

## **Measuring the Complex Nature of Correctional Chaplaincy**

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### **1. “Encounters” Are Not Trackable**

As I walked to lunch, I drew close to a young man leaning up against the wall of the education building.

“Who are you!” he sarcastically exclaimed.

My attention drawn, I replied, “Excuse me?”

“Who are you!” he said with anger in his voice.

“I am Chaplain Maness,” I said after a brief pause. “What is your name?”

He told me. Then he said that he thought I was a lawyer or something. (During my first several years I always wore a tie--quite a rarity in prison by any regular staff.) This would have been a more unnerving encounter had this man been any larger; he was quite small. Nevertheless, we talked for a while about his anger over this place--the penitentiary--and his desire to get transferred to another unit. I have not seen him again.

This is one example of ministry to human needs behind the razor wired fences of Texas’ prisons. A defusing took place of a good deal of built-up anger and the place of faith in anger and authority. Only God truly knows the full implications of that single encounter or the true and full value of the presence of a “Chaplain” and how that presence alone opened the door to an encounter with a young man’s deeply felt emotions.

Perhaps any “staff” person could have defused the anger.

Yet the very mention of “Chaplain” communicated volumes in and of itself. Here was a person whose “job” was concern, who somehow had concern for affairs of the heart, who was approachable. Here stood an institutional staff person who was “for” human growth and “for” spiritual guidance. Most clearly most of the time, the title “chaplain” communicated that there stood a person with concern for the soul. In fact, the “title” alone was defusing in spite of any ability of the Chaplain.

This kind of impact is not trackable. Even the though there was a substantial contribution, measuring and tracking that contribution is impossible. You can loosely track the “number” of encounters, but the depth, extent and multiple and even exponential ripples of such an encounter are not subject to measure.

## **2. “Religious Program” More an “Encounter” than a “Program”**

An individual inmate program is never simply a “religious program” for inmates: it is more an event or encounter among many to inmates “within” and “with respect” to the total institutional environment. That is the nature of every religious program, for all of the major religions have as a basic element a philosophy that permeates all of life. No “program” or “study” or “worship” or whatever is ever meant to be simply an event designed to affect one aspect of the person. Rather, every religious “event” in every religion is meant to be pervasive and touch every aspect of the person’s life.

Indeed, the term “prison religious program” is a misnomer. It is a “religious event” in a secular environment. In reality, every “religious program” is in fact meant to be a permeating and permanent piece of relating. See as references the Holy Books and the multitude of commentaries on those Holy Books from each religion. If one wants to be truly thorough, go back into the past several thousand years.

Chaplaincy is a specialized “religious ministry” that has roots in the history of humanity. At the heart of all “religious” ministry, there is also the attempt to touch all of the vital concerns of life: life, meaning, destiny, death and the definitions of hope and humanity itself. Indefinable. Untrackable. Nevertheless, there is a direct corollary between the integrity and effectiveness of a ministry and the openness of the administration to that ministry. That is Integrating--the Ministry of Balancing Trusts.

## **3. Integrating--the Ministry of Balancing Trusts**

Networking is essentially nurturing a number of dynamic connections. Administrating is essentially the maintenance of the paperwork trail that tracks that dynamic network. The bringing of the two together is Integrating--the Ministry of “Balancing Trusts,” a near invisible avenue of ministry. The Chaplain works in the center of the dividing wall between security staff and the inmates—integrating a ministry of “balancing trusts” in all of the relations in an institution.

Crises are the most common situations for the development of both staff and inmate relationships--especially with inmates. The crises are manifold: death, dear John letter, custody dispute or the removal of a child or the death or kidnapping or rape of a child; inmate assault upon another inmate; assault upon staff. Crises are complex enough, but the Chaplains also have to factor into the resolutions, the stages of life and the vital concerns of life.

The vital concerns of life impact these crises and lead men and women to examine their roots in faith and life. For better or worse: there is no choice here. Chaplains are the facilitators, hopefully, for the better when they can. Nevertheless, all of the religions of the world have a special focus upon the vital concerns of life. When this growth does occur -- and it does occur - - there is an exponential multiplication of growth.

