# EXPERIENCES OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS AT SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY AND THE RENEWAL OF CHAPLAINCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCES OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS AT SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY AND THE RENEWAL OF CHAPLAINCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Students of color at predominantly white institutions have been underserved by chaplaincy services. This study investigates why that is and what can be done. The experiences of Native American students at Susquehanna University provide a critical lens on this history and potential paths forward.

The growing religious and ethnic diversity in higher education has challenged chaplaincy to adapt. Higher education in the United States was born out of religious commitments. As religious demographics have changed, so has higher education's relationship to religion. Most chaplaincies in higher education institutions were instituted to serve white, Protestant students. As American higher education has grown more ethnically and religiously diverse since the 1960s, chaplaincies have been challenged to adapt to serve these new realities, including the intersection of racial inequities and religious diversity. Critical Religious Pluralism Theory is an analytical tool that discloses the ways in which Christian hegemony has been woven into the fabric of higher education in ways that reproduce inequity. Further, Christian hegemony and white supremacy have been historically linked and mutually reinforcing in contemporary America. These issues related to religious diversity in higher education intersect with a growing body of literature documenting the benefits of spiritual engagement among university students for both traditional academic and wellness outcomes. However, there are significant racial disparities related to staffing and resource allocation. For these

reasons, the pursuit of religious equity in higher education is an essential component of building antiracist institutions and providing spiritual support for student of color. The leadership, wisdom, passion, and moral imagination of Native American students at Susquehanna University, as demonstrated through their creation of a Native land acknowledgment site, known as the Susquehannock Tribute Circle, help us imagine what it might look like to nurture spiritual belonging on today's campuses, and how chaplaincy might be transformed to serve the human dignity of every student. I argue for a diversified staffing structure, collaboration with diversity and inclusion infrastructure, interfaith learning, and mentorship.

DEDICATION

To by parents,
Morrie and Marion Kershner,
who first dared me to imagine a more just world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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And to Soren, Sienna, and Lori: with gratitude and love, always.

# INTRODUCTION

When I was a junior in high school, I read a biography of Martin Luther King. Reading about the civil rights movement fired my desire for connection to a bigger world than my small upper Midwest town, and King's example of courageous, public-spirited faith tapped into my own desire for meaning and purpose. In a now-embarrassing show of grandiosity and naivete, I wrote in a what-I-want-to-be-when-I-grow-up essay for English class that I wanted to be a moral leader like King. It was an unlikely ambition for a white kid growing up in one of the most homogeneous communities in the country at the time. When my high school failed to offer any programming honoring Martin Luther King Day, I led a small group of students in an ineffectual boycott of classes, demanding the school district make civil rights education a priority. As a college freshman, I hung a large poster of King over my desk in my dorm room. A Black student, upon seeing it, quizzed me about who my roommate was, assuming it did not belong to me. Though I could not have named it at the time, claiming King as my hero was a way of navigating the perils, confusions, ambiguities and silences of white identity in late twentieth century America.

Midway through my college journey, still searching for ways to connect the nascent, King-inspired faith to the person I was becoming, I walked into a Buddhist *wat* perched on a mountain above Chiang Mai, Thailand. Brightly painted nagas—dragons of Thai mythology—guarded the gates of the peaked-roofed temple. I got in line with pilgrims and tourists and pressed a swatch of gold leaf into a statue of the Buddha, an act of devotion I did not fully comprehend but to which I felt drawn. My thumb pressed gently into the layers of soft gold as saffron-robed monks attended to burning incense.

Nothing in my first twenty years as a vaguely-Lutheran kid had prepared me for this encounter. In a sense, I've been seeking to make sense of it ever since. This was the first week of my semester study abroad experience, which included living with a Thai host family, and taking classes in Thai language, Thai history, and philosophy. Life's big existential questions open before me like a stunning vista. Questions of faith, spirituality, and cross-cultural encounter loomed urgently. After returning home, I became a religious studies major and eventually found my way to divinity school and ordination as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

I share these pieces of my personal story not because they are particularly noteworthy, but because they illustrate issues of identity and difference with which everyone in a diverse society must navigate, and about which this Doctor of Ministry dissertation investigating chaplaincy in higher education revolves. Of course, we engage these matters from different starting points and perspectives, conditioned by the histories, cultures, and social systems in which we find ourselves. Within these complex matrices, how we make sense of identity and difference—with an eye toward social justice—will shape the kinds of people and institutions we become.

Changes in religion and higher education chaplaincy have brought us to a crossroads. On the one hand, emerging and young adults are increasingly religiously unaffiliated—up to 30% of Americans under thirty—a trend which is especially strong among Protestants, or former Protestants. Higher education chaplaincies were largely conceived to serve Protestant student bodies. Their waning presence calls into question the purpose of chaplaincies themselves. On the other hand, growing religious pluralism

raises the possibility that a new kind of chaplaincy might be conceived, one capable of serving the diverse spiritual needs of today's student bodies.

Simply put, old models of chaplaincy built to serve a monolithically white, Protestant majority no longer meet the needs on campus. What is the way forward? At Susquehanna University, a small group of Native American students undertook to care for their own cultural and spiritual selves by creating a student club and eventually an Indigenous land acknowledgment site on campus. In the process, they changed the institution itself. My interviews with these students are presented fully in chapter five. My thesis is that the leadership, wisdom, passion, and moral imagination of these students can help us imagine what it might look like to create institutions that nurture spiritual belonging on today's campuses, and how chaplaincy might be transformed to serve the human dignity of every student. Through the words of these students, I will tell the story of their experiences and accomplishments at Susquehanna University, and how their example illuminates a path toward a new moral vision for chaplaincy. I turned to these students because they are both deeply spiritually engaged and operating outside the formal opportunities in religious and spiritual life offered on campus. Therefore, they help us imagine how chaplaincy can expand and stretch to better serve an increasingly diverse student body. My investigation into chaplaincy past, present, and future is framed by these voices of Native American students at Susquehanna. They are the thread that draws this story forward, providing a window into the challenges and needs that require a new approach to chaplaincy in higher education.

In chapter one, we look at the history of American higher education within the context of American religious history. Susquehanna University, where I serve as

chaplain, is a reflection of this larger American story in its own particular way. The growth of chaplaincies in higher education was in some respects a response to the growing religious diversity in university life. As religious pluralism flowered in the past fifty years, chaplains have been challenged to serve student bodies radically more religiously and culturally diverse than ever before.

Chapter two explores the changing face of chaplaincy in this new context. Yale University serves as a case study. In decades following World War II, Yale Chaplain William Sloan Coffin exemplified progressive, white, Protestant Christian chaplaincy. Coffin was a social activist and public theologian whose audience was not only the campus but the nation. In these post-war decades, Yale and Coffin gave little attention religious diversity. In the forty-five years since Coffin's ministry at Yale ended, the university's religious life staffing has diversified greatly. Coffin's singular voice has been replaced by a symphony of religious pluralism. Changes in intellectual and cultural life have paved the way for the embrace of religious pluralism within ostensibly secular institutions. Post-modern and post-colonial studies have called into question the sacred-secular binary, opening fresh ways of conceptualizing religion and spiritual care on campus. At the same time, the growth of chaplaincy in other sectors of society has increased the expectation for spiritual care within higher education, even among the religiously unaffiliated.

Chapter three maps the shape of religious diversity within higher education using two foundational approaches. The interfaith understanding approach focuses on building understanding and cooperation across lines of religious and worldview difference. Champions of interfaith work focus on nurturing the civic virtues required for life in a

religiously diverse democracy, honoring difference while maintaining shared commitments to a common life. By contrast, proponents of Critical Religious Pluralism Theory argue that the interfaith approach leads to an overemphasis on comity that masks inequities of power between religious groups. Specifically, CRPT takes aim at the ways in which white Christian privilege is replicated in higher education, creating and sustaining systemic inequities. While the interfaith emphasis on civic life in a religiously diverse democracy has much to commend it, CRPT brings a critique of religious inequity that is vital to reimagining chaplaincy.

What does all of this have to do with the actual experiences of students? Spiritual growth and engagement is a predictor of student success and well-being. In their landmark study of American undergraduate students, Astin *et al* offer an expansive definition of spirituality that includes what they describe as the universally human process by which subjective moral dispositions and humanistic values are cultivated.[1] This understanding of spirituality does not assume or require religious beliefs, but may be inclusive of them. The broad benefits of spiritual growth as documented by Astin *et al*'s landmark study run up against inequities in resources and opportunities, as I show below.

Chapter five is the spiritual heart of this study. Here we meet seven Native American students from Susquehanna University whose experience, perspective, and pioneering campus activism help us imagine a new kind of chaplaincy. Because these students are both deeply spiritually engaged while operating outside of the established offerings of religious life at the university, their stories help us imagine how chaplaincy

[1] Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 1-2.

would need to stretch and change to support more diverse student needs. Specifically, I consider how their development as campus leaders was integral to their transformative work. A renewal of chaplaincy begins by walking alongside, learning from, and supporting campus leaders like these. Finally, chapter six summarizes our learnings while pointing to an intersectional, liberative Christian theology for a transformed chaplaincy in higher education.

This Doctor of Ministry in Public Theology is grounded in the fundamental conviction that there is nothing more public—that is, impactful for our common life—than the ways in which we educate young minds. And there is nothing more spiritual than human beings exercising their sacred dignity to know and to love that which is good, true, and beautiful. "The vision of God is the life of humanity," wrote Christian apologist Irenaeus of Lyon in the second century.[2] In the spirit of Irenaeus, I am inviting us to imagine a chaplaincy that serves the sacred humanity—the immanent divinity—of every student. Chaplaincy, in some measure and iteration, can be a steward of and prophetic voice for higher education's highest and best aspirations. This means supporting students in their quest for meaning, purpose and belonging while being a prophetic voice within academia for the service of our shared humanity and the common good.

In closing this introduction, I share two student voices which capture the vital importance of spirituality for the students I interviewed. Their voices will be a thread that draws this discussion of chaplaincy forward. We meet them in depth in chapter five. One student, faced with a deeply personal and very destabilizing spiritual struggle, found

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[2] Quoted in Rowan A. Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church*. (University Park: Pennsylvania, 1986), 41.

solace and healing in a traditional blessing performed by a fellow Native student, who had to skirt campus regulations to do so. Reflecting on that experience and the impact it made for them in their experience in college, the student noted, "[I]f I didn't meet another Native on campus who shared, 'Hey this is how I'm able to practice what I believe, and this is how I'm able to cope being here,' . . . I don't know what would have happened. I probably would have been like I can't do this anymore."[3] Another student, reflecting on the importance and impact of institutional support for Native students to practice their traditions, said, "It's who we are, where we're alive. It's a living thing, we cannot separate the two. . ."[4]

For these students, Native traditions bring a sense of connection, life and healing. Such traditions are a thread weaving their identities as university students into their familial and community lives back home. Can chaplaincy services support such healing and belonging for students on our increasingly diverse campuses? Can our institutions be transformed to provide belonging and nurture flourishing? Through their leadership, these students point us toward an answer.

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[3] Participant 3, interview with the author, February 11, 2022, Appendix B, 188. All subsequent notes for interviews will refer to page numbers found in Appendix B. Throughout, I use the pronoun *them* in both the singular and the plural to refer to participants. Interviews in Appendix B have been redacted to conceal individual identities.

[4] Participant 5, interview with the author, April 20, 2022, Appendix B, 205.

# CHAPTER ONE

## RELIGION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICAN LIFE

The practice of public theology entails bringing theological discourse and praxis into the public sphere in ways that serve and advance the common good. Susquehanna University, where I serve as University Chaplain, is the setting where I engage in public theological praxis. From preaching in Sunday chapel worship services, to leading an interfaith Baccalaureate, to offering a prayer for a vigil on Transgender Day of Remembrance, to participating in a die-in led by the Black Student Union, to offering pastoral care to students from a diversity of religious and nonreligious backgrounds, to speaking to a class on the importance on vocational discernment that links head and heart, there are many different settings within which I engage in public theological discourse. For chaplains in higher education, the breadth and variety of this work will be familiar.

Both higher education and chaplaincy within it are rapidly changing. For that reason, the meaning and purpose of both are highly contested. To understand the present moment in higher education chaplaincy and the great potential for innovation it offers, we will need to look at how we have gotten to where we are today. Only then can we appreciate what the Native students with whom I spoke bring to this conversation. This will entail placing the story of Susquehanna University within the wider frame of the story of higher education in the United States.

## AN AMERICAN AND LUTHERAN COLLEGE

Susquehanna University was born out of a theological dispute among American Lutherans in the decades before the Civil War. While some sought to anchor their faith in the doctrinal traditions inherited from Europe, others sought a Lutheranism that took its theological cues from the American context and the missionary needs found locally. This latter group were Lutherans animated by the evangelical energies of the Second Great Awakening. Susquehanna's founder, The Rev. Benjamin Kurtz, found the village of Selinsgrove (located on the Susquehanna River forty-five miles north of Harrisburg) willing to offer land and support in exchange for the education of its sons and daughters. Supported by local boosters, the Missionary Institute was founded to provide a free education to equip young men of limited means who wanted to become preachers. Susquehanna Female College was founded simultaneously but incorporated separately. The two were combined in 1898 and adopted the name Susquehanna University. The institution served students who would enter the ministry as well as secular professions. In this, they were representative of the time in which they were founded. The faculty voted to eliminate the granting of graduate degrees in 1928 and the seminary closed in 1933. Only the baccalaureate-granting College of Liberal Arts remained, which is the heart of the institution to the present day.

American higher education was a religious enterprise from the beginning. The student experience at Harvard College, founded in 1636, is paradigmatic:

> [A]n essential ingredient of this early liberal education was the religious spirit of Harvard. Our founders brought over this medieval Christian tradition undiluted. The Harvard student's day began and ended with public prayer: daily he heard a chapter of Scripture (sic) expounded by the President (sic); Saturday was given up to catechizing and other preparations for the Sabbath, which was wholly devoted

> to worship, meditation—and surreptitious mischief. Harvard students were reminded in their college laws, and by their preceptors, that the object of their literary and scientific studies was the greater glory of God.[5]

While every one of the colleges founded in the colonial era were religious in their founding, they were also diverse in their goals and aims. The influence of Unitarians at Harvard led to the founding of the more theologically trinitarian Yale, while disputes with the theocratic impulses of Massachusetts Puritans led to the exile of the Baptist Roger Williams to the wilderness of Rhode Island and his founding of Brown University as a place that honored liberty of conscience in matters of religion. Columbia, William and Mary, and the University of Pennsylvania had various affiliations with the Church of England. American higher education was from the beginning both religious and diverse. It is also a fact that the establishment of American higher education and its religious mission was a tool of colonial expansion and disenfranchisement of Native peoples:

> The colonial colleges played on the desires of the English to "spread the gospel" among the "heathens." . . . . Complicated by funding from England and other Christian fundraising, Harvard University, for example, was able to expand their institution while neglecting their charter to educate Indigenous men. . . . As "heathens," on lands the colonists desired, education was a form of removal, not only physically and psychologically, but also a tool of removal of Indigenous ways of being. . . . [6]

The religious energies shaping the colonial colleges reflected many of the competing religious currents in Great Britain of the time: Puritans,

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[5] Kenneth Underwood*, The Church, the University, and Social Policy, Volume 1: Report of the Director*. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 51-52.

[6] Stephanie J. Waterman, "New Research Perspectives on Native American Students in Higher Education," *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (2019): 62-63.

Congregationalists, Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians.[7] Following the American Revolution, expanded European immigration deepened religious diversity to include increasing numbers of Lutherans, Mennonites, Moravians, Methodists, Greek and Russian Orthodox, to name a few.[8] Quakers had long been part of William Penn's commonwealth of religious tolerance in Pennsylvania.[9] Nineteenth century immigration from southern and eastern Europe brought increasing numbers of Jews, Roman Catholics, and Greek and Russian Orthodox to America's shores, challenging Protestant cultural hegemony and often accompanied by debates about what constitutes a "real" American.[10] The growth of higher education institutions in the nineteenth century is reflective of this growing cultural and religious diversity. Susquehanna is one of a flurry of denominationally-based colleges and universities founded during this period.

