

In our assessment, however, institutional chaplaincy and spiritual care is at the crossroads in Australia. Firstly, there is an increasing demand for the services of chaplains and spiritual carers that cannot be merely attributed to an increasing and religiously diversified population. The rise during the COVID-19 pandemic in demand for mental health services, especially with the forced closure of places of worship, has highlighted the need for spiritual, emotional and welfare support when a society is in significant crisis. As has been seen in Victoria during our consultations, there has been an increase in sectoral demands for chaplains, most especially in the emergency services and its frontline responders, most particularly in police forces and ambulance services. The demands for school chaplaincy have also increased, though this has been possible through the Commonwealth-funded program. The demand for, and pressure placed upon, first responders is very obvious during bushfires, cyclones and floods but the data suggest that in fact emergency chaplains and their volunteer

assistants are more usually called upon in smaller incidents such as housefires, semi-public suicides, fatal traffic accidents, fatal air incidents, missing or lost person situations, deaths in sporting clubs or schools, and so on.

Likewise, Cheryl Holmes (2021), who questions an outdated chaplaincy model, has recently noted these movements towards a professional spiritual care workforce but assesses that progress has been slow and inconsistency persists. She has identified five key factors that will ultimately determine whether Australia or individual states have a qualified and credentialed spiritual care workforce able to deliver safe and high-quality spiritual care, namely, greater attention to international models and research with the need for evidence, greater government support and involvement, more investment from health service management, cooperation between the different religious communities, both Christian and other than Christian, and, lastly, leadership and advocacy from the spiritual care peak bodies.

### **Concept of Moral Injury**

Secondly, the demand is often focused around suicides and psychological collapses associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Over the last decade, according to their sector chaplaincy leaders, the number of suicides has risen amongst police and ambulance officers.

Here the notion of moral injury is most useful and this is a topic which social research attention has recently focused upon. It was developed by the American psychiatrist, Jonathan Shay, in the context of traumatised American veterans who had killed enemy soldiers or participated in or witnessed traumatic events while serving in Vietnam. Moral injury intersects with PTSD but is different and broader with the development of a Spiritual Injury Scale and a Moral Injury Events Scale (Carey & Hodgson, 2018). Litz and his colleagues have developed Adaptive Disclosure Therapy which is an adapted secularised version of the sacrament of penance with the critical and deliberate exclusion of the priest (Litz et al., 2017). Recently Carey and Hodgson (2018) have developed the counselling and listening tool of Pastoral Narrative Disclosure with eight stages: (i) rapport (ii) reflection (iii) review (iv) reconstruction (v) restoration (vi) ritual (vii) renewal and (viii) reconnection. Slater (2015), as an Anglican priest and a health care chaplain, has developed a ten-step developmental consultancy model for chaplaincy. These developments in chaplaincy and spiritual care



have emerged from professional pastoral workers working collaboratively with fellow professionals in pastorally challenging individual and group situations.

The third positive factor is that the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim faith communities have been in the process of increasing their commitment to chaplaincy even though the concept is not part of their tradition. However, for the Buddhists chaplaincy is seen as a form of serving others to relieve suffering in accordance with the Four Noble Truths. It is a form of dharma in action:

Buddhist chaplains offer emotional and spiritual support, loving-kindness and compassion. Buddhist chaplains bring a caring presence and willingness to listen, especially in times of difficulty. We have ordained monastic chaplains (monks and nuns) as well as lay people with careers in addition to retirees (Buddhist Council of NSW, n.d.).

