

Chaplaincy for All speech: 15 January

Thank you and good morning everyone. It's a great pleasure for me to be back at Church House.

Before I begin, I'm sure I speak for all of us when I say how glad we all are to see Kenneth restored to health and able once more to give a speech as stimulating as the one we have just heard.

At the risk – if you will excuse the expression – of preaching to the converted, let me start with a hard fact. Among those who don't understand what it is, university and college chaplaincy has, if not exactly a bad name, then at least an aura of quaintness about it. To some it seems redolent of Oxford in the mid-nineteenth century.

Well, I've met plenty of today's chaplains, and I can think of none who would see their function as teaching muscular Christianity to prospective empire-builders. They are people far too grounded in today's realities for that.

Nevertheless, it's fair enough that people should question what place chaplaincy in education should have in the modern world. The newspaper leader-writers would have us believe that we live in a country that is increasingly agnostic, increasingly materialistic and increasingly less tolerant of the needs of other people. If that is right – and, incidentally – it's far from clear to me that it is – what place can there be in the 21st century for John Henry Newman's precept that education should have a spiritual as well as academic dimension if it was to prepare young people adequately for adult life?

As most of you know already, I don't agree that chaplaincy is necessarily any more of an anachronism in today's multi-faith Britain than it was in Newman's time, when an overwhelming majority of the population could be called with complete accuracy Anglican, Catholic or Methodist. I think we see proof of this every day, through the work of chaplains in hospitals and hospices. We see it through their work in prisons. And perhaps we see it above all through the work of chaplains in the Armed Forces.

If anyone seriously doubts that chaplains can be invaluable in a secular organization, among people of many faiths and no faith, then I suggest that they ask a soldier. At least one serving senior officer has said that they would rather take a chaplain into battle than a doctor.

And increasingly we are also seeing the value of multi-faith chaplaincy through the work of chaplains in further and higher education institutions.

Let me explain why I think this work is so relevant to today's needs. First, we live in a country that is far from being as godless as some would have it. The comparative decline in Church of England attendance over the past 60 years is not mirrored across other faiths. Our society today is one of the Western world's more religiously observant ones. But in our multicultural communities, there is a very wide diversity of faiths and forms of observance.

That is a function of immigration over many years. Obviously, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs now represent major faith communities in the UK. And new arrivals from Africa have brought a wide range

of different forms of Christianity. To take just one example, five minutes' drive from here, down the Queenstown Road in Battersea, there is a very well-attended service for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians every Sunday morning.

Attendance at Orthodox services is also growing because of immigration from Eastern Europe. And the ubiquitous Polish builders swell Roman Catholic congregations.

In view of all this, it is unsurprising that there are substantial faith communities among students of both further and higher education. Clearly, it would be unreasonable to expect universities or colleges to provide chaplaincy support for all of them. But in universities those students who wish to worship in a particular way are almost always able to find the facilities to do so. I am, of course, aware of the useful role that student union advice and information services play in helping them to do so.

But it is important to remember that many young people who do not necessarily observe any religion still have spiritual needs. A survey carried out a year ago showed that over half of all students in FE thought "values, beliefs and faiths" important in their own lives.

I think this is where chaplaincy fulfils one of its most valuable functions. Whether or not a person has religious faith, they will still have values. Higher and also further education is often a time when the values with which a young person grew up will be challenged, and when those values that will accompany them through adulthood are formed.

That is a good thing. Part of becoming an adult is learning to think for yourself and to make your own mind up. But it can also be a time when some young people are confused and vulnerable.

Multi-faith chaplaincy facilities provide an environment within which students' moral or spiritual concerns can be discussed openly and yet in a way that is both confidential and safe. And in which they can be offered practical guidance or just a non-judgmental ear.

Let me be clear that this function is equally valuable in both further education, where students tend to be living in their home communities, or in higher education where most are living away from home.

You would expect me to mention the role of chaplains in combating violent extremism and, of course, I must. We all know that extremist groups of one sort or another – and I'm not by any means speaking here only of Al Qaeda-influenced extremists – target students. Over the past year, we have heard some of them boasting publicly about that. Chaplains, share the responsibility of all citizens to expose unlawful behavior. But they should not be expected to – and in any case, I am sure, would refuse to – behave like informers. But merely by offering a sympathetic and impartial ear to the problems of anyone irrespective of background or belief, they can help to keep troubled students out of the hands of those who would exploit them.

I know that they are being strongly supported in this by university and college authorities and by students' unions. I also appreciate the fact that the Christian churches continue to make a significant contribution – in both human and financial resources – to chaplaincy, particularly in higher education, but also into the ways that are being developed to ensure that other faith provision is developed and

encouraged.

The report which I received last year from Dr Attaulah Siddiqui – from whom you will be hearing later on - argued that there are specific pastoral care needs for Muslim students in higher education that are not always being met at the moment, despite the best efforts of the churches, multi-faith chaplaincies, volunteers and students themselves.

I am clear that where there is an identified pastoral support need, that universities have a responsibility to meet it. And properly trained Muslim chaplains or advisers can help them to do so. But, as I implied earlier, that doesn't mean that all universities must employ one. Universities need to consider the needs of their students in their particular circumstances.