> The overwhelming features of American higher education have been its diversity and its restless expansion. Not only could any person find any study but, particularly after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against New Hampshire's attempt to impose state control on Dartmouth College in 1819, any individual, group, church, city, state, or private firm could found a college and open its doors to anyone willing to pay tuition fees. . . . The American cornucopia, born after the Civil War of free or cheap land, mass production, and endless opportunity, poured out part of its riches into hundreds and later thousands of colleges and universities across the continent. Every state and large city had its state-funded university, often with several campuses, and private universities sprang up for every kind of

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[7] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity Volume II: The Reformation to the Present Day*. (New York: Harper One, 2010), 275-290.

[8] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 319-326.

[9] Diana L. Eck, *The New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. (New York: Harper One, 2001), 39.

[10] Diana L. Eck, *The New Religious America*, 47.

> student. The nine colonial colleges at the American Revolution grew to 560 by 1870 and to 1,220 by 1928. . ."[11]

The founding of Susquehanna University fits within this broad historical context of the growth of American institutions of higher education. Remarks given at the laying of the cornerstone of the first building of the Missionary Institute in 1858 capture the spirit of Christian piety and moral formation that defined much higher education in this era.

> Education, in its legitimate sense, includes not only the cultivation of the mental powers, but the proper training and development of the moral sentiments and faculties, and its true object is to "make us not only wiser but better men." When as here, the church comes in to throw around all the sacred influence of religion, no one can doubt the salutary and lasting benefits.[12]

It wasn't only the cultivation of Christian virtue that was lauded in the founding of the Missionary Institute, but also the distinctly Protestant and specifically Lutheran viewpoints that were said to not only disclose religious truth but make possible political liberty.

> When Luther and his great compeers kindled the fires of the Reformation and taught the people of the earth to burst the shackles with which a ghostly hierarchy, under papal Rome, was binding the minds and consciences of men, it was then that the first great impulse was given to those sentiments of true liberty which have their culmination and consummation in the free institutions which are our inestimable birthright and rich inheritance.[13]

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[11] Harold Perkin, "History of Universities," in *The History of Higher Education, Second Edition*, ed. Lester F. Goodchild and Harold S. Weschler (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 1997), 22.

[12] Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Institute, *Addresses, Inaugurals, and Charges Delivered in Selin's Grove, Snyder Co., PA September 1st, and November 24th, 1858, in Connection with the Laying of the Corner Stone, and the Installation of the Professors of the Evang. Lutheran Missionary Institute, Together with an Appeal in Behalf of that Institution* (Baltimore: T. Newton Kurtz, 1859), 178.

[13] Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Institute, *Addresses, Inaugurals, and Charges,* 176-177.

Here we see a glimpse of the public theology underlying the religious energies at play in the founding of Susquehanna University. Luther and the Reformation are credited with not only revealing religious truth but making possible the birth of democratic government. The Roman Catholic Church is cast as a discarded relic of the past as well as a possible threat to the American church and American democracy. It is perhaps no coincidence that during this time period, immigration of Catholic populations from southern and eastern Europe loomed large in the American Protestant imagination as a potential threat. As a Lutheran institution, the Missionary Institute saw itself as serving ecclesiastical and nationalistic ends. The University's second president, Henry Zeigler, wrote in 1857, Susquehanna was to be "an American and Lutheran College."[14]

## THREE ERAS: PROTESTANT HEGEMONY, PRIVATIZATION, AND PLURIFORMITY

The role of religion in American higher education has changed much over time. From its Protestant roots in the colonial era, to the rise of the secular research university in the early twentieth century, to the diversification of religion in the culture and campuses of the twenty-first, religion in higher education is reflective of wider cultural movements. In *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*, Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen identify three broad historical eras that characterize the relationship between religion and higher education in the American context: the Protestant era, the era of privatization, and the era of pluriformity.[15] Each of these eras

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[14] Donald D. Housley, *Susquehanna University, 1858-2000: A Goodly Heritage* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2007), 19.

[15] Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16-30.

can be seen at Susquehanna, though they lag behind the mainstream trends the authors describe due to Susquehanna's homogeneity through much of its first century and its geographic isolation. In recent years, as Susquehanna has sought to welcome a religiously and culturally diverse student body, this history offers both resources and challenges for chaplaincy, which I will explore further below.

Jacobsen *et al* identify the colonial era through the late nineteenth century as the Protestant era, when white Protestant churches enjoyed a largely unquestioned hegemony in cultural and educational life. "The Protestant era in American religion and higher education was a time when all of life, including education, was set within a national culture dominated by Protestant Christianity. . . . It molded public values, shaped public perceptions, and defined the goals of higher education."[16] In this era, the classical curriculum defined American higher education, which included mastery of Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, and instruction in moral philosophy and rhetoric through the canonical texts of antiquity. Higher education was largely an elite endeavor, intended to educate young white men of means for positions of leadership in church and society. From its inception, Susquehanna University was driven by more democratic sensibilities, at least in respect to class and gender. As mentioned previously, the Missionary Institute sought to make a theological education available to poor young men entering the ministry and did not charge tuition. The Female College was founded because the town boosters who donated the land for the new institution insisted on an education for their daughters.[17]

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[16] Jacobsen *et al*, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education*, 17.

[17] Housley, *A Goodly Heritage*, 29-75.

The mid- to late- nineteenth century saw the founding of a proliferation of regional colleges affiliated with various Protestant denominations,[18] whose strength of denomination affiliation largely increased into the beginning of the twentieth century.[19] Between 1832 and 1896, thirty-seven Lutheran-affiliated colleges were founded.[20] Many, mostly in the Midwest, were founded by German and Scandinavian immigrant communities. Others, like Susquehanna, grew out of theological disputes and splits rather than by the cultural and educational needs of new immigrants.

Even during this flurry of founding of colleges serving Protestant aims, the tides in higher education were beginning to change. The Morrill Act establishing publicly funded Land Grant colleges administered by the states was passed in 1862. The Morrill Act is worth mentioning for two reasons. First, it led to the transformation of higher education in the United States by emphasizing agricultural and technical education. While Susquehanna was not aided by the Morrill Act, the Act's emphasis on pragmatic skills shifted the focus in much of higher education away from religious worldviews and character formation. Second, the Morrill Act accelerated the dispossession of Native peoples from their land. A recent study has for the first time sought to document the scale of land theft and wealth transfer made possible by the Morrill Act, accounting for "the nearly 80,000 parcels of land, scattered mostly across 24 Western states."

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[18] Perkin, "History of Universities," 22.

[19] David B. Potts, "American Colleges in the Nineteenth Century: From Localism to Denominationalism," *History of Education Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1971): 363-380.

[20] Richard W. Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 351-352.

> The Morrill Act worked by turning land expropriated from tribal nations into seed money for higher education. In all, the act redistributed nearly 11 million acres — an area larger than Massachusetts and Connecticut combined.
>
> Hundreds of violence-backed treaties and seizures extinguished Indigenous title to over 2 billion acres of the United States. Nearly 11 million of those acres were used to launch 52 land-grant institutions. The money has been on the books ever since, earning interest, while a dozen or more of those universities still generate revenue from unsold lands. Meanwhile, Indigenous people remain largely absent from student populations, staff, faculty and even curriculum.[21]

Built on the back of Native dispossession, the law itself funded a new vision for higher education with the goal of feeding and building a rapidly expanding nation. According to the Morrill Act, the educational goals of the land grant colleges:

> shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.[22]

The Morrill Act changed higher education in the United States, greatly expanding access while directing education toward practical ends. To take just one notable example, the number of engineers trained in the years following the law's passage points to the turn toward technical education it birthed.

> Immediately after the Civil War, engineering education exploded in the U.S. In 1866 there were only 300 men with engineering degrees, and only six colleges of any reputation granting them. By 1870, led by the newly created land-grant institutions, there were 21 colleges granting engineering degrees, and the total number of graduates was 866. In the 1870s an additional 2,249 engineers graduated, and in the first decade of the 20th century 21,000 engineers joined the work force. By 1911 the U.S. was graduating 3,000 engineers a year and had a

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[21] Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, "Land-Grab Universities," *High Country News*, March 30, 2020, https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/Indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities.

[22] 7 U.S. Code Subchapter 1- College-aid Land Appropriation § 304 - Investment of proceeds of sale of land or scrip. https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/7/304 (accessed January 28, 2022).

> total of 38,000 engineers in the work force. . . In just 50 years after the passage of the Morrill Act, the U.S. had become the quantitative leader in technical education.[23]

As colleges and universities founded by state governments began offering an education rooted in technical knowledge and practical application, higher education became less concerned with character formation and religious narratives. By the late nineteenth century, intellectual trends prizing "objectivity" in research and inquiry further de-centered religion within much of higher education. Schmalzbauer and Mahoney summarize the trends that contributed to this state of affairs:

> [H]istorians have portrayed the academic revolution as a prelude to secularization. In one version of the story, the rise of the modern university led to the repudiation of religious authority and the rise of academic freedom. In another, liberal Protestant educators adopted a stance of "methodological secularization," excluding religious and metaphysical presuppositions. Other accounts emphasize the role of the emerging disciplines, arguing that the marginalization of religion was an unintended consequence of departmental specialization. In both the social sciences and humanities, an emphasis on specialized research led scholars to "think small," ignoring religious and metaphysical questions. By the early twentieth century, the impact of secularization could be seen across the university.[24]

The secularizing trends noted above diminished the Protestant ethos of higher education and led to what Jacobson *et al* identify as the era of privatization or individualization of religious commitments.

> Over the course of the twentieth century, religion in American higher education was increasingly privatized. At most colleges and universities, religion was slowly withdrawn (or withdrew) from the more public domains of education and

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[23] Daniel E. Williams, "The Morrill Act's Contribution to Engineering's Foundation," *The Bent of Tau Beta Pi*, Spring (2009), no page number available.

[24] John Schmalzbauer and Kathleen A. Mahoney, *The Resilience of Religion in American Higher Education* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 24.

> came to be seen as a personal matter that faculty and students, if they so desired, could address on their own outside the academic framework of the institution.[25]

While religious commitments were still often ubiquitous in American culture and even on campuses, the era of privatization describes the bracketing of personal religious identities and commitments within academic discourse, particularly at elite colleges and research universities.

For its part, Susquehanna remained insulated from these broader trends for the first six decades of the twentieth century, and the Protestant era remained largely intact. Far from being invisible, religion was inscribed into the curriculum and inculcated in daily chapel services, at which student attendance was required. Along with many religious, denomination-based institutions, Susquehanna's mission was to inculcate Christian values within the homogeneous religious subculture it understood itself to serve. The *Student Handbook* of the late 1940s summarized the value of a Susquehanna education: "[T]o learn matters from students who are gentlemen, and form character under professors who are Christians—this is the offer of the college for the best years of your life."[26]

At Susquehanna, the Protestant era began to crack in the 1960s, when the cultural forces that roiled America breached even conservative, small liberal arts colleges in rural Pennsylvania. Some students protested to end the war in Vietnam, a group of white student activists sought to recruit a more racially diverse student body (with little support

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[25] Jacobsen *et al*, *No Longer Invisible*, 20.

[26] Housley, *A Goodly Heritage,* 290.

from the administration), and others rose up against a century of tradition to demand an end to compulsory daily chapel.[27] The story of the role of the university chaplain is itself a story of the evolving religious identity of the institution.

For more than the first one hundred years of its existence, Susquehanna University did not have a chaplain. During that first century, the institution was nearly synonymous with the Lutheran church. As required by the university constitution, Susquehanna's presidents were ordained Lutheran ministers, providing administrative and spiritual leadership to the campus. The founding of the position of university chaplain in 1964 was a change marked by paradox. With the chaplain representing the Lutheran church and heritage, the religious identity of the institution could reside in the person and ministry of the chaplain and less in the institution as a whole. The chaplaincy was a sign of the growing diversity of the student body and an increasing distinction between the institution and its religious heritage. In 1976, the university constitution was amended to end the requirement that the university president be an ordained Lutheran minister, and no president has been a Lutheran minister since. The chaplain served as both the standard bearer of Lutheran identity and a catalyst for the gradual diversification of the institution. Indeed, it was the first university chaplain who supported and helped to manage the end of required attendance of daily chapel services.[28] As Donald Housley put it:

> Two worlds collided at Susquehanna in the 1960s: the Christian college culture, whose symbiosis emerged in the 1890s, and the modern world of secular thought and intellectual freedom. As participants to this clash saw it, the campus culture

[27] Housley, *A Goodly Heritage*, 374-395.

[28] Housley, *A Goodly Heritage,* 388-393.

> transformed slowly. From a vantage point of decades, it is apparent that a revolution had occurred at Susquehanna from 1959 to 1968. The "American and Lutheran College," which entered the decade of the 1960s left it as "an American College" that would be as Lutheran as necessity (*sic*) and the proclivities of select individuals might make it.[29]

The relationship between the university and the church erupted in conflict in the early 1980s. The Central Pennsylvania Synod, the regional Lutheran church body to which the university related and from which the university received financial support, passed a resolution requiring the university to hire professors who were members of the Lutheran church in good standing. The faculty protested at this church over-reach and the university came close to formally cutting ties with the church.[30]

In an effort to mend institutional relationships, a commission was founded to study the relationship between the Lutheran church and the university and provide recommendations for a path forward. Chaired by Lutheran luminary Rev. Dr. Krister Stendahl, dean of Harvard Divinity School, the "Stendahl Commission" was notable for its multifaith composition, including Rabbi Solomon Bernhards, co-director of the department of interfaith affairs at the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Dr. Eugene Fisher, of the National Council of Catholic Bishops, and Rev. Dr. John Vannorsdall, Chaplain of Yale University. The commission included in its recommendations a vision for the future of the chaplaincy at Susquehanna, which includes the recognition that the chaplain serves a religiously diverse student body while also being the institutional standard-bearer for all things Lutheran. This is the only known

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[29] Housley, *A Goodly Heritage,* 392-393.

[30] Housley, *A Goodly Heritage*, 503-509.

institutionally-authorized reflection on the role of Susquehanna University's chaplain in light of the growing diversification of campus and society, and is worth quoting at length:

> For the LCA[31] pastor who serves as chaplain in an LCA college is not a pastor only to Lutherans. She or he is the chaplain to the whole community in its diversity, responsible for the nurture and deepening of the spiritual life of all. In a truly diverse community this is certainly not achieved on the "lowest common denominator"; rather the distinct needs for worship, spiritual nurture, and faithfulness to various traditions of religious groups must be met often with the help of others invited to and recognized by the college.
>
> In such a ministry the chaplain has a unique opportunity of showing generations of students how to grow in commitment and faith along with respect for and willingness to serve others. The chaplain's own role as "the Lutheran presence" (*sic*) on campus gives him a special opportunity to exemplify that art. For a chaplain on an LCA campus is not a colorless and cool coordinator of activities or the administration's "religious guardian for the kids." The chaplain of an LCA college functions best when he or she taps the resources of Lutheran faith and tradition as they bear on all his work, preaching, counseling, organizing, and enabling all communities and individuals to grow in their spiritual and moral life. An LCA chaplain is not a Lutheran pastor to some, a Catholic priest or a rabbi to others. It is as a Lutheran he or she cares in various ways for a diverse community in various and imaginative ways.[32]

The commission provided a roadmap for the way in which the chaplaincy has largely functioned in the decades since. The conflict that occasioned the commission in the first place was eventually smoothed over, with the university asserting its freedom in matters of faculty hiring while remaining in friendly, if distant, relationship to the church.

During the decades to follow, the chaplain's role as a senior university administrator functioned as the chief marker of the university's religious identity ("the Lutheran presence"), ensuring a privileged place for Lutheranism in the institution even

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[31] The Lutheran Church in America (LCA) merged with the American Lutheran Church and American Evangelical Lutheran Church to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1987.

