

UNFOLDING: UNIVERSITY CHAPLAINCY IN PRACTICE

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Welcome to the third issue of **Unfolding: University Chaplaincy in Practice**. This journal exists to draw upon the depth and breadth of wisdom within ACSLHE's diverse membership and to offer practical support to those serving in the field of chaplaincy. With this issue, we wanted to explore, "*The Best (& Worst) Practices in Higher Education Spiritual Care.*" We landed on this theme after hearing from seasoned professionals that we needed a repository for hard-earned wisdom. Similarly, newer colleagues were asking for instructions, frustrated by a lack of resources. Our goal was to gather your insights—through articles, case studies, reflective essays, and more—on how the work moves from idea to implementation. In chaplaincy, as in life, failure is an excellent and frequent provider of wisdom. And because chaplains are uniquely skilled at truth-telling, we also invited honest reflection on missteps, challenges, and lessons learned along the way.

One of the profound challenges of being a chaplain is that it is hard to describe what we do and why it is valuable. Part of the reason for this difficulty is that we do so much; we care for a wide variety of communities and diverse members, and we work across varied frameworks and perspectives. Much like chaplaincy itself, this issue contains a little bit of everything. The articles included in this issue reflect that breadth—from interfaith engagement to retreat design, to the prophetic and mystical dimensions of care. This issue is a snapshot of the complexity and richness of our profession.

We begin with two articles by Núñez and Gillespie:

Núñez explores the Open Encounter framework and its role in shaping interfaith engagement at a secular university staffed by an interfaith team. The article highlights three signature programs—the Interfaith Council, the Affiliates Network, and the Flagship Seminar—and evaluates outcomes using belonging-centered metrics supported by survey data from the 2024–2025 academic year.

Gillespie offers a comprehensive literature review synthesizing current empirical research on spirituality and religion in higher education. The article defines key terms, outlines the benefits and challenges students experience, examines how spirituality and religion are conceptualized

and assessed on campus, and concludes with practical recommendations for institutional policy and practice.

Next, we present three case studies by Loomis, Gill Morris, and Peek et al:

Loomis reflects on the Pause Retreat, a new initiative at Southern Methodist University designed to address student stress, burnout, and overcommitment through a 24-hour off-campus experience centered on rest and wellness. Although the retreat drew fewer participants than anticipated, post-retreat surveys revealed meaningful growth in students' understanding of rest and connection. This case study highlights the ongoing tension between student busyness and wellbeing efforts, offering valuable insights for future programming.

Gill Morris's case study introduces the use of an assessment tool as a best practice. The Interfaith, Spiritual, Religious, and Secular Campus Climate Index (INSPIRES Index) is a free tool designed to assess a campus's commitment to supporting students of diverse religious, secular, and spiritual identities. This case study explores how chaplains can meaningfully engage this resource.

Peek and Adarkwa describe how two chaplains responded to rising anxiety and uncertainty among students by developing a discernment workshop. The case study outlines the workshop's structure, key takeaways, and participant reflections.

Following the case studies, a reflective essay by Banerjee explores the tension between rationalism and mysticism in spiritual care, particularly in light of the Enlightenment's legacy. Drawing on Hindu traditions, evolutionary cosmology, and personal experience, the essay invites a reclamation of intuitive, embodied, and mystical ways of knowing. It envisions a holistic model of care that honors both science and mystery as essential to human flourishing.

Finally, the issue concludes with two book reviews of texts that promise to help chaplains deepen their interfaith engagement: "*With the Best of Intentions*" by Chris Ray Alexander and "*Theology Without Walls*" by Elizabeth Candido.

We hope this rich collection offers insight, inspiration, and companionship in your work.

Sincerely,

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Co-Editors-in-Chief

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