Inspiring Generous Faith; Engaging the Heart of the University
Office of the Chaplaincy Strategic Plan

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Part 1: Introduction

The Jessie Ball duPont Chaplaincy is a gift to the University of Richmond and wider community. It has long been a cherished part of University life and has served the institution with honor and distinction, lending its voice to support religious expression, to advocate for issues of social concern, and to offer a sturdy shoulder of compassion and prayer during dark times. For the past five years, the Chaplaincy has been in transition, following the retirement of David Burhans who served as chaplain with passion, imagination, and courage for 30 years. A new future is now here.

President Ayers is in his third year at UR, I arrived as university chaplain and Jessie Ball duPont chair of the chaplaincy this past summer. The Richmond Promise, a new strategic plan for the University’s future, is being implemented, and the University has continued its rapid rise within the elite schools in all of American higher education. Key elements that for many years were cornerstones of the Chaplaincy program such as civic engagement and diversity training have grown to have their own offices in other divisions of the University. The Sunday morning Protestant worshipping community at Cannon Chapel, a source of life and joy to so many, finished its course in faith several years ago, while many other Protestant worship opportunities, and opportunities for worship in other faith traditions, have emerged through partner campus ministries to take its place and carry on its purpose with integrity and passion. The demographics of the student body are changing rapidly, with more and more students coming to campus from diverse and underrepresented religious backgrounds, while increasing numbers of students say religious and spiritual vitality is a critical part of their college experience. The Chaplaincy has offered countless gifts to the campus and wider community in previous years. Now is a time for creativity and imagination, to draw on the strengths of the past and build new energies of faithful practice into the future, to birth new gifts, and offer them with generosity, grace, and humor to the campus and wider community for such a time as this.

Therefore, the purpose of this document is to outline a new vision, and the objectives to accomplish that vision, for the future of the Jesse Ball duPont Chaplaincy at the University of Richmond. The key question driving this exercise is: What critical role can the Chaplaincy fulfill at the University of Richmond and in the wider community that no other individual or department can satisfy?

The rich history of the University, especially the generous and visionary leadership of the Virginia Baptists in establishing and leading the institution for so many decades, has been well-documented in other places and cannot be overstated. Thus, while I spend little time in this document on the history of the institution, I am grateful for all those who played a role in the official expression of religious life on campus since the institution was founded in 1830. I am especially grateful to chaplain emeritus David Burhans for his three decades of faithful service, and to associate university chaplain Kate O’Dwyer Randall for her gracious leadership over the past two years. Their wise counsel and friendship during my first several months on campus have been particularly helpful.
Part II: Present Ecology

1) Staffing

The Chaplaincy currently employs six-full time staff members: university chaplain and chair of the chaplaincy, associate university chaplain, director of arts and education, interreligious and justice coordinator, events and operations coordinator and columbarium manager, and administrative assistant. The administrative assistant and interreligious and justice coordinator positions are vacant.

Furthermore, seventeen campus ministers serve seventeen partner campus ministries that are supported financially and administratively by outside organizations, though fall under the umbrella of the Chaplaincy for their work on campus. Campus ministries include Buddhist, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and a wide variety of mainline and evangelical Protestant ministries. Each campus minister and each member of the Chaplaincy staff sign The Covenant of Mutual Understanding at the beginning of every academic year, a tradition dating to 1991. Signing the covenant means committing to support the mission of the University and to engage respectfully and thoughtfully in appreciation of one another and the wider campus.

The current office of the Chaplaincy is, in many ways, structured to support a time in the Chaplaincy’s history, and the larger University’s history, that looked much different than now. In January 2007, the previous university chaplain left campus on short notice. Subsequently, the Bonner Scholars program, a part of the Chaplaincy since the beginning of the Bonner program at UR, moved into the Center for Civic Engagement. The recently hired associate university chaplain and director of the Bonner program was appointed acting chaplain to the university. One of the staff members in the Chaplaincy who had been working with the Bonner program stayed in the Chaplaincy and became director of arts and education. Meanwhile, the administrative assistant in the Chaplaincy was named coordinator of operations, eventually becoming coordinator of operations and events, and columbarium manager. A new administrative assistant was hired and a year later an interreligious and justice coordinator was also hired. To further highlight the significant transition in staff and programming the Chaplaincy has experienced recently, consider that within the past three years twelve different people (not including temporary employees) have served in various capacities on a staff of six, with two of those positions currently open.