[32] Krister Stendahl *et al*, "Draft Report of the Stendahl Commission," July 21, 1982, personal copy, 9-10.

while those theological traditions played an ever-shrinking role in most aspects of its daily life. The chaplain stood for both the continuity of Susquehanna's religious identity and its irrelevance to the way the university actually functioned. In its own way, Susquehanna had caught up to the era of privatization.

Brian Beckstrom, former dean of spiritual life and campus pastor at Wartburg College, notes the role campus chaplains at ELCA colleges and universities played in advancing these secularizing trends:

> An unintended result of the hiring of campus pastors has been the siloing of religious faith. Changing student and faculty demographics have certainly also contributed to the compartmentalizing of religion on campus, but the perception that there are now professional religious people on campus to handle faith issues has contributed to a growing indifference toward the college's religious identity in the general population.[33]

Beckstrom is correct that chaplaincies have contributed to the bracketing of religious faith within the life of higher education institutions. However, there may be more intention behind that siloing than he is prepared to admit. At religiously affiliated institutions such as Susquehanna, chaplaincy has been a path for the administration to manage the religious affiliation—and those constituents for whom it remains important—while keeping it at arm's length. This dynamic is born out at other institutions, which we will see in the following chapter.

In the later decades of the twentieth century, the tide in American religion and higher education began to shift toward the era of pluriformity. Religion came out of the shadows with a vibrant diversity the guardians of the Protestant era could not have

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[33] Brian Beckstrom, *Leading Lutheran Higher Education in a Secular Age: Religious Identity, Mission and Vocation at ELCA Colleges and Universities.* (New York: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 29.

imagined. The reasons for this shift are academic, cultural, and political. Following the Immigration Act of 1965, immigrants from non-European countries greatly increased the cultural and religious diversity of the United States. As a result, college and university campuses became much more diverse. Religious diversity in America was no longer limited to the post-War consensus of Protestant/Catholic/Jew.[34] It included ever-growing numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others, including growing numbers of the religiously unaffiliated.[35]

It wasn't just demographics that have driven the embrace of religious diversity; academic trends aided this, as well. Postmodern philosophy and post-colonial studies placed non-Western and nonwhite cultural expressions and ways-of-knowing on an equal plane with white Euro-American traditions, challenging centuries of racism and cultural/religious chauvinism. At the same time, as student bodies grow more diverse, religious practices and traditions are increasingly seen in light of students' expectation to have their diverse identities affirmed and supported—whether those students are Christian or Wiccan, Muslim or Buddhist. Once sidelined in much of higher education, religion is "no longer invisible."

> For the first time in American higher educational history, the push for talking about matters of religion and spirituality and answering questions about human purpose and meaning is coming from the bottom up rather than the top down. Paying attention to religion in higher education today is not at all a matter of imposing faith or morality on anyone; it is a matter of responding intelligently to the questions of life that students find themselves necessarily asking as they try to

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[34] Will Herberg, *Protestant—Catholic—Jew: An Essay on American Religious Sociology*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 211-253.

[35] Diana L. Eck, *The New Religious America,* 1-25

> make sense of themselves and the world in an era of ever-increasing social, intellectual and religious complexity.[36]

At Susquehanna, the shifting role of the chaplain within the institution points to the changing relationship to its religious heritage and to perceived institutional need. At the inception of the university chaplaincy in 1964, the chaplain reported to the president. As a member of the president's staff, the chaplain's role was primarily pastoral, symbolic, and administrative. The chaplain personally represented the religious identity of the institution at the highest administrative level. In 2018, the organizational structure was changed; the chaplain was to report to the vice president for student life. The focus shifted toward student engagement: values formation and vocational discernment, support for diverse religious communities and expressions, mentoring, interfaith programming, and spiritual care. The director of Jewish life, first hired in 2009, was part of the chaplain's staff. A Muslim prayer room was established and "Multifaith and Mindfulness Spaces" were created in residence halls.

In May 2021, another reorganization shifted the reporting structure again, with the chaplain now reporting to the chief inclusion and diversity officer as part of a multi-staff division charged with advancing diversity, equity and inclusion across the institution. These changes have come in rapid succession. It is too early to assess the long-term implication of these changes on the chaplaincy at Susquehanna, though the rapid changes suggest an administration juggling competing priorities as it seeks to relate to its religious heritage. Susquehanna is trying to find its way in the era of pluriformity.

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[36] Jacobsen *et al*, *No Longer Invisible*, 30.

Change is not without its tensions. I periodically field calls from Lutheran clergy who bristle at the institution losing its "Lutheran identity" and call on me as chaplain to defend this heritage. One pastor and parent of a prospective student complained angrily, "Why does the ELCA give Susquehanna money if they are going to downplay their Lutheran identity? And what are you as chaplain doing about it?" I gently pointed out that all ELCA-affiliated colleges and universities are self-sustaining entities that receive no funding from the denomination (and haven't for decades). On the other side of the spectrum, some antireligious voices question the need for a chaplain at all, seeing the role as a vestige of a bygone religious era. Both sentiments see the chaplaincy through the lens of Protestant hegemony, one meaning to defend it, another to reject it in favor of an anti-religious secularism. Both fail to embrace religious and cultural pluralism or view the chaplain as an advocate for these values.

**BEYOND THE SACRED/SECULAR BINARY**

Brian Beckstrom places the struggles over religious identity at ELCA colleges and universities within the shifting notions of religion and secularism in the modern West. Interpreting Charles Taylor's analysis of social, cultural, and intellectual forces that have given birth to modernity in *A Secular Age*, Beckstrom outlines the typologies that guide Taylor's analysis.[37] He shows how they can be seen in the ways in which ELCA colleges and universities have related to and articulated their religious identity through time. Taylor's models of secularism are lenses for thinking about the relationship of the human self to the transcendent realm. They are also helpful models for reflecting on the

[37] Brian Beckstrom, *Leading Lutheran Higher Education*, 112-128.

way institutions understand their relationship to transcendence—that is to say, the way colleges and universities understand their relationship to God or the divine.

Taylor's Secular 1 model describes a self (and a world) that is porous to the transcendent. A sense of divine transcendence enfolds the world, which points beyond itself to its fulfilment in God. Such a world is described as enchanted with divine mystery and action. While Secular 1 may seem to describe a premodern worldview, it is important to note that Taylor's models do not exclusively represent an historical chronology, as elements of all his models can coexist side by side.

Secular 2 describes a world in which a radical break has been made between religious spaces (which maintain a sense of the transcendent) and a-religious spaces (which do not), a cleavage driven by the Enlightenment. No longer is the self/world seen as porous to an all-encompassing transcendent realm. Instead, the world is seen as divided between religious and a-religious realms. This state of affairs has invited a variety of responses. For those hostile to religious influence, this bracketing of religious worldviews is welcomed. For many with this perspective, Secular 2 heralds the eventual withering away of religion. For the religiously inclined, this model suggests religion is embattled or in a hostile relationship with the a-religious world.

The earliest foundations of American higher education were laid at the boundary between these two models. While assuming a religious worldview and mission, American higher education was charged with Enlightenment ideals of inquiry and investigation. With time, many elite institutions settled into the a-religious side of Taylor's Secular 2 split. Many church-affiliated institutions have also assumed the Secular 2 model,

positioning themselves on the religious side of the binary. Both view the religious and a-religious spheres competing in a zero-sum game.

One can see in Susquehanna's history the power of the Secular 2 model. For the first hundred years, Susquehanna was a small denominational institution serving a religious subculture. When the revolutions of the 1960s roiled campus, the religious ethos was bracketed through the introduction of the chaplaincy, the end of mandatory chapel, and, by the 1970s, an end to *in loco parentis* supervision. While this opened up vital space for diversity and freedom, it left limited space for understanding the constructive role that religious identity or chaplaincy might play, beyond competing for an ever-shrinking portion of campus real estate and student attention.

Taylor's Secular 3 model integrates elements of the previous models. It describes the complexity and diversity of the postmodern milieu in which the self is porous to meaning beyond itself, which may or may not be understood in religious terms. This model is not bound by dichotomies. It does not assume transcendent or divine meaning in the life of individuals but it also does not foreclose it. Religion may be present but more "fragile" and less institutionally monolithic, while opening space for dynamic and open-ended spiritual engagement within the life of the individual (as well, potentially, of institutions). While the Secular 3 model may seem to describe the diminishment of religious substance, Beckstrom argues that it opens the opportunity for a renewed vitality of religion within a more diverse frame.

In his study of ELCA colleges and universities and the ways in which they publicly describe their religious identity and educational mission, Beckstrom notes that religious identity is generally articulated in exclusively humanistic terms (for example,

commitments to service and social justice) without reference to the theological commitments that undergird them. While the humanistic framework is valuable, the theological tradition is rendered mute, disconnected from the values of which they are an expression. This state of affairs is a symptom of a Secular 2 framework, as a religious institution seeks to interpret itself in a-religious terms as a way of negotiating the boundary. Beckstrom argues that the Secular 3 model offers a way for ELCA colleges and universities to lay claim to their religious heritage and theological commitments in a fresh way. "In the Secular 3 world, human experience and authenticity are the coin of the realm. Theological ideas are less about doctrine and more existential, adding form and texture to experience."[38]

Beckstrom argues that this impacts how we think about chaplaincy. It allows for a way of affirming how God or the divine is an active subject in the lives of individuals and institutions in ways that honor the diversity of human perspectives and flourishing. In this sense, the action of God in the life of individuals or the world *may or may not* be synonymous with the interpretations of particular religious traditions. This perspective is open-ended and process-oriented while not shying away from particularity. Beckstrom suggests language for ELCA institutions that, quoting a recent theological statement by the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU), is both "rooted and open."[39]

> Because NECU institutions are both rooted in the Lutheran tradition and open to others, they are distinctive in higher education in the United States. Neither

[38] Brian Beckstrom, *Leading Lutheran Higher Education,* 124.

[39] "Rooted and Open: The Common Calling of the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities," Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, accessed September 6, 2021, https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Rooted_and_Open.pdf.

> sectarian nor secular, NECU colleges and universities take a third path of being rooted in the Lutheran intellectual and educational traditions while being open to others.[40]

Beckstrom's analysis is helpful for thinking about chaplaincy in a diverse world. His model suggests that the religious particularity of an institution need not be in conflict with religious pluralism. Indeed, Beckstrom suggests that support for religious pluralism can be an expression of particular theological commitments. Further, Taylor's schema helps us imagine educational spaces that are neither wholly secular nor wholly religious, in which religious and secular traditions of meaning-making inform the educational mission inside and outside the classroom. Whether those sources of value and meaning point toward the divine transcendent (as in theistic traditions) or toward non-theistic sources (as in Buddhist traditions or secular traditions), chaplains serve as ministers and stewards of such engagement and encounter. These are possibilities for chaplaincy that are yet to be realized in most settings, including Susquehanna University, whose story is part of the much larger story of religion and higher education in American life.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, though Susquehanna was insulated for a time from the larger trends in American institutional life, it was not immune to them. The demographic, cultural, and intellectual changes that dramatically increased diversity in the wider culture began to transform Susquehanna as well. This has meant a reassessment of how its religious heritage relates to its educational mission, a reassessment that is still very much underway.

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[40] "Rooted and Open," Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities, 4.

The chaplaincy and religious life at Susquehanna have adapted and changed over time, yet basic questions remain: is the chaplaincy a relic of the institution's religious past with waning relevance for its future, as the Secular 2 model suggests? Or might chaplaincy be understood as advancing an essential part of its educational mission in the 21st century, a possibility of Secular 3? Indeed, debates about the value and purpose of chaplaincy sit close to the heart of debates about the value and purpose of higher education itself:

> As chaplains strive to provide ethical leadership, enable human flourishing, provide forums for communal healing, and assist students in questions of character formation and vocation, some aspects of their role remain unclear. At a time when higher education is facing a crisis concerning its purpose, utility, and sky-rocketing costs, is building character still central to the mission of the university? Are students still expected to leave campus with resilience and virtues, as well as a set of more readily demonstrable, marketable, technical skills?[41]

The Guiding Values of Susquehanna University state that it is an institution seeking to be "a diverse community that cultivates inclusive excellence, intercultural competence, and global citizenship."[42] The university's Learning Goals, which are inclusive of student learning both inside and outside the classroom, include the statement: "SU graduates develop and internalize their own integrated vision of the common good and how to pursue it in the context of their lives," including, "committing to ongoing development of one's intellectual, physical, and spiritual life."[43]

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[41] Celene Ibrahim, Elizabeth Aeschlimann, and Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, "Campus Chaplains Hold the Center When Things Fall Apart," in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, 49, no. 1 (2021), 52-62.

[42] "About Susquehanna: Our Guiding Values," Susquehanna University, accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.susqu.edu/about-susquehanna/our-guiding-values.

[43] "About Susquehanna: Learning Goals," Susquehanna University, accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.susqu.edu/about-susquehanna.

Despite the radical changes we have seen in higher education and religion since the founding of the colonial colleges, the ongoing presence of chaplains points to a thread of continuity running from Harvard College in the 1630s to the most diverse and ostensibly secular campuses today. Higher education, at its best, is concerned for the holistic development of young minds equipped to serve not only themselves but the common good. Chaplaincy is a persistent reminder that education is never merely instrumental but also aspirational and, yes, spiritual. Might the changing landscape of American religion and higher education make a new vision of chaplaincy possible? Might a reconceived chaplaincy contribute something essential to a Susquehanna University education, and especially to Native students whose voices we will hear from below? It is to these questions that we now turn.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THE CHANGING FACE OF CHAPLAINCY: CAMPUS PROPHETS, SPIRITUAL GUIDES, INTERFAITH TRAFFIC DIRECTORS

In the fourth century, a young, noble-born soldier from Tours in what is now central France is said to have encountered a destitute beggar. So moved was Martin by the man's plight, he unsheathed his sword and cut his cloak (*capella*) in two, giving half to the poor man. This event marked a radical vocational turn in Martin's life, who hereafter renounced his wealth and status to found the first monastic communities in the Western church. As the legends of Martin's holiness grew following his death, the famed *capella* become a revered relic. Fragments of it were venerated in small churches or structures which came to be called *capellae*, from which we derive the English word chapel. The priest assigned to attend to a chapel and its holy relics, often serving at the

pleasure of a monarch, came to be known as a chaplain.[44] Since its origins in early Christian Europe, chaplaincy has changed much. No longer custodians of Christian holy relics, chaplains provide religious and spiritual care in a variety of institutional settings. In addition to Christians, representatives of many different world religions can be found serving as chaplains. Chaplains serve in the military, health care institutions, hospices, and institutions of higher education, to name just a few. As we will see, chaplains are found in more and more areas of American society. Brian Konkol argues that the roots of chaplaincy in the caretaking of sacred objects bears a surprising relevance to chaplaincy today. Contemporary chaplains, he says, are also stewards of the sacred—not of sacred objects but sacred human beings. Reflecting on higher education chaplaincy, he writes:

> As someone who repeatedly witnesses the ways that chaplains accompany a campus community, I have found it increasingly clear that our students are worthy of awe and respect. In other words, our students are sacred. The hopes of our students are sacred. The dreams of our students are sacred. The affirmations, questions, curiosities, fears, faiths, doubts and failures of our students are all wonderfully sacred. By accompanying students through their increasingly complex educational journeys, chaplains deserve to be considered indispensable within the ever-changing context of higher education.[45]

The journey of chaplaincy from nominal beginnings in the story of St. Martin of Tours to contemporary chaplaincy in multifaith settings is one of continuity and change. In this chapter, we look at the development of chaplaincy within American higher education, consider models of multifaith chaplaincy on contemporary religiously diverse

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[44] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2009), 312.

[45] Brian E. Konkol, "Chaplains are Essential for Higher Education's Heart and Soul," *Inside Higher Ed,* December 15, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/12/15/importance-chaplains-and-why-colleges-should-support-them-opinion#.YS6Asm485fN.link.

campuses, assess the impact of chaplaincy through the lens of practitioners, and locate chaplaincy within the broader sweep of American life.