Relationships are not stagnant. Every school of psychology and every major religion and all of life itself instruct us on this. Relationships are active and dynamic, always affecting more people than the primary parties involved. A man or woman encountering growth and gaining a measure of stability will transmute or translate “something” of that growth, something of that stability into his or her other relationships in the local prison unit and eventually to his or her home. All persons are involved in the symbiosis of a closed system: inmates, staff, volunteers and the families of all of these. The dynamic nature of relationships is complicated further by

the faith elements of each individual adherent. Who is not an adherent to some faith group? Even an atheist is such by “faith.”

Call “Integrating--the Ministry of Balancing Trusts” a simple a call to good relations. A method of being kind. A method of “winning friends and influencing people.” Call the “Ministry of Balancing Trusts” a modus operandi of “doing unto others as you would have them do to you.” Though impossible to fully explain, Networking and Administrating precede and provide a basis for Integrating--the Ministry of Balancing Trusts. Some might even see such as an over-complicated way of simply stating how one is submissive to the authoritarian and hierarchical structure of prison. Sometimes it is that simple for the simple-minded Chaplain or naive administrator who is not cognizant of the immensity of the agency’s mission statements.

The good conscience of every Correctional Chaplain will bare witness that they are always on the cutting edge of “wanting” to do more with what they have. That is the drive of most every correctional Chaplain. “Integrating--the Balancing of Trusts” is one of highest levels of discretion squarely on the shoulders of the institutional staff Chaplain.

So then, from mechanisms of organization to the manifold crises of individuals, complexity of Chaplaincy increases. Then again the complexity increases and trackability decreases to near impossibility when one factors in the stages of life and concerns for vital issues of life. And the above impossibility of trackability and complexity increases when one attempts to factor into the above the exponential nature of growth from one encounter to another.

#### **4. Measuring the Complex Nature of Chaplaincy**

These three -- Networking, Administrating & Integrating -- are exceeding complex in themselves. So complex, one will have trouble finding much literature about them specific to Correctional Chaplaincy. Yet one does not have to look far for “pertinent” literature. For each of the three are veritable professions in themselves. TDCJ has entire positions devoted to networking and administrating. Politics and the very offices of national and state senators and representatives know this very well. There are enormous energies and skills at work to network, administrate and integrate in the offices of a successful politician: they do not call it “political science” in vain. Political science and chaplaincy have so very many similarities.

Unlike the political sciences, the professions of engineers, lawyers, actuaries and computer programmers are complex in a different way, in a more focused way. These are so very “trackable”: a bridge, a legal brief, an insurance analysis and even a computer program are “finite” items. Certainly, a great deal of complexity went into their creations, but more often than not, the product is finished. And the issues of networking, administrating and integrating that support the “finite” creations were accomplished by others in support. These professions are also more “tractable” in the sense that the teaching of skills has so many more benchmarks-clear benchmarks and tests of competence.

The “MBA” has become the classic credential for senior executives the world over. How many books exist on “business administration.” Certainly, most of this has to dovetail with the “CPA” in the management of money and the Human Resources executives in the management of people. Yet when the tally has been reached and the manual written, the job is done for the day. These are finite positions that are very trackable. “Because” the primary functions “are” trackable with tangible figures, that makes those professions “less” complicated than the concerns of Chaplaincy that are near impossible to track.

Many elements in Chaplaincy are trackable, like attendance and phone calls. The simple stuff. Yet the heart of ministry is in the substance of the teaching, the quality of relating and the essence of the encounters themselves. These things are not very trackable or tractable. Outside of the obvious “degrees” by the many seminaries in the many religious faiths, the issue of tractability also entails the “unique person” themselves. Thus, the heart of ministry -- the balancing of trusts -- is indeed a cultivation of precious hearts that makes the measuring of the full impact of the Chaplaincy Services extremely complicated.

As the most complicated of all, that makes “Chaplaincy Profession” most deserving of ALL of the professions for “Professional Equity.” See more at [www.PreciousHeart.net](http://www.PreciousHeart.net).



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See my book at right.  
It was a Titanic fight!  
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