Given my recent arrival, and the two open positions – the administrative assistant and the interreligious and justice coordinator – and given the associate university chaplain’s job description needs to be re-imagined to take full advantage of her skill, now is the time to structure the staffing and fiscal resources to most effectively fulfill the larger mission of the Chaplaincy.

2) Space

Cannon Chapel

The Chaplaincy is blessed with remarkable facilities which are sufficient to support the Chaplaincy’s ambitions. Cannon Chapel, built in 1929, is a glorious brick gothic structure overlooking the lake with seating for 750. The chapel is currently used both in its ecclesial dimensions as well as a gathering place for the wider campus. Catholic mass is held every
Sunday afternoon at five o’clock with 150-200 students and community members in attendance. The chapel also holds the yearly “Candlelight” service in December, the Martin Luther King commemoration service, Richmond College Investiture, Westhampton Proclamation Night, alumni weekend remembrance service, regular sacred music programs, lectures, weddings, memorial services, and occasional Protestant worship services. The chapel is scheduled to be off-line from summer 2011 through summer 2012 for significant structural renovations.

Wilton Center

The Wilton Center for Interfaith Campus Ministries, dedicated in 1990, is the envy of chaplaincy programs across the country. The Wilton Center holds offices for the Chaplaincy staff and campus ministers. It also houses the Bonner Scholars program. The Wilton Center has a large interfaith programming space (and kitchen) – used by campus ministries and many other groups on campus and off – a smaller interfaith prayer room, a conference room (which also serves as a library), and restrooms on both levels.

Cannon Chapel and the Wilton Center are places of beauty, prayer, and programming, and are cherished features of the human and architectural landscape of the campus. Issues having to do with broader use of sacred space are being resolved as part of a larger University-wide examination of our space usage policies.

3) Chapel Guild

The Chapel Guild is a group of some 50 dedicated friends of the University, many of whom are Westhampton graduates. Over the years Chapel Guild members have given generously of their time and resources to the University. The Chapel Guild has seen its primary mission as tending to the upkeep and decoration of Cannon Chapel. During the years when Cannon Chapel held a Protestant Sunday morning service, many guild members attended and functioned like the building committee of a local church. Given the chapel is now under the care of University services and facilities, the relationship between the Chaplaincy and the Chapel Guild will need to be shaped towards emphasizing support for students and programming rather than the building itself.

Part III: Mission

The University of Richmond is an increasingly diverse and dynamic university committed to educating the whole person, body, mind, and spirit. During my extensive conversations throughout the recruiting process that brought me here – with President Ayers, members of the search committee, and a vast array of people who love the University of Richmond – I outlined five key areas I believe are critical to a vibrant, inclusive, and visionary Chaplaincy for the future. Those five key areas are:

1) Religious diversity and engagement with the city – creating structures to support an increasing diversity of faith expression, and encouraging dialogue and programming across lines of difference within the faith community on campus and in the wider city so as to prepare students of faith and no faith for leadership in a world ripe with religious tension and possibility.
2) Pastoral care – extending care and compassion to individuals, and the institution at large, in moments of deep pain and during moments of great joy, and the emotional landscape in between.

3) Spiritual vitality – creating a wide array of programming that helps students name that which is most sacred to them and connect spirituality with their intellectual, social, and ethical lives at this critical point in their development.

4) Vocational reflection – helping students mine the deep wisdom present in faith traditions as a means of exploring the meaning and purpose of their own lives while on campus, and in their personal and professional lives beyond.