Dr Siddiqui has opened up a debate about the important contribution that Muslim chaplains and advisers can make; and also about who should provide their funding and support. Although it has concentrated so far on higher education, this debate is also of relevance to the further education sector, and I am sure that colleges will follow it with interest.

These are all reasons why inter-faith dialogue – the sort of dialogue that this conference represents – is so important. Where a chaplain has to deal with people of a different faith, they need first to be equipped not only with the depth of knowledge but also with the awareness of sensitivities needed to support people in their own faiths while also encouraging the identification of shared values and beliefs.

The All Faiths and None project is developing methods and materials through which young people can examine their different faith backgrounds to identify what are the common values and beliefs across faiths – what we share rather than what divides us. I very much welcome the fact that the project has been taken forward by six faith groups, but has also involved the British Humanist Association.

Of course, we all recognize that chaplaincy services are at present more readily available in universities than in FE colleges. Indeed, the findings of the Faiths in Higher education Chaplaincy Report, which is being published today, confirm this.

But that situation is changing gradually. And following passage of the Further Education and Training Act last year, all colleges should already be looking at how they can consult learners and potential learners on their precise needs.

In some ways, I think that some university students are potentially more vulnerable than those in further education simply because they tend to be away from home and can therefore feel more cut-off and isolated. But the flip side of that fact is that FE colleges tend to have deeper roots in their local communities. As a consequence of that, the guidance – and, yes, the protection - they make available to their students can potentially make a really substantial contribution to promoting greater solidarity and cohesion within those communities.

That is one of many reasons why I very much welcome the National Ecumenical Agency for FE and Faiths in FE Forum's initiative in establishing Regional Development Officers and supporting many colleges in building links with local faith communities and finding ways of meeting spiritual needs of

students.

As you know, I want to see chaplaincy services made available in all colleges. While we are still some way from achieving that, progress to date has been encouraging. The number of colleges with chaplaincies or similar provision has gone up from about 200 two years ago, when I last spoke to this conference to about 270 at the last count.

And the guidance and training materials for chaplains in FE and others providing multi-faith support to students that are currently being piloted have the potential to do much to ensure that the services on offer will be relevant and appropriate to the needs of as many learners as possible.

The creation of the new national Council for Faiths and Beliefs in FE and the services it offer a new and very welcome way of these welcome developments further forward still.

This coming year will offer an important chance to take stock of what has been achieved so far and what more should be done.

I know from meeting with Bishop Stephen Venner, Acting Chair of your Board of Education last month, of the high importance which you in the churches place on supporting Government ambitions for giving all young people the fullest opportunities and incentives for education and training up to the age of 18. As you will appreciate, that issue falls to the responsibility not of my Department, but of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Nevertheless, I was interested to read your policy paper *Pushing Further*, with its ambitious target to support a multi-faith chaplaincy in every college and that the Churches would like us to extend the entitlement to spiritual and moral development to all 16-19 year-olds in colleges as well as sixth forms. Nevertheless, I know that my DCSF colleagues there, while they are not persuaded that legislation is the appropriate way forward on this issue, remain keen to pursue discussions with you and others on how we can achieve our common aims.

In my own area of responsibility, there is still a debate to be had about what the role of further education colleges should be in meeting students' spiritual needs be, given that they are independent, secular organisations? That debate must clearly involve not only the Government and faith groups, but also college leaders and students themselves.

In a similar vein, there is also work to be done on what alternative models for working with local faith communities colleges can consider. The Government's ambition for colleges to form ever closer links with the communities they serve is not confined to economic needs. If colleges are to fulfil their maximum potential in promoting community cohesion, they also need to engage with other parts of society and take account of particular local circumstances. That includes the faith profile of their area.

We in Government also have work to do. Above all, we must be wary of the danger of stereotyping, of assuming that we know the needs of a given faith community. We must also be careful, each time a faith issue arises, not just to round up the usual suspects and assume that their views necessarily equal those of a whole community. This is a task in which the Student Listening strategy that my Ministerial

colleagues at DIUS and I embarked on in the autumn can be of enormous help, because it allows us to hear a wide range of views from real students at first hand.

Together, we must work to meet the challenge of finding a model that genuinely works for students of all faiths and acknowledges spiritual needs of students with no faith but who are still developing their own beliefs and ability to deal with pressures and temptations and issues of meaning in their lives.

I would like to conclude my remarks with a piece of news that I know many of you will be expecting. My Department will shortly be publishing guidance for universities on how to prevent the propagation of violent extremism on campus. This incorporates feedback from the higher education sector and others on the guidance that we originally published in 2006, as well as legal and administrative changes that have taken place since then.

At the same time, we will publish for consultation draft guidance on the role of further education institutions in promoting community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. This will concentrate on how the sector can best protect vulnerable students and take responsibility for tackling violent extremism. It will also address other important themes. For example, how colleges can promote shared values, reduce segregation different groups of students and prevent bullying and intimidation by extremists.

We also recognise that learners themselves have a vital role to play as partners in this area and we will be emphasising the need to work with and build capacity of the learner body in this.

You will appreciate that I cannot go into detail on either of these documents until they are published, but I would like to pay tribute to the constructive role that representative bodies from both sectors as well as faith communities have played in helping us to develop them.

Thank you.