## CHAPLAINCY IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Despite the overwhelmingly religious nature of American higher education historically—and despite contemporary voices like Konkol's arguing for the indispensability of chaplaincy and spirituality to higher education—chaplains were uncommon in higher education until the twentieth century. Yale named the first known university pastor in the mid-1700s and no other college or university appointed another for nearly one hundred years.[46] Many university presidents and professors were already members of the clergy, leaving no shortage of campus religious leadership. Chaplaincy positions began to be established in greater numbers in the decades leading up to and following World War II. As colleges and universities grew, gifts and endowments established campus chapels and chaplaincies. As the demands on administrators in higher education grew, there was a trend toward specialization, including the need for specialized religious leadership. As was seen with Susquehanna University in the previous chapter, the establishing of chaplaincies was linked with managing the growing campus religious heterogeneity. Newly inaugurated chaplaincies accompanied the abolishing of compulsory chapel at Harvard (1887), Dartmouth (1920s), Yale (1927), and Grinnell (1941).[47] The growth of college and university chaplaincies was influenced by a variety of factors, including increased institutional enrollment and financial resources,

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[46] Seymour A. Smith, *The American College Chaplaincy* (New York: Association Press, 1954), 10.

[47] Smith, *The American College Chaplaincy*, 32.

increased professionalization of roles across institutions (including a desire for higher quality religious offerings), and growing religious diversity of student bodies. In 1949, the National Association of College and University Chaplains was founded, marking the professional establishment of this new role of campus clergy.[48]

As noted previously, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a retreat of religion from the public educational mission of most elite colleges and universities. Out of this process a new clergy presence on campus began to emerge: "No longer presidents of these institutions but serving as their chaplains, these religious leaders were charged to ensure that their institutions and those who studied within them took up work of worth and significance."[49] In the decades following the Second World War, some university chaplains become titans of prophetic, progressive public theology. Phillip E. Hammond's survey in the 1960s of Protestant clergy serving campus ministries identifies campus ministers as "radicals" within their denominations whose liberalism on theological and social issues made them outliers among their clergy peers.[50] The legacies of prominent university chaplains testify to Hammond's insight.

Howard Thurman, theologian and Baptist minister, was dean of Boston University's Marsh Chapel when Martin Luther King was a doctoral student there. Thirty

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[48] Ronit Y. Stahl, "Chaplaincy in the United States: A Short History," in *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 24-25.

[49] Janet M. Cooper-Nelson, "Forward," in *College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century: A Multifaith Look at the Practice of Ministry on Campuses Across America*, ed. Lucy A. Forster-Smith (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), xi.

[50] Phillip E. Hammond, "The Radical Ministry," in *The Church, the University, and Social Policy, Volume 2: Working and Technical Papers,* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 3-15.

years King's senior, Thurman had journeyed to India to meet with Mohandas Gandhi in 1935, where Gandhi told him, "it may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered to the world."[51] Thurman's reverence for Gandhi's message, through sermons in Marsh Chapel and personal interaction, seeded King's theological and political vision. King invited Thurman to preach at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and is said to have carried Thurman's book *Jesus and the Disinherited* in his pocket during the year-long boycott that desegregated the city's buses.[52] Relatedly, in a sentiment that's undoubtedly valuable to the interfaith context of contemporary chaplaincy, King said of Gandhi, "God worked through Gandhi and the spirit of Jesus Christ saturated his life. . . . It is ironic but inescapably true that the greatest Christian of the modern world was a man who never embraced Christianity."[53]

Many chaplains of this era were known for speaking forcefully at the intersection of faith and social justice. Chaplain Ernest Gordon at Princeton University, Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan at Cornell University, and William Sloane Coffin Jr. at Yale University commanded national profiles for the visibility of their ministries and the controversies sometimes stirred by their activism. Coffin, chaplain at Yale from 1958-1976, was in many ways paradigmatic of the chaplain as a public, prophetic figure. The evolution of

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[51] Paul E. Harvey, "This Theologian Helped MLK See the Value of Nonviolence," *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/this-theologian-helped-mlk-see-value-nonviolence-180967821/

[52] Errin Haines, "King's Mentor Also Dreamed," *The Orlando Sentinel*, accessed January 10, 2021, https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2004-01-19-0401190135-story.htmlThurman's.

[53] James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 90.

religious ministries at Yale in the decades since Coffin is also paradigmatic of the changing nature of chaplaincy and religion in American life. I treat these developments below as a case study of how higher education chaplaincy has changed and where it might be going in the future.

## RELIGIOUS LIFE AT YALE UNIVERSITY FROM COFFIN TO THE PRESENT

When Yale President Whitney Griswold offered Coffin the position of University Chaplain, he asked him to be "Yale's conscience."[54] It was a role Coffin embraced. "The role of the chaplain is to ask where does the heart go to school, and to ask the question, 'Now that we've got this education, what do we do with it?'" Coffin continued, "I used to tell the economics professors to ask their freshmen to consider this question: 'To whom does the earth belong?'"[55]

From his pulpit at Yale, Coffin commanded a national profile and brought a progressive theological voice to preaching, student mentorship, and activism. Coffin's arrest in May 1961 in Jackson, Mississippi as a Freedom Rider landed him on the front page of the *New York Times*. From his pulpit at Yale's Battel Chapel to his civil rights activism around the country to his founding of Clergy and Laity Concerned that sought to end the Vietnam War, Coffin was one of the most prominent religious leaders in the country.[56]

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[54] William Sloane Coffin, Jr., *Once to Every Man*, (New York: Antheum, 1977), 133.

[55] Ari L. Goldman, "60's Chaplains Reflect on Students Today," *The New York Times, a*ccessed January 10, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/12/education/60-s-chaplains-reflect-on-students-today.html

[56] Warren Goldstein, "The Rise and Fall of 1960s University Chaplains: William Sloane Coffin, Jr., 'Heroic' White Guys, and the Disestablishment of Public Religion in America," accessed on June 16, 2012, https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-04/Warren%20Goldstein%20Publication.pdf.

Chaplains like Coffin represented the high point of the WASP establishment. Speaking from a place of immense privilege (Coffin's father, for example, was the president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art) at a time when the authority of clergy and mainline religious institutions still had a significant influence in American society, Coffin critiqued the very privilege that afforded him such authority and influence, including elite institutions like Yale that had created barriers to racial, cultural and religious inclusion. Janet Cooper-Nelson, chaplain at Brown University, summarizes the public theological work of this generations of chaplains:

> They decried the unrighteousness of discrimination, racism, imperialism, privilege, and exclusivity that was found within the academy and the nation. Their voices resounded from the hallowed halls of ivy with the scriptural authority of biblical patriarchs and the animating revolutionary fervor of the nation's founders. Essential catalysts for integral change, these towering prophets spoke in pulpits from within the academy. Ironically, their voices articulated a rationale for the clearcutting of much of the forest from which they emerged.[57]

As Cooper-Nelson suggests, these great public theological voices of the mid-twentieth century were products of a Protestant establishment that still had a very influential (if rapidly waning) presence in even the most ostensibly secular elite institutions.

With the changing religious landscape, chaplaincy changed, too. Developments with religious life at Yale since the time of Coffin (he left Yale in 1976) illustrate the changes and challenges to higher education chaplaincy in the intervening decades. Today, Yale's University Chaplain is Sharon M. K. Kugler, a Roman Catholic lay woman. Her work includes the coordinating of the many chaplains and religious advisors who serve Yale's diverse communities, further pointing to the sea change in university chaplaincy. Kugler writes,

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[57] Janet M. Cooper-Nelson, "Forward," xi.

> I recall one of many articles that were written upon my appointment to be the chaplain to Yale. It lamented the end of the prophetic era of chaplains and interpreted my somewhat different approach to chaplaincy as one lacking in much depth to inspire young adults. It is true, I don't lead many protest marches or deliver thunderous sermons. But no less than my predecessors, I still see my work as building a cathedral.[58]

Kugler insists that, though her style differs significantly from the headline-grabbing public presence of Coffin, her work is no less impactful.

> What matters most is to care for people in surprising ways, step outside of what is expected, and trust in the smallest of gestures offered with sincerity and without fanfare. . . I remain heavily influenced by the notion of servant leadership and have never forgotten its importance in my daily work with people. The core values of the "ministry of presence" and "creative loitering" are at the very heart of my work.[59]

Kugler's chaplaincy represents a retreat from more public displays of religious leadership in favor of an emphasis on individual spiritual care and coordinating the equitable interaction of diverse religious communities on campus.

Working under Kugler's supervision is Ian Oliver, the Pastor of the University Church at Yale, where Coffin preached. His title did not exist during Coffin's time: Senior Associate Chaplain for Protestant Life. While preaching ostensibly from "Coffin's pulpit," his role is vastly different. Far from speaking to the campus and the nation with the prophetic authority of the Protestant establishment, Oliver finds himself anchored in the particularity of being a progressive Protestant amid a diversity of other religious communities on campus. "I am not chaplain to Protestant culture as a whole. I am not

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[58] Sharon M. K. Kugler, "My Dreamsicle Job: Good Humor and Being a Chaplain," in *College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century: A Multifaith Look at the Practice of Ministry on Campuses Across America*, ed. Lucy A. Forster-Smith (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 14.

[59] Kugler, "My Dreamsicle Job," 14.

chaplain to America as a whole. I serve a particular community, and I can discover from by Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim colleagues what that vocation looks like."[60]

The chaplain's office at Yale includes professionals serving student groups from Baha'i to Zoroastrian. Yale's institutional support for religious diversity is described on the university's web page as an expression of its religious roots and its vision for higher education: "an outgrowth of both Yale's history and a critical reflection on the role of religion in higher education."[61] These commitments are driven by changing demographics and the needs of a student body radically more diverse than it was only two generations ago. The chaplaincy staff includes not only chaplains identified with familiar world religions, but also those who do not: Chris Stedman served until recently as Executive Director of the Yale Humanist Community. This embrace of both religious and nonreligious identities points toward chaplaincy's future in higher education:

> Yale's approach is secular in that it does not favor or establish any particular religious tradition. Yale is open to students, faculty or staff without regard to their faith. But Yale is not secularist in that it does not seek to marginalize religious expression, so long as it is within the boundaries set for open and honest discourse in an academic community. People with religious and spiritual commitments are a critical part of the institution's diversity.[62]

Yale has positioned itself squarely within Taylor's Secular 3 model—that is, beyond a strict sacred/secular binary—discussed in the previous chapter.

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[60] Ian B. Oliver, "In Coffin's Pulpit: Re-envisioning Protestant Religious Culture," in *College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century: A Multifaith Look at the Practice of Ministry on Campuses Across America*, ed. Lucy A. Forster-Smith (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 60.

[61] "Chaplain's Office, History," Yale University, accessed on February 1, 2021. https://chaplain.yale.edu/about-us/history.

[62] "Chaplain's Office, History," Yale University, https://chaplain.yale.edu/about-us/history.

The movement from the era of Coffin to Yale's current model points to the seismic shifts in religion, higher education, and chaplaincy. The singular prophetic voice has given way to the many voices of an emerging pluralism. For chaplains committed to nurturing religious pluralism, the work includes the willingness and capacity to center the voices, perspectives, and truth claim of others, and building bridges of understanding and cooperation between those who orient around religion differently. Such chaplaincy is collaborative, synthetic, and equitable. It convenes and inspires but does not dictate.

## MODELS OF MULTIFAITH CHAPLAINCY

Recent trends have shown a significant increase in the visibility and interest in religion on campus. In *The Resilience of Religion in Higher Education*, John Schmalzbauer and Kathleen Mahoney demonstrate how religion has made a significant comeback in recent decades on a variety of fronts. From the academic study of religion, to the revitalization of religion and church-related colleges, to student religious life, religion has proven resilient in higher education.[63] "From Baptists to Buddhists, higher education has become a haven for religious diversity. Far from uniform, the place of religion on campus varies widely by context and setting. . . . Animated by competing approaches to higher education, the return of religion has taken many forms."[64]

The resurgence of interest in religion and spirituality in higher education both outside and inside the classroom, and the complex motivations behind this resurgence, frame the broad scope of concerns to which chaplains are charged with attending.

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[63] John Schmalzbauer and Kathleen Mahoney, *The Resilience of Religion in Higher Education,* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 16.

[64] Schmalzbauer *et al*, *The Resilience of Religion and Higher Education*, 17.

> In sharp contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, many of today's chaplains focus on religious diversity, serving as interfaith traffic directors and accommodating multiple faiths. The vast majority also act as spiritual guides, accompanying students as they ask the big questions about religion, spirituality, and life. Finally, like William Sloane Coffin, Jr., today's chaplains function as campus prophets, though less through fiery oratory and more through their quiet presence. By facilitating campus activism and by steering students into socially responsible careers, they have worked to advance social justice.[65]

As the role of chaplains has broadened and changed, so has the positioning of chaplains within their institutions. We've already seen this with the example of Yale. These developments are important to our current discussion, as the institutional investment in chaplaincy has a significant impact on the students being served. In a recent pilot study, Elena van Stee *et al* identified a "continuum of institutionalization" of the ways in which colleges support multifaith chaplaincy on diverse campuses.[66] On one end is the staff model, in which chaplains are paid staff of the university. In such an arrangement, chaplains serve not only the students to whom they are assigned to provide care, but also the educational mission of their employer, such as my current role at Susquehanna as University Chaplain. Staff chaplains provide prayer and invocations at major university events and provide spiritual care in a variety of settings. On the other pole is the affiliate model, in which religious ministers and leaders provide spiritual care for students but are not employed by the institution. Affiliate ministers may be provided access to the institution in exchange for abiding by terms that typically involve the agreement not to

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[65] John Schmalzbauer, "Campus Prophets, Spiritual Guides, or Interfaith Traffic Directors? The Many Lives of Today's College and University Chaplains," accessed on June 15, 2021, https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-04/John%20Schmalzbauer%20Publication.pdf

[66] Elena G. van Stee, Wendy Cadge and Rebecca Barton, "How Do Colleges and Universities Support Multifaith Chaplaincy? The Causes and Effects of Different Institutional Approaches," *Journal of College and Character*, 22, no.2 (2021): 134-155, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2021.1898981.

proselytize. In the middle is a hybrid model that includes elements of both the staff and affiliate approaches, versions of which be found across public and private institutions.[67]

Van Stee *et al* found that institutional history has a great impact on current chaplaincy models. Institutions with a religious history (even if they are secular today) are more likely to employ a staff model, while those which were nonreligious from their inception tend to have an affiliate model. This is seen in our discussion of Yale above, in which institutional history was invoked to explain current commitments to religious particularity and diversity. Yale falls on the staff end of the continuum, while having additional affiliate staff to include elements of the hybrid model. My own context of Susquehanna University represents a staffing model, while attempting to grow in the direction of a hybrid model to serve a more diverse student body.

What difference do these models make for the students they serve? Van Stee *et al* find that staff chaplains are able to extend spiritual care to students in a greater variety of settings and are more successful in advancing interfaith engagement.

> [R]espondents suggested that staff chaplains were more likely to interact with faculty and staff in other departments, collaborate with chaplains of different faiths, and participate in interfaith programming. Respondents . . . indicated that the university itself benefitted from the staff model because employees were held to a greater degree of accountability and tended to share the goals of the administration. Second, respondents from across the continuum identified part-time appointments as a practical barrier to collaboration and interfaith engagement. According to some of our respondents, part-time chaplains and affiliates were likely to prioritize work with students of their own tradition during

[67] Samuel Grubbs, "The Administrative Oversight of Campus Religious Groups in the Southeast," *Journal of College and Character* 7, no.8 (2006):1-14, DOI: 10.2202/1940-1639.1218.

> the few hours for which they received compensation, leaving less time for collaboration with other chaplains, students, or staff.[68]

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS: CHAPLAINS ON CHAPLAINCY**

What, exactly, do chaplains do and what do they contribute to campus life? Barton *et al* sought to capture it in chaplains' own words. They studied a religiously diverse cross-section of chaplains and sought to understand how chaplains see the need for spiritual care among their students and as well as their contributions to campus life.[69] While past research on chaplaincy has focused almost exclusively on white Christian chaplains, more than two-thirds of chaplains in this study identify with a tradition other than Christianity, including Unitarian Universalist, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Quaker, and Humanist traditions. What unique contributions do this diverse group of chaplains bring to student needs? The authors identify three main themes: building community, bridge building, and tending the soul of the university. Bridge building happens in a variety of ways within and between religious groups and between students and the institution.