5) Animating conversations of meaning – working with others on campus and from across varied disciplines to encourage conversations of meaning, ethical reflection, and responsible living.

During my first several months on campus I filled my calendar with times for listening and conversation with students, faculty, administrators, alums, and faith and civic leaders in the wider city. I asked questions about the role and value of the Chaplaincy at the University of Richmond, about what the Chaplaincy had done well in the past, and what it could do to build on core strengths in meaningful ways for the future. Again, the driving question: What critical role can the Chaplaincy fulfill at the University of Richmond that no other individual or department can satisfy? Over and over, similar themes were voiced:

- The Chaplaincy should be a place where members of the university community find welcome, compassion, a prayerful spirit, and a listening ear, especially for students, staff, and faculty going through a difficult time.

- The Chaplaincy should be a place that cares about the diversity of religious identities present at the University, while continuing to support the majority Protestant and Catholic expressions, and should work to help make the University a place that is welcoming to a variety of faith traditions.

- The Chaplaincy should encourage people of various faiths and no faiths to engage one another across lines of difference, to seek common understanding, and should celebrate the wisdom that is present in all areas of our community.

- The Chaplaincy should create opportunities for worship, prayer, and reflection, and should help students attend to the life of the spirit and the life of the mind.

- The Chaplaincy should serve as a voice of “conscience” within the University, and work with others on campus to hold the University to its highest ideals, and to help ensure the University grapples with matters of ethical reflection, social justice, and responsible living.
Drawing on the rich history and valued contributions the Chaplaincy has made to UR for so many decades, gleaning the wisdom I received from many conversations with those who love and cherish the University of Richmond, and building on my own experiences in campus ministry at Davidson College and chaplaincy at Duke University, I described a broad vision for the future of the Chaplaincy in my installation sermon, a sermon I shared with the wider community on October 4, 2009, the evening I was installed as the Jessie Ball duPont chair of the chaplaincy.

The title of the sermon is: *Inspiring Generous Faith; Engaging the Heart of the University.*\(^1\) I then circulated the sermon even more widely, asking for feedback from a variety of stakeholders. The feedback I received has been encouraging. It seems to be a vision recognizable to the diverse constituents the Chaplaincy serves, one that students, campus ministers, faculty, staff, administrators, and alums can support in its broad contours.

Given the wide support for this vision, I suggest the mission for the Jessie Ball duPont Chaplaincy at the University of Richmond is: *Inspiring Generous Faith; Engaging the Heart of the University.*

*Part IV: Objectives*

In order to fulfill the mission of the Chaplaincy, *Inspiring Generous Faith; Engaging the Heart of the University,* I propose the following objectives based on the strengths of the Chaplaincy’s past, the energy of *The Richmond Promise,* the changing demographics of the present, the need to be good neighbors to the wider city, and the thoughtful reflections so many community members have offered during my time on campus:

1) Create structures of welcome and inclusion for the wide range of religious traditions present on campus. We will do this by:

a. Continuing to offer the Interfaith Iftar, Interfaith Thanksgiving, Interfaith Seder, and the Discovering Many Faiths series.

b. Establishing a Faith Leadership Council made up of Richmond clergy representing diverse faith traditions who will be named adjunct university chaplains. The Faith Leadership Council will:

i. Seek to model genuine friendship across lines of faith difference on campus and in the wider city.

ii. Advise the university chaplain on how to encourage the University community be more welcoming to a diversity of faith traditions.

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\(^1\) [http://chaplaincy.richmond.edu/sermons/Rev.%20Kocher%27s%20Installation%20Sermon%2010-03-09.pdf](http://chaplaincy.richmond.edu/sermons/Rev.%20Kocher%27s%20Installation%20Sermon%2010-03-09.pdf)
iii. Develop programming for students and others to highlight commonality, difference, and engagement across and within faith communities on campus, in the city, and beyond.