Among the Hindus in Victoria, chaplaincy development has been led by a former devout Catholic. Chaplaincy is foreign to Hindu patients in hospital. Hindu chaplaincy works closely with Spiritual Health Australia and there is now a Hindu chaplain in every major Melbourne hospital, and it is hoped to extend into other sectors. Muslim chaplaincy has been developing, especially in hospitals and prisons, usually working with the Board of Imams. There are many online programs offered by the University of Medina and Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

## **The Militating Factors**

However, on the other side of the ledger, chaplaincy is at the crossroads. There is a series of factors militating against the appropriate delivery of chaplaincy and spiritual care services which are focussed around the twin lack of personnel and funds. This recently has been highlighted by the decision of the Salvation Army to withdraw from prison, court and airport chaplaincy. But the larger mainstream churches, led by the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches, are withdrawing from chaplaincy because of the lack of trained personnel and lack of funds as they concentrate on their core commitment to parishes. The gap is being partly filled by evangelical Christian groups as seen in school and sports chaplaincy but often they are volunteers minimally trained and with a narrow theological and pastoral vision. All faith groups have difficulty attracting and recruiting chaplains, and this is another factor holding

chaplaincy back. But funds are also a major negative factor. It is very difficult to make a living out of chaplaincy when the religious communities simply do not have the required funds. Another issue is proper training and entry levels. Each faith community essentially does “its own thing”. The Nan Tien Institute of Higher Education, attached to the Fo Guang Shan Nan Tien Temple at Unanderra, just south of Wollongong, is offering undergraduate and post-graduate courses in Buddhist Studies, including a graduate Diploma in Human Well-Being. In other faiths, both Christian and non-Christian, there are no government guidelines to guide and govern course quality.

## **The Nomenclature Issue**

We need to deal with the confused nomenclature issue here. The Christian heritage of the notion of chaplaincy has generated a resistance to its usage in multicultural contexts. Replacement terms such as pastoral services, spiritual care, spiritual health and spiritual direction have been introduced. But such phrases have vaguer, less defined parameters with emphasis on the individual rather than an institutional focus. In the 1990s in the UK, the term “sector ministry” was introduced and has received some legitimation (Slater, 2015). It is noted that chaplaincy has generally been retained as the descriptive label in the UK and USA, whereas Spiritual Health Victoria has adopted its term to cover the area of specialist pastoral care and chaplaincy services in health care settings. Spiritual animator is another term. The Indian Army uses the phrase “spiritual teachers” because that is their main function—to teach young Indian soldiers about behavioural and ethical issues. It is likely that various terms and phrases will gain legitimacy to cover the various institutional settings. However, it is possible the terms could be incorporated into a multilayered vision extending from volunteers to highly professionalised spiritual carers.

## **Chaplaincy and Its Connectivity with the Real World of Social Care**

Chaplaincy as a multilayered reality is a distinctive form of religious ministry or service with considerable international variation. Swift (2014) has noted that contemporary chaplains stand at the intersection between the historic presence of the church in the public square, the onset of secularisation where belief in God is no longer axiomatic, contemporary spiritual expressions in civic and a-religious settings, and direct

engagement with the fundamental realities of people's lives. The chaplain's capacity and creativity to negotiate this space determines success and flourishing, and hence the place of chaplaincy in the various locations and sectors has had to be constantly negotiated and re-negotiated (Swift, 2014). This occurs in many institutions where chaplains have too often had to justify their presence and argue for the reality of the spiritual in real life. This is one reason why, in recent times, chaplaincy practice has triggered many research projects to justify its presence and empirically document the positive outcomes of this type of pastoral care. Chaplaincy represents a sacralising of the real world outside the traditional parish, and operating in professional and institutional contexts.

Yet religious chaplaincy has not been sufficiently framed beyond its religious parameters. Here the term "social care" is very useful. It is a term broader than social welfare because it can incorporate spiritual and preventive aspects. It is generally described as the provision of social work, psychological counselling, personal care, safeguarding and protection measures, and social support to children and adults in need or at risk arising from illness, disability, old age or poverty. It would seem that chaplaincy fits neatly within the notion of social care which emanates from the UK, particularly its 1990 *National Health Service and Community Care Act* though the notion has a longer pedigree. The notion is only now being transferred to Australia, and one university is currently exploring its possibilities. Since 2013, a journal, *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy*, has been initiated with Lindsay Carey, now at LaTrobe University, as one of the editors.