> [C]haplains act as bridge builders on behalf of a variety of individuals and communities. Chaplains build bridges not only between students and religious communities but also among various student groups and different campus departments and between different denominations of the same religion that may be divided by theological or political differences.[70]

Community building includes tending relationships and spaces that allow for a sense of belonging. Especially for non-majority groups, this means social justice solidarity and

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[68] van Stee *et al*, "How Do Colleges and Universities Support Multifaith Chaplaincy?", 150.

[69] Rebecca Barton, Wendy Cadge and Elena G. van Stee, "Caring for the Whole Student: How Do Chaplains Contribute to Campus Life?" *Journal of College and Character* 21, no.2, (2020): 67-85, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2020.1741392.

[70] Barton *et al*, "Caring for the Whole Student," 67-85.

advocacy. Tending to the soul of the university includes asking the questions of meaning making and values formation that are at the heart of liberal education. Barton *et al* conclude their study by calling for greater collaboration and communication between chaplains and student affairs professionals to better serve students.

*College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century*, published in 2012, is a collection of essays by higher education chaplains across a range of institutions and traditions. It is the definitive account of the state of the profession in the United States to date. The voices of these chaplains attest to the three themes identified by Barton *et al*. For example, Chaplain Richard Spaulding at Williams College describes of the power of bridge building in his multifaith ministry that remains rooted in his Christian faith and ordination:

> I'm learning that what I'm about is awakening or uncovering an elusive but palpable sense of things going on in the depths. It's about access to what's going on below the radar, down at the place where our overlapping experiences of humanity and, perhaps, divinity are less about maps and more about intimations, less about evidence and more about faith. As a Christian whose chosen ministry, now, is to celebrate the nobility of the world's religious families, even while standing firmly rooted in my own, I'm publicly committed to the proposition that encounters with the stranger whose roots tap a different creed or sensibility are always potentially sacramental.[71]

Spaulding's capacity to frame his own religious identity and particularity within the broader spectrum of campus diversity are marks of multifaith chaplaincy.

Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann reflects on her work as chaplain and associate dean at Stanford University and the ministry of tending and building community. Through mentoring at key moments, ministering in times of grief, loss and life transition,

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[71] Richard E. Spaulding, "Passports: The Chaplain Moving Across Boundaries," in *College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century*, edited by Lucy A. Forster-Smith (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 213-214.

and walking with students as they make meaning of life and commitments, spiritual care happens.

> This is how I understand the art of chaplaincy. We are the spiritual messengers in our students' lives, present as they move from youth to adulthood, trusting and encouraging their gifts, guarding their dreams. As an advisor or a pastor, a teacher or a friend, a challenger to students like the Golden Boy or a comforter to those in mourning, I hope to be one who points the way to holiness. I hope to be regarded as a *malacha*, a spiritual messenger, for our students, for those who teach and mentor them, and for the university in which they grow.[72]

Rabbi Karlin-Neumann's description of her work also touches on a third theme: tending the soul of the university. Chaplains from many different traditions attend to this aspect of the work in a variety of ways.[73] Chaplain Lucy Forster-Smith, a Presbyterian, summarizes:

> Chaplains' work engages the soul of our universities. We have been working for decades with generations of young adults, non-traditional students, in public universities and private colleges. Our mentoring has guided, challenged, expanded, and grounded untold numbers for global citizen leaders across the planet. We have presided at memorials services for dignitaries and for quiet citizens. We have invoked the Holy at university opening convocations and building dedications. We've reminded our faculty colleagues, when needed, that our students are more than empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Some of us pray with trustees, holding the college's fiscal well-being in the arms of a ready spirit of stewardship. We've spent sleepless nights wondering if a student will make it to morning as depression claws at her brilliant mind. We've laughed, cried, bled, died, been born anew in our work—work almost no one, even within our own institutions, fully understands.[74]

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[72] Patricia Karlin-Neumann, "God is in this Place: Mentoring, Ministering, and Making Meaning at Stanford University," in *College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century*, edited by Lucy A. Forster-Smith (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 145.

[73] Karlin-Neumann, "God is in this Place," 145.

[74] Lucy A. Forster-Smith, "Chaplains Breaking the Silence of Faith in the Academy: The Charge," edited by Lucy Forster-Smith. *College and University Chaplaincy in the 21st Century*, edited by Lucy A. Forster-Smith (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 326-327.

The ways in which chaplains describe their work points to another vector shaping higher education chaplaincy in the twenty-first century, which is the growing appreciation of the value of spiritual care. As we will see, chaplains and spiritual care providers are found in more and more corners of American cultural life.

## THE BROADER CONTEXT: CHAPLAINCY AND SPIRITUAL CARE IN U.S. CULTURE

As chaplains' roles are diversifying and expanding in higher education, chaplaincy is a burgeoning field in many other sectors. There is perhaps no greater indication of this trend than the founding of the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab at Brandeis University in 2018. The CIL aims,

> to bring chaplains, theological educators, clinical educators and social scientists into conversation about the work of chaplaincy and spiritual care. As religious and spiritual life continues to change, the CIL sparks practical innovations that enable chaplains to nurture the spirits of those they serve and reduce human suffering.[75]

Chaplains engaged with the CIL are drawn from a diversity of religious traditions, including those who do not identify with any religious tradition at all. In a CIL community survey conducted in 2021, 13% of the 1,738 responding chaplains identified as "atheist/agnostic/humanist/none," the same percentage as those who identified as Roman Catholic. Another 9% identified as "more than one religious group." While Roman Catholic and Protestant chaplains together totaled 56% of total respondents, the religious diversity of the sample is striking.

[75] Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, accessed August 8, 2022, https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/.

Other aspects of the same survey point to the proliferation of sectors in which chaplains are found. While many respondents identified with traditional chaplaincy sectors such as healthcare (the highest at 42%), higher education, hospice, corrections, and the military, other sectors indicated the expanding scope of the field: "workplace," "community," "pets," "social justice," "transportation," and "other."[76] The expansion of chaplaincy beyond its Christian origins has occasioned new definitions of the nature of the work. *A Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Care*, published by the CIL, observes, "More chaplains today are calling themselves or being called spiritual care providers in an effort to be more inclusive and move away from the Christian origins of the term chaplain. People from all religious and spiritual backgrounds work as spiritual care providers."[77]

The evolution of chaplaincy is tied to evolving public views of spirituality and religion. In 2007, a chaplain to the Maine department of natural resources wrote a memoir that become a best seller. In *Here If You Need Me*, Kate Braestrup describes the work of providing chaplaincy services while riding shotgun with a game warden in the state of Maine. What is a chaplain in such a setting? "I am a sort of generic, ecumenical clergyperson representing the God that even atheists pray to in foxholes, an undemanding character."[78] Braestrup represents an increasingly common clergy presence in American life, a religious presence shorn of tradition and particularity. This impulse toward

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[76] "Community Listening Survey, 2021," Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, accessed August 8, 2022, https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/resources/community-survey-2021.

[77] "A Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Care," Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, accessed August 8, 2022, https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/resources/ebooks.

[78] Quoted by Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), xi.

providing spiritual care for all regardless of religious identity expands the scope of care in salutary ways. However, it must be noted that spiritual care unmoored from religious and wisdom traditions risks becoming a chaplaincy of *sui generis* self-invention. Emerging professional standardization within the field are an important corrective, respecting both the particularity of religious traditions as well as general competencies for spiritual care at the borderlands of the sacred and secular.[79]

> The US chaplain . . . operates at the intersection of the sacred and the secular, a broker responsible for ministering to the wandering souls of a globalized economy and a public harrowed by a politics of fear—while also effectively sacralizing the institutions of the contemporary world.[80]

Chaplains can be found in many sectors of American life. A recent survey found that twenty-two percent of Americans reported they had had contact with a chaplain in the past two years, and more than half in healthcare settings.[81] Nearly seventy theological schools now offer specialized degrees for chaplaincy, most of which are new in the past twenty years.[82] In another marker of the state of the profession, a recent book aims for the first time to establish a unified set of professional competencies for chaplains across sectors. The editors note:

> We extend this invitation to think about the work of chaplains because we believe *there is a growing role for chaplains in North American religious leadership given shifting religious demographics.* While many people historically sought

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[79] Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo, *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care*, 1-15.

[80] Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence,* xi.

[81] Wendy Cadge, Taylor Paige Winfield and Michael Skaggs. "The Social Significance of Chaplains: Evidence From a National Survey," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 28, no.2 (2022): 208-217, DOI: 10.1080/08854726.2020.1822081.

[82] Wendy Cadge, I.E Stroud, P.K Palmer *et al,* "Training Chaplains and Spiritual Caregivers: The Emergence and Growth of Chaplaincy Programs in Theological Education," *Pastoral Psychology* 69, (2020): 187–208, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-020-00906-5.

> counsel from leaders in places of worship that reflected shared beliefs, shifts in religious life suggest that this kind of support—if it continues—will be provided differently.[83]

Winnifred Fallers Sullivan has extensively documented how, paradoxically, as America has grown more religiously diverse and affiliation with religious institutions has waned, chaplaincy has proliferated in contemporary life. Chaplains can be found today not only in hospitals and universities, but in corporate workplaces, at NASCAR races, among law enforcement, at labor union gatherings, and in the streets supporting social justice movements, to name a few. Chaplains routinely,

> care for persons with whom they may or may not share a common religious creed or practice. Their clients are persons with whom they are temporarily brought together for other reasons—reasons such as war, sickness, crime, employment, education, or disaster—persons who may be of any religious affiliation or none. These professional encounters are spread across the secular landscape of contemporary life.[84]

Sullivan notes that the "ubiquity" of chaplaincy in contemporary life is rooted in the idea, increasingly supported by the Supreme Court in adjudicating church/state arguments, that the human being is "fundamentally spiritual in her anthropology," deserving of "spiritual care in her workplace and other secular settings away from conventional spaces or temples."[85] College and university chaplaincy can be seen within this cultural trend. While most chaplains are ordained or credentialed through religious denominations, their work often carries an expectation of spiritual care beyond the parameters of religious

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[83] Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo. "An Introduction," in *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 14. Italics original.

[84] Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence*, ix.

[85] Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence,* 17.

denomination. Sullivan quotes Ian Oliver of Yale, who puts it this way, "The work of the chaplain is no longer to be the lighting-rod, the conscience of the university, but to facilitate the many ways students express themselves spiritually or religiously."[86] Sullivan avers, "College chaplaincies are being reinvented as custodians and facilitators of universal human need, rather than outposts for particular ministries."[87]

## CONCLUSION

The idea of chaplaincy has changed much from his origins in the *capella* of St. Martin of Tours in fourth century France. The forces that have driven such changes are not without tensions. Chaplaincy in the context of religious diversity requires an honoring of particular traditions and identities, while seeking what is also common and universal. Sullivan's analysis points to the need for a chaplaincy that is not only a champion of diversity but also capable of gracious, nonjudgmental, and nonsectarian spiritual care. The tension between these two demands deepens the need for chaplains in higher education to be attuned, responsive, and adaptive to the complex times in which we live. In the next chapter, we will investigate further how religious and spiritual difference is understood in higher education, what this means for chaplaincy, and the difference it makes for equity and student flourishing.

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[86] Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence,* 7.

[87] Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence,* 11.

# CHAPTER THREE

# CHAPLAINCY AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

As we have seen, the foundations of American higher education were built upon religious aspirations. Though these theological visions varied somewhat by institution, America's earliest colleges and universities sought to marry the life of the mind with the mission of the church, however that was conceived. Throughout our history, the relationship of higher education to religion has reflected the evolving relationship of religion and culture. As Protestant hegemony has waned and religious diversity has grown in American society, this too has been reflected in higher education. Chaplaincy both reflects and responds to these changes. Religious and spiritual diversity is the context of chaplaincy today. How one understands and engages with religious difference shapes the nature of chaplaincy in higher education.

Two major ideological approaches characterize the different ways in which religious difference is approached in the higher education context. On one hand is an approach that stresses interfaith cooperation and understanding across lines of religious and philosophical difference. On the other is a social justice approach which emphasizes equity of resources and representation, employing critical theory to unmask and deconstruct Christian hegemony and privilege on college campuses. While these two approaches—roughly characterized as interfaith understanding across religious difference versus justice and equity among religious groups—need not be seen as a mutually exclusive binary, they represent ideological terrain that higher education chaplaincy must

skillfully navigate today. In what follows we will look at the work of two leading theorists of religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation, Eboo Patel and Diana Eck. By contrast, Jenny L. Small offers a forceful critique of the approach of Patel and Eck, arguing that authentic religious pluralism requires radical critiques of Christian privilege. The work of Khyati Y. Joshi and Robert P. Jones, respectively, demonstrate the need for the social justice approach Small calls for, as they illuminate the ways white supremacy has been constructed and maintained by Christian hegemony in the United States. These are urgent issues to understand as we investigate multifaith chaplaincy and spiritual support for students of color at predominantly white institutions. Before considering these theories of religious difference, we need a picture of religious demographics in the United States today and what that means for college students.

## MAPPING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the 1960s, sociologist Peter Berger argued that modernity would inevitably lead to the withering away of religious commitment and be replaced with a nonreligious secularism. "Secularism theory" was considered academic consensus for a generation. Berger lived long enough to recognize his theory was incorrect. Modernity doesn't so much secularize as pluralize. The religious composition of the United States is pluralizing fast, driven by disaffiliation and the modest growth of non-Christian religious communities. The percentage of US adults who identify as Christian has dropped by twelve percent in the past decade, from seventy-five to sixty-three percent. The downward trend in Christian affiliation in the past ten years is principally seen among Protestants, as Roman Catholic affiliation remains at about twenty-four percent of the US population. At the same time, about one-third—twenty-nine percent—of US adults

indicate no religious affiliation at all. As we will see below, the trend toward religious disaffiliation is itself a diverse phenomenon and another example of pluralization. About six percent of US adults identify with a religious tradition other than Christianity.

These changes are most pronounced among the younger generations. Between 2009 and 2019, Millennials fell sixteen percent in Christian affiliation, making the Millennial generation equally divided between those who identify as Christian and those who do not—these changes being driven largely by religious disaffiliation. Among college students, the percentage who identify as religiously unaffiliated has tripled in the past thirty years, to about thirty percent.

The contemporary religious landscape is shaped not only by how people identity religiously, but how people relate to those who are religiously different from themselves. The IDEALS longitudinal study surveyed the attitudes of first-year college students about a range of attitudes concerning religious difference and tracked how those attitudes changed over the course of their undergraduate experience.[88] The study found strong interfaith commitment: seventy percent of college seniors identify themselves as "highly committed to bridging religious divides." However, only twenty-three percent of students said that their college experience equipped them with the skills to do so. Moreover, students' assessment of whether their institutions were supportive of religious difference varied significantly based upon the identity of the student, with many non-majority identities experiencing a low degree of welcome on campus compared with worldview-

[88]Allyssa. N. Rockenbach, Matthew. J. Mayhew *et al*, "IDEALS: Bridging Religious Divides Through Higher Education," Interfaith America, 26.

majority students. The authors summarize the impact of support for diverse religious communities on improving campus climate and the student experience:

> IDEALS shows that an important way to improve perceptions of the campus climate involves providing space and support for individual worldview expression; in turn, these positive experiences create the conditions for learning how to bridge religious and worldview divides. When students believe places exist on campus where they can express their beliefs, and when they feel safe doing so, it suggests their religious identity is recognized and valued. Relatedly, when faculty and staff make accommodations for students to celebrate religious holidays or other important observances, students perceive support for their personal worldview.[89]

Institutional investment in religious diversity—in the form of staff support and dedicated spaces to support diverse religious practices and worldviews—has a positive impact on the student experience. The study's authors further summarize the urgent need for intentional engagement with religious diversity to help bridge cultural polarization and educate the next generation of leaders for a diverse democracy. The authors list activities outside the classroom that advance this important learning, which reads like a job description of contemporary chaplaincy:

> Participating in interfaith or religious diversity training; participating in an interfaith dialogue; participating in interfaith action that has an impact on critical issues like hunger or poverty; learning about religious diversity on campus in orientation or other required events; working together with students of other religious or nonreligious perspectives on a service project.[90]

As the United States grows more diverse, this bridge building work becomes more and more urgent. Changes in religious identification intersect with racial and ethnic

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[89] Rockenbach *et al*, "IDEALS: Bridging Religious Divides," Interfaith America, 26.

