



The Heartbeat of the Community: Becoming a Police Chaplain

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Dedication



I dedicate this doctoral thesis to the life of Reverend David Brown who greatly inspired me in my ministry as a chaplain, lecturer and writer.

David passed away on 25 December 2005.

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Abstract

In today's hectic society, opportunities to receive pastoral care and to participate in relevant adult or continuing education are greatly valued by organisational employees. For the police community in the English-speaking world, police chaplains have emerged as a group of professionals in police organisations providing specialised pastoral care and associated education to their constituents. As a relatively new community of practitioners, little is known about the emergence of this group in terms of its needs for learning, education and support and processes of acquisition of knowledge and skills. Major purposes of this study were to explicate the learning engaged in by police chaplains to become a professional practitioner and to project the role for future sustainability for all stakeholders.

This is the first doctoral thesis to examine the development and practice of police chaplaincy in New South Wales (Australia), New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It was argued that neither police chaplains themselves nor the police communities they serve understand the potential of the role and implications for future learning and performance of that role. Prior to this study, there were no strategies in place to assess consequences of change, to address work-related problems or to determine future training. Consequently, this study explored how police chaplains perform their role so they could better justify the value of their roles for multiple stakeholders and make suitable professional development plans and strategies to improve services, address work-related problems adequately and respond appropriately to social changes.

In order to understand and articulate the experiences of police chaplains, a reflective analysis was provided of the work of practising police chaplains in New South Wales, Australia, and a comparative study of police chaplains in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The qualitative research design was interpretive and used ethnography and autoethnography as methodologies. The researcher is a police chaplain herself and is a current member of this professional group in New South Wales and was for a period of time in New Zealand.

Four key objectives guided the inquiry and were addressed in determining an explanatory framework in the literature review and in the findings and discussion chapters. The first objective was to investigate the nature of the professional police chaplain. The findings suggested that police chaplains were male or female, ordained or

lay, highly educated and pastoral and have a passion for policing. They are professional in nature from their qualifications as a minister, practising professionalism in their role as minister and chaplain and behaving appropriately as a professional. It was discovered in this study that because police chaplains largely act alone they have developed four distinct ‘walking styles’ of having a presence and performing their role in a police station or other venues.

The second objective to explicate the nature of police chaplaincy culture focused on *kinship* among police chaplains and incorporated notions of community of practice, culture and identity. The findings showed that *kinship* was a useful explanatory concept for analysing the culture of police chaplaincy. It became evident in the study that learning, belonging, connecting, participating and knowing were essential in the police chaplain’s role in complex and diverse communities of practice and various community and organisational cultures that influenced their identities as a minister, chaplain and pastoral carer.

The third objective was to identify the major challenges faced by police chaplains. The findings indicated that police chaplains consistently faced challenges in representing the spiritual to police, managing their time, finding best practices, being credible and understanding others relationally as well as attending critical incidents in their ongoing honorary position. Senior Chaplains played an important role providing the support and training that police chaplains require for their ongoing practice while mentors and/or spouses also provided necessary time to listen to the police chaplain’s challenging day.

The fourth objective was to examine the professional development and training of police chaplains. The findings revealed that training offered to the honorary police chaplain was minimal and did not meet the police chaplains’ needs. Strategies including a program of continuing professional education have been suggested to enhance training and development for the future of police chaplaincy.

Police chaplains interviewed for this research have given a broad range of perspectives making this exploratory study a significant contribution towards capturing the culture of police chaplaincy for the first time. This exposition of the work of police chaplains contributes to setting future directions for police chaplaincy practice and research enabling a better service for police officers and staff of police services worldwide.