In Victoria, emergencies services chaplaincy began in 1977 but was formalised within the Government's Displan Welfare Plan after the 1983 bushfires. It has subsequently played an important supportive role in dealing with numerous State disasters and many local emergencies including the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983, the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 and the floods in 2010/2011 and 2016. In the Bourke Street mall incident on 20 January 2017, Emergencies Ministry Chaplains and Personal Support Workers from the Victorian Council of Churches were on site in the mall for the following 12 days. In this huge, unheralded effort, 3,321 persons were supported, with the Victorian Council of Churches deploying 162 individual personnel conducting 311 days of volunteer service ([www.vccem.org.au](http://www.vccem.org.au)) over that period.

By their presence, chaplains provide Emotional Spiritual Care (ESC) which can include (i) psychological first aid, (ii) personal support, (iii) intentional creation of safe and calm spaces to aid in the emotional and spiritual processing of the event, (iv) listening to affected people's stories, (v) grief and loss support, (vi) religious rituals on request, (vii) memorial services, and (viii) funeral services.

Hospitality is defined as creating space for the other and is also key to the work of chaplains, not least in armed forces and university settings. Geoff Boyce, Uniting Church minister and longtime chaplain at Flinders University in Adelaide, has named his centre as "The Oasis", suggesting a place where travellers may find nourishment and interchange for their life journey. Its primacy is to effect human transformation (Boyce, 2010). He particularly draws on Henri Nouwen and it is worth re-quoting:

Hospitality...means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines...The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances, free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt a life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own (Nouwen, quoted in Boyce, 2010, p. 83).

Hence, while chaplains do formally preach, their form of preaching is, perhaps primarily, through sheer presence, as in hospitals and prisons and through the hospitable act of making space for the other as listeners and counsellors, as mediators and reconcilers and as ethical advisors. Within the context of befriending and hospitality, the chaplain finds opportunities to worship and pray with individuals and communities. Much more than in parish settings, chaplaincy, both ordained and lay, is exercised in settings in the real world of an intensive care unit or in a prison. Chaplaincy can be seen as a sacralising presence in the realities of the world, as previously mentioned.

In dealing with the survivors of moral injury, chaplains can take the lead, seeing healing as a multifaceted and dynamic process of healing over the lifespan. Another aspect to this attribute is the multifaith element. Military chaplains can be in the situation where they may have to pray with wounded or dying soldiers from faith traditions not their own. The chaplains in both the Australian and British armies always have with them their special Prayer Book which contains prayers from various faith traditions, both Christian and other than Christian.

Within institutional chaplaincy, the priest chaplain works at the behest of his bishop or religious superior but equally within the institution he or she is subject to: a military commander or a hospital director or to a prison governor. Chaplains are professionals working alongside professionals in professional settings.

Prisoners might appear to be a difficult group to love. Corrections Victoria in arrangement with Fulham and Port Phillip private prisons contract faith-based organisations to provide chaplaincy services with coordination provided by a Regional Liaison Chaplain (Department of Justice, 2014). Every prisoner has a right both to a chaplain and to speak freely to the chaplain. Chaplains can walk freely around a prison, including into solitary confinement.

In Victoria, in an empirical study, Webber (2015) has provided a window into prison ministry with its chaplains and many volunteers whose efforts often go unrecognised in their work with prisoners and their families, including in the post-release phase. They provide practical and emotional support as well as religious and spiritual nurturing. Her focus was on the Catholic prison ministry where the St. Vincent de Paul Society is very supportive. The philosophy is to “walk with prisoners on their journey” in a non-judgemental and respectful way. Webber found that prisoners are appreciative of the efforts of the prison ministry. As one prisoner expressed it, “They helped us accept our fate as well, to be accepting of where we’ve found ourselves and not being judgemental as to why” (Webber, 2015, p. 15). Generally they make prison life more bearable and help prisoners deal with their vulnerabilities. Female prisoners are especially appreciative. Such is the work and efficacy of chaplaincy.

In conclusion, gradually chaplaincy must move towards a more multilayered reality, towards a fully professional and paraprofessional spiritual care model which takes into account the great diversity in the different sectors. There are some key decisions to be

made within the realms of government, faith community leaders and sector leadership but gaining cohesion, even in one sector, will not be easy.

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