[90] Rockenbach *et al*, "IDEALS: Bridging Religious Divides," Interfaith America, 26.

shifts. In 2009, White Christians ceased to be a majority demographic group in the United States. Non-Hispanic whites will cease to be a majority the 2040s.[91] The polarization evident in American culture today reflects a culture in dramatic flux. In this context, chaplains capable of engaging with difference in ways that reduce polarization and cultivate a sense of "equal dignity and mutual loyalty"[92] have never been more important. To these different models of engaging difference we now turn.

## INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION

Eboo Patel is a leading thinker on the subject of religious pluralism on college and university campuses and is a passionate defender of religious pluralism as an essential feature of a flourishing American democracy. I will begin by considering Patel's account of religious diversity, which represents an important framework for understanding religious difference and its implications for spiritual care.

What do we talk about when we talk about religious diversity? Patel argues that to promote interfaith understanding one first needs to understand the diversity that hides within the concept of religious diversity itself. Chaplains must understand the many strands of religious diversity to be effective in building understanding and cooperation across lines of difference. The first category of religious diversity is what Patel calls the "world religions category." This includes traditions named by words like Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity. Such categories are the first thing many people think of when the

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[91] Khyati Y. Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: New York University, 2020), 84.

[92] Eboo Patel, "A Common Life Together," Huffpost, November 12, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-common-life-together_b_1897909.

topic of religious diversity is raised. These broad categories include diverse threads of tradition, culture, and scriptural interpretation. "World religions" tends to be the realm of the academic specialist with extensive knowledge of the complexity of traditions, histories, and ritual practices. By contrast, the practice of chaplaincy is rooted in pastoral engagement at the intersection of spiritual traditions and particular human lives and stories. An academic informed by the study of world religions might ask: What is Buddhism? A chaplain, informed by knowledge of world religions and skilled in pastoral conversation, asks a different sort of question: What is your story and perspective as someone who identifies as a Buddhist? This leads directly to the second type of diversity Patel identifies: "intrafaith diversity."[93]

Intrafaith diversity is the diversity of thought, practice, and doctrine that are internal to the world religions named above. There are, for example, thousands of denominations within Protestantism, in addition to the great diversity within Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Christianity contains many Christianities. Sunni Islam encompasses a radically decentralized tradition guided by local authority and practice, while Shia Islam is organized around a lineage of authority descending from the prophet Muhammad. Jewish tradition celebrates its diversity of interpretation and practice. Within any of these traditions, individuals and groups may adopt, interpret, and engage their traditions in innumerable ways. Any discourse about religious diversity needs to acknowledge the kaleidoscope of plurality within all living traditions. A recognition of

[93] Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 79.

intrafaith diversity is essential for higher education chaplaincy, creating space for complexity and personal authenticity.

While intrafaith diversity is concerned with the diversity within religious traditions, the third element of diversity Patel presents is concerned with the diversity of identities within individuals: "intersectional identities." Intersectionality is a term derived from legal theory to identify the ways in which identities intersect and overlap within oppressive systems. We will return to this important concept later in this chapter. In Patel's account, intersectionality is a way of describing the diverse elements of personal identity. Yet, he elides the critical analysis of power and oppression that is at the heart of the concept. A poor Buddhist immigrant who identities as transgender will have a different set of experiences than a native-born American Buddhist who is a white, wealthy, and cis-gendered, male heterosexual. How do those different experiences constitute oppression and inequity, as well as different ways of interpreting and perceiving their traditions? And what might it mean for chaplains? Patel doesn't engage in critical analysis—a point to which we return later in this chapter. He simply observes: "Even if religion may be highly salient, it is always intersecting with other identities like race, class, gender, geography, politics, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality."[94]

Another major type of intersectional identity is what Patel calls "embracing multiple traditions."[95] Susan Katz Miller writes in her book *Being Both* that, according to a Pew survey in 2008, 37% of Americans were in interfaith marriages or long-term

[94] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership,* 79.

[95] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership,* 81.

relationships. Miller calls members of this group "a grassroots movement of interfaith families claiming the right to create their own communities beyond a single creed or dogma."[96] From the perspective of chaplaincy, it is vital to be attuned to the dynamics of multiple religious affiliations. Emerging adults are less concerned with the strict boundaries of doctrine and identity that defined previous generations, often content to mix and match them in ways that fit their story and experience. This is particularly true with people who come from multifaith families. Chaplains must be able to provide spiritual care for people whose spiritual identities are defined by themselves and not by external religious authority structures.

The fourth type of diversity Patel notes is the growing category of religious "nones"—those who do not affirm a religious identity (up to 33% among Millennials). Not surprisingly, this broad category is also very diverse internally. It includes avowed atheists, though they make up a small percentage. More numerous are those who may be identified as seekers or spiritual but not religious.

> Nones also contain the growing number of people who proactively seek community with others who share secular values. These communities often mirror many important dimensions of religious traditions, while maintaining intentionally non-religious ethics. Secular humanism has central texts and prominent heroes and is increasingly creating formal communities and rituals for important life events like birth, marriage, and death."[97]

The growing prevalence of the religiously unaffiliated creates a challenge for contemporary chaplaincy: how to find a shared language capacious enough to include those who claim a religious identity and those who do not. This points to a central

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[96] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership,* 81.

[97] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership,* 81.

conundrum for the interfaith movement: are the nonreligious (however understood) also part of "religious" pluralism? Does interfaith include those of no faith? Patel says yes. He insists on the need for language and conceptual categories that place nonreligious or secular worldviews in a common conversation with the more conventionally religious. He writes,

> [E]mploying the word "religious" for those who marvel at the mystery of the universe but do not believe in God is useful, 'expanding the territory of religion improves clarity by making plain the importance of what is shared across that territory.' For myself, for now, I will stick with Wilfred Cantwell Smith . . . who addresses nontheistic worldviews and maintains that the word 'faith' is still relevant: 'Simply to be a theist is by no means to be a person of faith. To be a non-theist is by no means not to have faith . . . faith is sensitivity and response, to the intangibles of ultimate worth.' We approach such intangibles through the tangible dimensions of traditions, whether the birth rituals of Judaism or the communal picnic of a secular humanist society.[98]

I agree with Patel that our conceptualizing of religious diversity needs to be capacious enough to include both religious and secular worldviews. Attention to the continuity and commonality—where it exists—between seemingly divergent worldviews opens up vital space for dialogue and mutual recognition. Yet it's important to bear in mind that not all people who identify as atheist, secular, or non-religious appreciate being theorized into a religious framework. A chaplaincy of religious pluralism must help us account for both commonality and alterity, points of similarity and points of radical difference or disagreement.

While Patel helps us see what a multifaith chaplaincy must *do*, he also pushes us to ask what it is *for*. That is, what are the goals and aims? Patel highlights the civic value of interfaith work, and in so doing makes an important distinction about the goals toward

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[98] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 82.

which interfaith work points. For Patel, such goals are civic rather than theological. He seeks to nurture civic spaces where people of diverse religious convictions can coexist and work together for the common good.

## AN AMERICAN SHAHADAH

Patel's interfaith vision is deeply rooted in American democratic aspirations. Much like Jill Lepore in *This America: The Case for the Nation*,[99] Patel's vision of interfaith cooperation involves a particular reading of U.S. history. "Pluralism is not a birthright in America; it's a responsibility. Pluralism does not fall from the sky; it does not rise up from the ground. People have fought for pluralism. People have kept the promise. . . . Every generation has to affirm and extend the promise."[100] Interfaith leaders, such as chaplains in multifaith contexts, must develop a theology or ethic of interfaith cooperation rooted in their own traditions that speak to the value of cultivating understanding and cooperation with those who are religiously different. Pluralism, he says, is the "American *shahada*"—a declaration of faith to our nation, and to each other."[101] Patel uses the Arabic term for the declaration of faith in Islam to suggest that the American democratic project requires faith in its promise. Patel draws powerfully on threads of American history that have celebrated and guarded religious pluralism. He lifts up the ways in which pluralistic religious coalitions have worked to deepen America's

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[99] Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation*. (New York: Liveright, 2019).

[100] Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), xxix.

[101] Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground,* xxix.

democratic promise, such as during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Through this lens, interfaith work is at once both secular and sacred.

Diana Eck is a scholar of American religious diversity who, like Patel, draws deeply from America's democratic aspirations. Her book, *A New Religious America*, published in 2001, sits astride the challenges to cultural diversity that the terrorist attacks of that year and their aftermath have brought. Indeed, in light of the cultural polarization that have marked the ensuing decades, her call for a distinction between diversity and pluralism takes on increased urgency. She writes,

> [P]luralism is not just another word for diversity. It goes beyond mere plurality or diversity to active engagement with that plurality. . . . [D]iversity alone is not pluralism. Pluralism is not a given but must be created. Pluralism requires participation, an attunement to the life and energies of another.[102]

What does such a pluralism look like? It is a movement "beyond tolerance to the active attempt to the understand the other."[103] While seeking understanding, such a pluralism affirms difference and distinction. "It does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments, or secular commitments for that matter. It is, rather, the encounter of commitments."[104] How is such pluralism achieved? Eck insists that the work of achieving pluralism is never finished "but is the ongoing work of each generation."[105] For Eck, such a pluralism is simultaneously a religious project and a civic one. It challenges religious traditions and practitioners to an affirming engagement with religious otherness while at

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[102] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. (New York: Harper One, 2001), 70.

[103] Eck, *A New Religious America,* 70.

[104] Eck, *A New Religious America,* 71.

[105] Eck, *A New Religious America,* 72.

the same time affirming the value of religiously diverse civic space and life. For Eck, the project entails reaffirmation of America's deepest democratic hopes. Upon surveying the rich religious diversity of the United States, she concludes:

> Today we have the unparalleled opportunity to build, intentionally and actively, a culture of pluralism among the peoples of many cultures and faiths in America. We may not succeed. We may find ourselves fragmented and divided, with too much *pluribus* and not enough *unum*. But if we succeed, this is the greatest lasting leadership we can offer the world.[106]

Patel's and Eck's framing of religious pluralism within the American story is both a strength and a potential weakness. Its strength is in its invoking of a powerful tradition that is in equal measure deeply democratic and deeply theological/spiritual. Yet, their Americanism may also be a limitation for a multifaith chaplaincy in higher education. Does framing this conversation within the American story limit the aperture or diminish its accessibility? Further, as we see below, does the emphasis on interfaith understanding and cooperation mask social injustices that hamper the establishment of pluralism before it can get off the ground?

## CRITICAL RELIGIOUS PLURALISM THEORY

In contrast to the emphasis on building bridges of understanding and cooperation across lines of religious difference stands an emerging discourse about religious equity. In her book *Critical Religious Pluralism for Higher Education: A Social Justice Perspective*, Jenny L. Small presents what she calls Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT). Like Patel and Eck, Small seeks to advance the civic good of pluralism, but unlike them, she feels this can only be accomplished through radical critiques of power

[106] Eck, *A New Religious America,* 77.

and privilege and the prioritization of minoritized traditions and identities. CRPT is summarized in the following seven points:

1. CRPT declares that the subordination of non-Christian (including nonreligious) individuals to Christian individuals has been built into the society of the United States, as well as institutionalized on college campuses.
2. CRPT critically examines the intertwined nature of religion and culture, and embraces an intersectional analysis of religious identity with race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, immigration status, socioeconomic class, and all other forms of social identity.
3. CRPT exposes Christian privilege and Christian hegemony in society, as well as the related concept of the false neutral of secularism.
4. At the individual level, CRPT advocates for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, recognizing the liberatory potential of these identities upon individuals' lives.
5. At the institutional level, CRPT advocates for the field of higher education to utilize a religiously pluralistic lens in all areas of research, policy, and practice, accounting for power, privilege, marginalization, and oppression.
6. At the systemic level, CRPT advocates for religious pluralism as the means for resolving religious conflict in the United States.
7. CRPT prioritizes the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities and those with pluralistic commitments in the work toward social transformation.[107]

Small's analysis begins with the assumption that inequities of power between Christians and non-Christians are endemic to the United States and have been produced, preserved, and perpetuated institutionally, including in higher education. A systemic analysis of the intersectional nature of oppression in society is required. In critiquing Christian hegemony and advocating religious equality, Small insists she does not seek the diminishment of Christianity. Nor does she seek the banishment of religion from higher education. The "false neutral of secularism," far from creating a level playing field, often works to hide Christian normativity, as we see below. Instead, she argues for the

[107] Jenny L. Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education: A Social Justice Framework to Support Religious Diversity*, (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 63-64, ProQuest Ebook Central.

equitable engagement of religious, spiritual, and secular identities, "recognizing their liberatory potential." Small's "prioritizing the voices [from] . . . minoritized religious identities" echoes the hermeneutical and theological method of liberation theologians in their "preferential option for the poor." The centering of oft-silenced perspectives helps unleash social and personal transformation.

How might CRPT inform our current discussion of chaplaincy? If social justice is indeed a guiding spiritual commitment for chaplaincy, CRPT challenges chaplains and higher education institutions to interrogate Christian privilege and hegemony in their institutions and practices. It also holds out hope that such work holds great spiritual and liberatory potential. For Christians habituated to hegemony, this is a call to solidarity with the religious other and, in the process, to discover a new integrity to their own faith commitments. No longer resting on the crutch of cultural privilege, Christians are challenged to find their foundation in the love of God active in hearts and hands, which Jesus calls the true hallmark of faith. Small writes,

> We must advance religious equity in the United States. So while religious and spiritual resistance has been used to battle other forms of oppression, we are left with the question of whether they can be used to resist religious oppression and Christian hegemony itself. And if the answer to that question is "yes," what kind of religious or spiritual resistance could effectively be used?[108]

Small does not think the "interfaith dialogue movement"—represented by voices like Patel's—is capable of such liberating potential, as it tends to leave Christian hegemony unexamined. She writes:

> [W]hile the twinned problems are that of Christian religious privilege and Christian hegemony in the United States, the solution is not the dismantling of

[108] Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism*, 15.

> religion in general nor of Christianity in particular. Instead, it is the eradication of privilege and hegemony through concerted, intentional religious pluralism. This is not grudging tolerance or laissez-faire detachment, but active engagement with religious and nonreligious difference.[109]

## THE SHAPE OF CHRISTIAN HEGEMONY

Hegemony is by definition a normalized system of advantage; understanding it requires describing things that often go unnoticed or unexamined. Christian hegemony can be simply described as "the system that institutionalizes the social privileges and advantages from which Christians benefit."[110] In an effort to take the measure of Christian hegemony that resides at my own institution in obvious and subtle ways, I inventory it below.

The largest building on campus is the chapel, sitting prominently in the center of campus and where the university chaplain's office resides. While the chaplain ostensibly serves the spiritual needs of all students regardless of religious or nonreligious identity—indeed, I strenuously seek to communicate that to the campus community—I and all who have come before me have been Lutheran Christian clergy. This creates a clearer point of connection for students who share the chaplain's faith background. Through the chaplain's ministry, the university provides Christian worship services every Sunday that classes are in session. With the exception of Shabbat dinners and very occasional Jewish religious liturgies, these are the only university sponsored religious activities regularly

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[109] Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism*, 16.

[110] Gordon Maples, Leah Rediger and Jenny L. Small "Privilege as Policy? An Analysis of Student Religious Accommodation Policies in Higher Education," *Journal of College and Character* 22 no. 4 (2021): 272-290, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2021.1977151.

held on campus. The university chaplain offers prayers at major university events, duties which are sometimes shared by a part-time Director of Jewish Life. One of the university's most cherished yearly traditions is the Christmas Candlelight service, for which most of the department of music (over one hundred fifty musicians) provide music. Performing for this Christian worship service is required of music students, regardless of religious identity. The same holds for the university choirs, which perform for Sunday chapel services once each semester and which is written into the syllabus requirements.