2) Work to bring the seventeen campus ministries and the campus ministers who serve them more robustly into the mainstream of campus life. We will do this by:

   a. Viewing them as key allies and partners in the work of ministry on campus.

   b. Telling the story of their good work far and wide to other campus constituents, and providing opportunities for them to engage with student development staff, faculty, and administrators to exchange ideas and hone best practices.

   c. Providing more access to University resources such as those students affiliated with their traditions, opportunities for engagement with administrators and faculty, and more access to one another’s wisdom through fall and spring retreat days and informal social gatherings to encourage one another in friendship and ministry.

3) Provide opportunities for Pastoral Care for students, faculty, and staff of the University. We will do this by:

   a. Offering one-on-one pastoral care and guidance.

   b. Creating small groups focused on particular issues such as grief, sexuality, body image, and loneliness.

   c. Continuing to offer the popular and meaningful “Blue Christmas” service in early December and considering offering other services in a similar genre.

   d. Deepening partnerships with CAPS and other areas of student development which attend to overall student wellness.

   e. University Chaplains, when available, doing weddings and memorial services for students, faculty, staff and alums.
4) Develop programming for students to pursue spiritual renewal, reflection, and critical engagement with their own experience and that of others. We will do this by:

   a. Offering times for the community to gather for worship and reflection such as the December Candlelight service, the alumni service of remembrance, and a weekly service of prayer and contemplation in Cannon Chapel.

   b. Leading a yearly faith pilgrimage either domestically or internationally to a place of religious conflict and possibility or to a place of social division and reconciliation with religious implications.

   c. Offer “Theological Think Tank” a weekly small group for students to have explicitly theological conversations that connect their spiritual traditions and wider lives on campus and beyond.

   d. Partner with the Career Counseling Center to offer Destination Unknown a year-long program for sophomores to explore their sense of identity and long-range vocational aspirations.

5) Animate conversations of meaning to cultivate our highest ideals of responsible living and learning. We will do this by:

   a. The university chaplain teaching courses in areas of living/learning, faith in the public square, spiritual memoir, faith communities and social change, and other themes appropriate to the academic mission of the University, the mission of the Chaplaincy, and the Richmond Promise.

   b. Offering opportunities specifically for faculty to help them connect their professional work and identity with their own sacred stories and traditions.

   c. Partner with the authors of the Teagle Foundation White Paper from September 2008 to continue to explore questions of spirituality, identity, belief, and doubt as expressed in the classroom and beyond.

   d. Offering a series of public conversations called “The Chaplain’s Conversations” whereby the university chaplain will do public interviews with visible figures on campus around a yearly theme, such as: “What does it mean to do good?” and “Why do you do what you do?”

   e. Work to bring faculty, staff, and students together across lines of faith and no faith, sacred and secular, curricular and co-curricular to reflect on our common hopes, aspirations, and challenges, with special concern for issues of justice and inclusion.
f. Provide a significant program of faith and arts to highlight the intersection between creative arts, religious traditions, and social transformation.

g. Develop partnerships with all five schools at UR to help students further integrate their academic pursuits and their faith and social commitments.

Part V: Conclusion

The University of Richmond is one of the premier institutions of higher education in the United States, and the Chaplaincy continues to play a vital role in advancing the University’s mission. The University of Richmond has always expressed a dynamic life of the spirit through its rich heritage and inclusive practices. Now more than ever students are seeking to integrate their faith, religious traditions, and vibrant spirituality into all aspects of their lives on campus and beyond. Richmond students want to express their deepest selves and highest commitments and engage others and the wider world out of their faith traditions and spiritual hunger.

Now is the time to build on the strengths of the past and imagine new possibilities for the future, to encourage students to express their faith with generosity and passion, to create structures of welcome for students from various religious traditions so as to enrich our common life and prepare students for leadership in a world filled with religious difference and possibility, to connect with the rich and varied faith community in the wider city of Richmond, to help students live lives of consequence informed by their sacred commitments, and to animate conversations of meaning that bring people together from all areas of campus life to encourage our highest ideals of responsible living.

Long may it be so.