The work week and academic calendar are built around the Christian calendar. Classes are never held on Sundays, creating no conflict with weekly Christian worship. The university is closed for Christmas. The long-weekend Easter break was taken off the calendar several years ago, creating a calendar with a higher degree of religious equity. However, this ostensibly religious neutrality masks the "false neutral of secularism," hiding Christian hegemony in plain sight. Jewish students must appeal to professors for accommodation for high holiday observance, which frequently fall during the week and which individual professors are under no obligation to honor. The same follows for any other student having a religious observance that falls during the week, including Muslim students observing *jummah* prayers on Friday afternoons.

Food is rich with religious meaning across traditions. In the New Testament, the identity of the nascent Christian movement was forged in part around the relationship of followers of Jesus to Jewish dietary laws. The perspective of the Apostle Paul became canonical for Christianity, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (Acts 10:15). As a result, most Christian traditions do not include dietary requirements. Campus dining at Susquehanna reflects this aspect of Christian identity and theology,

though Christians are not used to thinking of the cafeteria as designed to accommodate Christian diets. Meal plan options (all students are required to live on campus and have a meal plan) do not include kosher dining. Halal chicken is available on a limited basis. At Susquehanna, Jewish and Muslim populations are very small, at roughly two percent and less than one percent, respectively. Are the numbers small because of the limited accommodations for these respective traditions, or are there limited accommodations because of the small numbers?

Students who identify variously as secular, atheist, agnostic, spiritual but not religious, or religiously unaffiliated compose an increasing percentage of the student population, perhaps as much as twenty-five percent at Susquehanna. This is a cohort of students with a diverse range of beliefs, perspectives, and needs. Campuses and chaplaincy models are increasingly recognizing the need to provide spiritual care (for those comfortable with the term) and engagement with this diverse population. While I seek to connect with all students, my identification as a Christian pastor creates a barrier for many.

Protestant hegemony can perhaps most clearly be seen in relation to Roman Catholic students, who compose about one-third of the campus population. Despite being the single largest religious group among the student body (Protestants as a whole comprise a little less than a third, with Lutherans being about eight percent.), the university dedicates no staff or space for Catholic ministries—beyond the ways in which I, as the university chaplain, seek to support and facilitate religious life for the diverse religious communities on campus. Here, hegemony resides in institutional structure and historical tradition. Ministry to Catholic students is a ministry of the local parish and its

pastor and receives no institutional investment from the university. In terms of religious equity, the need to deepen our commitment to our campus Catholic community is urgent. This could take the form of hiring a campus minister—perhaps an associate chaplain—dedicated to attending to the Catholic community. It could mean dedicating space to programming and fellowship for Catholic students, such as the Hillel House dedicated to Jewish community life on the edge of campus.

In myriad ways, Protestant Christian hegemony is the business-as-usual of Susquehanna University because of its structure and history. This is not to say that Protestants are in a position of power in every circumstance and situation on campus. There are many situations, particularly in the classroom, in which a secular perspective may be privileged. It does, however, mean that Protestant—and specifically Lutheran—privilege continues to be perpetuated through institutional life and history. The university is less hospitable to, and less dedicated to the flourishing of, non-Protestant Christian populations than it could be.

A study of thirty-six campuses across the United States found pervasive Christian hegemony inscribed in the very policies meant to provide religious accommodation to students.[111] What is the impact of Christian hegemony on students? The IDEALS survey has shown that students who experience their worldview identities accommodated and supported show a higher degree of openness to and support for worldviews different from their own.[112] Religious minority students tend to rate campus climate lower and have

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[111] Gordon Maples *et al*, "Privilege as Policy?" 272-290.

[112] Allyssa N. Rockenbach, Matthew J. Mayhew *et al*, "Navigating Pluralism: How Students Approach Religious Difference and Interfaith Engagement in Their First Year of College." Chicago, IL: Interfaith Youth Core (2017).

lower levels of institutional satisfaction than their religious-majority peers.[113] These studies point to the positive impact that comes from dismantling Christian hegemony—and the negative impacts of failing to do so.

What would it mean to dismantle Christian hegemony in the realm of chaplaincy and spiritual care? CRPT's emphasis on equity between religious traditions presents challenges to chaplaincy at religiously affiliated institutions, for which Christian hegemony (or that of some other tradition) is to some extent inscribed into the school's identity. It is also true that many religiously affiliated institutions, including Susquehanna University, voice support for religious diversity as an expression of their religious identity. Small advocates the active engagement of religious energies toward the goal of equity. What is the way forward? Joshi advocates a shift in perspective toward what she calls a "liberatory consciousness"[114] that is able to apprehend inequities within social systems—even, and especially, those *one may be benefiting from*—while intervening in creative ways that engender justice. A liberatory consciousness is process-based and intersectional; it is never finished critically interrogating the ways in which systematic injustices amplify and intertwine in social systems, while intervening in practical ways to create root-deep change. "It is high time," Joshi writes,

> To pursue "Interfaith 2.0," which acknowledges the American context of White Christian supremacy. Interfaith 2.0 . . . understands that there are differences between religions, and is ready to have conversations from that standpoint while also grappling with race, class, gender, and privilege where they appear in theology and society. Interfaith 2.0 shifts interfaith from "we are here to support each other" to "we are working together to create a social justice paradigm." For

[113] Rockenbach *et al*, "IDEALS," Interfaith Youth Core, 15.

[114] Joshi, *White Christian Supremacy*, 213.

> White Christian participants, Interfaith 2.0 requires exploring, owning, and beginning to fix White Christian supremacy…"[115]

Joshi brings the issue of whiteness into our discussion of Christian hegemony and religious pluralism, and it is to this issue to which we now turn. For White Christians, Joshi's call for Interfaith 2.0 requires a radical shift in perspective, a centering of traditions and communities they may have rarely considered. For those used to having their needs, paradigms, and values operating as the unexamined default mode of institutional and cultural life, this may seem like a destabilizing change. This is of urgent concern for multifaith chaplaincy.

## CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS

Joshi demonstrates how Christian supremacy and white supremacy develop in tandem, often as two sides of a coin—the presence of one inferring the presence of the other. The European Enlightenment and the field of "scientific racism" served to "biologize" cultural and religious difference into the concept of race. Joshi writes:

> By beginning with religious difference, and reconceptualizing the Christian/non-Christian rivalry in biological or "natural" terms, European Enlightenment thought replaced religion with race as the defining distinction between superior and inferior peoples. As European society continued to encounter different "others," including during precolonial and colonial times in the United States, race was foregrounded as the basis for distinguishing peoples who were also religiously different.[116]

Throughout American history, the colonial and national project has intertwined with the Christian theological imagination in ways that produced and reinforced white Christian

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[115] Joshi, *White Christian Supremacy*, 218-219.

[116] Joshi, *White Christian Supremacy*, 65-66.

racial identity and privilege. From the Doctrine of Discovery promulgated by Popes Nicholas V and Alexander VI[117] granting Christians the authority to seize and subjugate non-Christian peoples, to the Puritans of New England viewing themselves as a chosen people founding a "New Israel" in the wilds of Massachusetts on land wrested from Native peoples, to ideologies of Manifest Destiny imagined as a providential divine Spirit driving the westward expansion of the American empire, to assertions of the moral and spiritual superiority of "Anglo-Saxon" people, Christian identity and theology have been intertwined with the construction of racial hierarchies.[118]

What does this mean for chaplaincy? Joshi's analysis helps us understand the force of Small's argument that we cannot advance religious pluralism without a critical analysis of power. Failing to do so leaves unjust systems intact and religious pluralism crippled. Religious difference has been entwined with social hierarchies throughout US history, and remains so on the campuses where chaplains work. Robert P. Jones has shown through extensive polling data just how true this is.

Jones is the founder and CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), which conducts surveys of the American public related to religion and public life. In *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*,[119] Jones argues that American Christianity has been shaped theologically and culturally to coexist with—and in many cases as an outright apologist for—slavery and Jim Crow. This is an

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[117] MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 563.

[118] Joshi, *White Christian Supremacy*, 63-64.

[119] Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

indisputable part of the historical record. Through contemporary survey data, Jones shows how racist attitudes have become endemic within white American Christianity.

Jones's historical analysis begins with his own Southern Baptist roots, describing how the Southern Baptist Convention was founded in 1845 by a split with northern Baptists over the issue of slavery. The Southern Baptist Convention was conceived as a pro-slavery Christian denomination. Given this history and its contemporary footprint as the largest and most influential white evangelical denomination in the United States, it is perhaps not surprising that Jones's survey data reveals a high correlation between racist attitudes and white evangelical identities. What may be surprising is how pervasive racist attitudes are among white Christians of all denominations and regions. The 2018 American Values Survey conducted by PRRI included an assessment of racist attitudes by region, racial group, and religious affiliation. The survey found a high incidence of racist attitudes among white evangelical Protestants, white mainline Protestants, and white Catholics. By contrast, religiously unaffiliated whites and Black Protestants register dramatically lower incidences of racist attitudes.[120] The pervasiveness of racism among white American Christians causes Jones to conclude racism has become encoded in the DNA of white American Christianity. Jones summarizes,

> [The survey] demonstrates—with rigorous quantitative evidence—a disturbing fact: that Frederick Douglass's nearly two-hundred-year-old observations about the positive correlation between white supremacy and Christianity continue to be supported by the contemporary evidence. Not only in the South but nationwide, higher levels of racism are associated with higher probabilities of identifying as a white Christian; and conversely, adding Christianity to the average person's identity moves him or her toward more, not less, affinity for white supremacy. White supremacy lives on today not just in explicitly and consciously held

[120] Jones, *White Too Long,* 169.

> attitudes among white Christians; it has become deeply integrated into the DNA of white Christianity itself.[121]

Jones himself was raised in the Southern Baptist Church and continues to identify as a Christian who calls on his own community to face the contagion of racism with which the faith has been infected and inflected for so long. Like Small and Joshi, he sees the way forward as one requiring truth-telling, repentance and repair. His book shares powerful stories of Christian churches who have begun such a journey.

> Perhaps the most important first step toward health is to recover from our white-supremacy-induced amnesia. It is indeed difficult—at times overwhelming—to confront historical atrocities. But if we want to root out insidious white supremacy from our institutions, our religion, our psyches, we will have to move beyond the forgetfulness and silence that have allowed it to flourish for so long. Importantly, as white Americans find the courage to embark on this journey of transformation, we will discover that the beneficiaries are not only our country and our fellow nonwhite and non-Christian Americans, but also ourselves, as we slowly recover from the disorienting madness of white supremacy.[122]

I have highlighted issues of Christian hegemony and white supremacy not because questions of religious pluralism are somehow reduceable to them, but because they are foundational issues with which a chaplaincy committed to religious pluralism must contend. They serve to illustrate a fundamental point about a social justice approach to religious pluralism: we will not achieve pluralism in our institutions and society without contending with inequities of power that have been entwined with and encoded within religious difference.

## CONCLUSION

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[121] Jones, *White Too Long,* 186-187.

[122] Jones, *White Too Long,* 235.

The United States has undergone radical changes in religious demographics over the past generation, a process which has only accelerated in recent years. College students are the most religious diverse age cohort of American adults, making college and university campuses a bellwether of the changes in store for the rest of society. They highly value the work of building bridges of understanding and cooperation to those who are religiously different from themselves while feeling that their college experience leaves them under-equipped to build such bridges. For all of these reasons, effective engagement with religion and religious difference is a central concern for institutions committed to the education of citizens in a diverse democracy and for chaplains who serve in these settings.

One model presented for engaging religious difference prioritizes understanding and cooperation across lines of religious difference. This model seeks out areas of agreement or shared concern, encouraging groups to grow in mutual understanding and to advance the common good. Patel examines the nuanced ways individuals create identity and meaning around religious tradition and practice—including those who don't identify with religion at all. Patel is driven by a desire to honor both difference and similarity. Diana Eck, like Patel, argues that this work has both secular and sacred dimensions. The honoring of difference and charitable regard for the other are vital for the flourishing of a religiously diverse democracy. These values touch many of the highest spiritual aspirations at the heart of the world's great religious traditions. In all these ways, Patel and Eck have a great deal to say to contemporary chaplaincy.

In contrast to Patel, Small insists that religious pluralism can only be arrived at through a social justice praxis that engages in radical critiques of Christian hegemony and

privilege with the goal of advancing religious equality. Christian hegemony, as we have seen, is deeply implicated in the production and maintenance of white supremacy, both in American history and powerfully in the present day.

Responding to the critiques of Small and others, Patel and Cassie Meyers acknowledge that interfaith cooperation may appear to assume a neutral playing field between religious groups—a posture which may serve to justify unjust structures. Further, the desire to find areas of agreement and cooperation among traditions may serve to elide critiques of problematic practices or beliefs within traditions.[123] While acknowledging these potential problems, Patel and Meyers counter that concepts of justice are themselves often religiously derived, such that privileging social justice as the starting point for engaging religious diversity will *a priori* exclude some religious voices from the table. They argue instead that their model of interfaith cooperation, focusing on "respect for diverse religious or philosophical identities, mutually inspiring relationships across lines of difference, and common action for the common good"[124] holds greater promise for building a religiously diverse and just society of "equal dignity and mutual loyalty." At the heart of their project is the conviction that bringing people into relationship across lines of difference creates the possibility for a shared sense of belonging and common humanity, even when profound differences of belief and practice

[123] Cassie Meyer and Eboo Patel, "Social Justice and Interfaith Cooperation," in Kathleen M. Goodman, Mary E. Giess, Eboo Patel, Kevin Kruger, and Cindi Love, *Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement*, (Bloomfield: Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2019), 49.

[124] Meyer *et al*, "Social Justice and Interfaith Cooperation," 47-48.

remain. Bringing people into relationship holds out the hope that such differences themselves may be overcome.

Patel and Meyer's points are well taken. Sometimes, however, more radical interventions are required to create and ensure equity. As we see in the next chapter, historic inequities have impacts on the spiritual lives and educational flourishing of non-majority students in higher education. Small's call for a social justice framework to support religious diversity in higher education is one that chaplains and those attending to the spiritual care of today's students must heed.

# CHAPPTER FOUR

# SPIRITUALITY AND EQUITY

American institutions of higher education were born from Christian theological commitments and the search for meaning and moral formation was inscribed into their missions. As American culture and religion have changed, so has higher education. As religion became disestablished within many institutions over time—whether at secular research institutions or religiously affiliated institutions like Susquehanna—religious life and spiritual development moved from the curricular to the co-curricular sphere of universities, a move which included the founding of chaplaincies in great numbers following World War II. Founded to serve Protestant Christian students, the growing diversity of American higher education in the last decades of the twentieth century led to radical changes to chaplaincy. At Susquehanna, chaplaincy has been reframed and repositioned to serve institutional goals related to diversity and inclusion. My role as university chaplain includes that of Lutheran minister, diversity and inclusion professional, interfaith leader, non-denominational spiritual care provider, and mid-level student services administrator. This diffusion of roles is one way chaplaincy has adapted to the needs of today's student body. Models of chaplaincy at Ivy League institutions show how these tensions are managed at larger and more diverse institutions.[125] Balancing the importance of spiritual care, belonging and meaning making with the

[125] van Stee *et al*, "How Do Colleges and Universities Support Multifaith Chaplaincy?" 134-155.

diversity of today's student bodies is the central challenge faced by chaplains today. The challenge to chaplaincy goes to the heart of tensions within higher education itself. In this chapter, I will show how attention to student spiritual life correlates to positive student outcomes. However, those outcomes are not shared equitably. What is to be done, and how might chaplaincies respond?

## CULTIVATING THE SPIRIT

In the early 2000s, three researchers from the University of Southern California, Alexander Astin, Helen Astin, and Jennifer Lindholm, began a seven-year study of the spiritual life of college students. It began out of a sense of urgency. They had observed how the most fundamental questions in life are essentially spiritual questions, and that such questions were almost completely neglected in the literature on college student development. Questions like: "Who am I? What are my most deeply felt values? Do I have a mission or purpose in my life? Why am I in college? What kind of person do I want to become? What sort of world do I want to create?"[126] As higher education has become more focused on technical knowledge and practical outcomes, the exploration of such questions and the cultivation of the "inner life" has been increasing neglected.[127] In the process, they argue, students have lost out and higher education has lost its way.

> "Spirituality," according to Astin *et al*, "points to the inner subjective life," and,
>
> has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us. Spirituality can also bear on aspects of

[126] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit,* 1-2.

[127] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit,* 2.

> our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, the mystical. Finally, we believe that highly "spiritual" people tend to exemplify certain personal qualities such as love, compassion, and equanimity.[128]

This definition of spirituality is distinct from religious belief, though the two may overlap for some.

> "Whereas religion is characterized by group activity that involves specific behavioral, social, doctrinal, and denominational characteristics, spirituality is commonly conceived as personal, transcendent, and characterized by qualities of relatedness" (Fetzer Institute, 2003). It is to be expected that some students will view religious practice as the primary means for expressing their spirituality, while for others formal religion will play little or no part in their spiritual life.[129]

This study of spiritual engagement among college students parallels a growing concern that higher education has come to focus too narrowly on technical knowledge and that the affective aspects of self-development—character and moral formation which were the traditional domain of the liberal arts—have been lost. While numerous thinkers have called for a renewal of wholistic student development at the heart of higher education, Astin *et al* have captured the data on the impact of spiritual engagement in the lives of college students. In essence, the study goes to the heart not only of students' lives and concerns, but to the goals and aims of higher education itself. Nothing could be more urgent to our current discussion of chaplaincy in higher education.

The study measures ten indicators of spirituality and religiousness. Spiritual measures included: charitable involvement, ecumenical worldview, spiritual quest, ethic of caring, and equanimity. Religious measures included: religious struggle, religious

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[128] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit,* 2.

[129] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit,* 5.

commitment, religious engagement, religious skepticism and religious/social conservatism.[130] The largest of its kind to date, the study surveyed over 14,500 students from 136 baccalaureate-granting institutions in the fall of their first year and again in the spring of their third year. The results map the ways in which spiritual and religious attitudes change over the course of college, the impact of those changes, and the types of experiences that influence such change.[131]

What did the study find? While religious engagement decreases during college, spiritual engagement grows. What's more, spiritual growth correlates to a wide variety of positive outcomes. The summary findings include:

> During the college years, growth in the qualities of equanimity and global citizenship has positive effects on virtually all of the traditional [educational] outcomes.
>
> Growth in equanimity enhances students' grade point average, leadership skills, psychological well-being, self-rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and satisfaction with college.
>
> Growth in global citizenship enhances students' interest in post-graduate study, self-rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and commitment to promoting racial understanding.[132]

They continue:

> Global citizenship, a measure that combines items from Ethic of Caring and Ecumenical Worldview scales, reflects the student's concern about helping others and one's identification with global community. It includes items such as trying to change things that are unfair in the world, reducing pain and suffering in the world, and feeling a strong connection to all humanity. The fact that growth in this quality tends to raise students' educational aspirations suggests that expanding one's understanding of and commitment to global issues and

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[130] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 23.

[131] For a detailed account of their methodology and findings, see Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 161-198.

[132] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 135.

> strengthening one's sense of caring for others may spur an interest in pursuing further education as a means of positioning oneself to make a difference in the world. In sum, these findings, which show the positive role that spirituality can play in academic development, underscore the importance of assisting students to grow and develop in all of the important dimensions of self, not just academically but also spiritually.[133]

Spiritual engagement and growth during the college years enhances not only personal well-being among a variety of measures but educational and professional outcomes as well. Further, the authors isolate specific aspects of the college experience occurring both inside and outside the classroom that enhance spiritual growth. "Our data reveal several critical types of experiences that promote students' spiritual development: study abroad, interdisciplinary studies, service learning, philanthropic giving, interracial interaction, leadership training, and contemplative practices."[134]

Many elements of the experiences here noted occur outside the classroom or are beyond the scope of the academic curriculum. While Asin *et al* do not discuss the work or role of campus chaplains as such, their findings offer powerful support for the kind of work chaplains do in cultivating a sense of connectedness to others and creating opportunities for demonstrating, in the words of St. Paul, "faith active in love." They write:

> Clearly . . . *one of the surest ways to enhance the spiritual development of undergraduate students is to encourage them to engage in almost any form of charitable or altruistic activity.* In this connection, many of the people who are regarded as 'spiritual leaders,' people like Mother Theresa and Albert Schweitzer, have devoted their lives to altruistic work.[135]

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[133] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 121.

[134] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 145.

[135] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 147. Italics original.

Contemplative practices such as prayer and meditation, rooted as they often are in spiritual, religious, and sacred wisdom traditions, fall within the domain of chaplaincy. The authors write, "Our study found that *contemplative practices are among the most powerful tools at our disposal for enhancing students' spiritual development*."[136]

The work of Astin *et al* lays the groundwork for further investigation of spirituality and meaning making in higher education, including the impact of social inequities on the lives of students. How is spiritual engagement experienced differently by students who are not in the religious or racial/ethnic majority? This is a vital question for chaplaincy to which we now turn.

**NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL**

We know from Astin *et al* that religious engagement is positively associated with spiritual growth and other positive outcomes. However, Bowman and Small have shown that religious minority students demonstrate decreased religious engagement for reasons of decreased faculty and institutional support.[137] Another study considers Astin *et al*'s "spirituality measures" of spiritual identification, spiritual quest, and equanimity, as experienced by African American/Black, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and White/Caucasian students. The study found significant differences

[136] Astin *et al*, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 148. Italics original.

[137] Nicolas A. Bowman and Jenny L. Small, "The experiences and spiritual growth of religiously privileged and religiously marginalized college students," in Matthew M. Mayhew and Alyssa B. Rockenbach, *Spirituality in College Students' Lives: Translated Research into Practice*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 491-509.

between groups upon entering college and in growth over time.[138] When it comes to spiritual engagement and growth, one size does not fit all. Institutional support for minoritize identity groups is an important ingredient in supporting the spiritual engagement among those groups. As one reviewer summarized, "The greater the institutional attention to group identities, the greater the opportunity for spiritual growth across all dimensions."[139]

A recent pilot study at an elite liberal arts college in New England assesses the impact of chaplaincy on the student experience and highlights the differential impact for white and non-white students. The college's Center for Spiritual and Religious Life is staffed by a full-time University Chaplain and part-time chaplains serving Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Unitarian Universalist campus communities. The authors frame their study thusly:

> Young adults are less likely than members of older generations to identify with a religious tradition or attend religious services (Cooperman, 2015). At the same time, college students are more religiously diverse than ever, and many expect institutions of higher education to create inclusive environments for students who identify with diverse religious and nonreligious traditions (Kosmin & Keysar, 2013; Mayhew et al., 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2014). How, in these contexts, do chaplains address student needs and contribute to campus life? Who are the students that use chaplaincy services, and what does this contact with chaplains look like? What demographic factors predict engagement with chaplaincy

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[138] Sean J. Gehrke, "Race and pro-social involvement: toward a more complex understanding of spiritual development in college," in Matthew M. Mayhew and Alyssa B. Rockenbach *Spirituality in College Students' Lives: Translated Research into Practice*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

[139] Michael D. Waggoner, "Spirituality and Contemporary Higher Education," *Journal of College and Character*17, no. 3 (2016): 147-156, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2194587X.2016.1195752.

> services? Most importantly, how—if at all—do chaplains impact student experiences and outcomes?[140]

The study's survey, completed by 44% of the student body, found that students who engaged with chaplains where more likely to integrate spirituality into their daily lives, felt supported in wrestling with life's big questions, and experienced spiritual growth.

Two important themes emerge from this study. The first is that religious minority students were more likely than Christian students to interact with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. This suggests that on a predominantly white, Christian campus, a religiously diverse chaplaincy is an important component of supporting a diverse student body.

> [T]he fact that religious minority students (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim) are more likely than Christian students to be involved in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life suggests that campus resources and leadership may be effective in meeting the particular needs of students from these underrepresented religious groups through chaplaincy services. As Barton et al. (2020) suggest, offices like the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life may be important sources of support and community for students from minority traditions who feel that they do not fit in the campus social scene because of their religious commitments.[141]

Experiences on my campus resonate with these findings. Friday night Shabbat dinners, hosted weekly by Jewish Life, are some of the most religiously, culturally and racially diverse gatherings on campus. This is a testament to the hospitality of the staff and students who host these events, and speaks to the fact that on a predominantly white campus, non-majority students often find support and community with one another across

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[140] Elena. G van Stee, T. P. Winfield, Wendy Cadge, John Schmalzbauer, Tiffany Steinwert, Shelly Rambo, and Elizabeth Clifford, "Assessing Student Engagement with Campus Chaplains: A Pilot Study From a Liberal Arts College," *Journal of College and Character* 22, no.4 (2021): 5.

[141] van Stee *et al*, "Assessing Student Engagement with Campus Chaplains," 22.

lines of identity and affiliation. Institutional support for Jewish life (the Director of Jewish Life is the only non-Christian chaplain on campus) lends support for many types of diversity across campus.

The second finding from the study that is especially apropos our current discussion is that non-white students were more religiously engaged than white peers but less likely to engage with campus chaplains.

> We find that Black and Asian students are more likely to participate in other religious student groups than their white counterparts—suggesting that these students are not actually less involved in religious life but that they are less likely to engage with university chaplains. This finding suggests that other religious leaders may be meeting the needs of Black and Asian students in ways that the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life is not, raising important questions about racial and theological diversity in chaplaincy offices.[142]

While non-white students were more likely than their white peers to participate in campus religious groups, they were less likely to engage with (mostly white) chaplaincy staff. This data underscores the importance of racial diversity among chaplaincy staffing. Through multiple measures, this pilot study demonstrates that a religiously and racially diverse chaplaincy matters for the spiritual engagement and growth of a religiously and racially diverse student body.

## NO MORE GALLERY SECTIONS

In *No More Gallery Sections: Exploring Spiritual Wellbeing for Descendants of Enslaved Africans at Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education*, K. Monet Rice-Jalloh writes about the challenges to well-being and flourishing faced by descendants of enslaved Africans on predominantly white colleges and universities. Rice-

[142] van Stee *et al*, "Assessing Student Engagement with Campus Chaplains," 23-24.

Jalloh brings a Black liberation perspective to the questions of chaplaincy, spiritual engagement and equity we have been considering. She begins by defining well-being in expansive and wholistic terms, including emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions.[143] Systemic racism has denied African Americans equal access to many such dimensions of well-being. Rice-Jalloh asks,

> If wellness is the desired state for students (and faculty/staff), should administrators consider the importance of having a curator for the spiritual wellbeing of Black . . . students, one who has labored under and resonates with the Black experience? . . . [T]he idea that repairing one's humanity in the face of repeated attacks aimed at devaluing an individual based upon that person's racialized embodiment is a spiritual act. This means that to pursue wellness, one must first be offered guided experiences and resources for healing.[144]

The "guided experiences and resources for healing" include a chaplaincy that is representative of and informed by Black spiritual traditions. Rice-Jalloh conducts a study of Black chaplains at Ivy League institutions. What emerges from her interviews are powerful qualitative data about the ways in which spiritual care often occurs outside the confines of traditional programs, attesting to Astin *et al*'s expansive notion of spirituality. They also testify to the urgency and liberative power of their work, connecting to our previous discussions of Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and the importance of challenging white Christian hegemony in higher education. Their testimonies speak to the nuance and texture of the work and are worth quoting at some length.

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[143] K. Monet Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections: Exploring Spiritual Wellbeing for Descendants of Enslaved Africans at Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education,* (DMin diss., Duke University, 2021), 15-18. In my usage, I hyphenate well-being. Rice-Jalloh uses wellbeing. I retain her usage in direct quotes.

[144] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 6.

One chaplain, identified as Chura, reflected on a conversation with students following a commencement ceremony:

> I know they [students] see the value of someone looking like me, and they say it all the time, especially my graduate students. I always do the invocation at the end of the year and last year, I counted five or six people that may have identified as black folk. And I pulled one of them to the side and I said, "You know what, y'all make me so proud looking out into the audience and seeing your five faces." She says, "No Chura, it made me proud, looking up at the podium and seeing you, this beautiful black person, with your hair, and in this regalia, and being on *that* stage." She said, "That inspired me."[145]

Well-being includes the whole of life and takes the form of an urgent need for healing and repair. Another chaplain, Asali, reflects:

> You will hear this word from me a lot: decolonize. Decolonize your spirituality and your belief system, in order to lean into the things that ground us—the very things that our mothers and grandmothers did that we laughed about, but now we know can save our life. . . There has to be constant growth and expanding, but I would say that God is not bound by religion. . . . And this is the core of decolonizing your spirituality for Black people. . . . You go into a Black church, you go into a Black space where spiritual things are being talked about and, literally, you are feeling and sensing this desperation like "we need God"—because God is equated with wellness.[146]

Building on the theme of spirituality and Black wellness, a chaplain identified as Hadithi adds:

> When you go to a Black step show . . . and you see just the joy there or . . . some Saturday night party . . . us just laughing on the benches on campus . . . that to me is just as essential as . . . the church service that we're going to pull together on Sunday morning. I think cosmically about our worship of the Divine, worship of God is why we made it [through the American experience]. I think in terms of spiritual practices, us laughing together—when they try to kill us, when they try to fail us—is such an important part of what spiritual wellness looks like for us on these campuses.[147]

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[145] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 85.

[146] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 90.

[147] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 90

Well-being and spiritual growth are associated here with engagement well beyond the confines of the religious programming chaplains offer. Black chaplains attest to the ways in which their presence on campus helps create a cultural and spiritual space that nurtures the lives of Black students in myriad ways. A chaplain identified as Bilal speaks to the ways in which Native American spiritual practices, such as burning sage, intersect with African American spirituality and history.

> I have witnessed spiritual practices from the Native art forms coming to the forefront, where they [students] will sit in a circle, they will burn some sage. Or they will burn some sage at a protest. These are all spiritual practices and they may not be what we're used to, but they're still part of our resources, our spiritual resource deep in our DNA from being enslaved. These were the enslaved who ran to the bush, who then escaped the plantation, and met up with the Natives in the bush. This is how they got through! So, these practices are now becoming prevalent in the marches and protests, and as practices at White institutions. We had to educate [administrators], "They're not in violation. This is a spiritual practice when they're burning sage."[148]

Native American spiritual practices and chaplaincy are themes we explore further below. Here, Chaplain Bilal gives an indication of the intersection of spiritual traditions and identities on campus, and the importance of a chaplain who can interpret and advocate for such practices. On a white majority campus, such spiritual resources might otherwise go unrecognized or actively suppressed without chaplains who understand them. Below, a chaplain identified as Dunia describes how Black spiritual traditions are oriented toward liberation—an essential element of wellness in the context of oppression.

> I've met Black students who have . . . appreciated a space where we can speak frankly and speak truthfully about the realities . . . and then be able to have that space connected to spirituality, and the type of spirituality that we're talking about . . . is . . . coming out of a deconstructive . . . black theology where we know that as black Christians, we exist in an antagonistic relationship with the status quo and that is being part of what it means to be a black Christian . . . to

[148] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 99.

> always be ready to subvert and invert power structures and to connect that kind of action to the upside-down kingdom. Yeah, I think there's a wealth of resources and a wealth of possibilities within the offices of religious and spiritual life with someone being Black in that role and understanding the breadth.[149]

Rice-Jalloh's interviews with Black chaplains at Ivy League institutions speak to the power and importance of chaplaincy as a locus of spiritual support for Black students. The testimony of these chaplains adds depth to the findings of Astin *et al*, who find that spiritual development contributes to a range of positive outcomes for undergraduate students. However, as we have seen, there is not equal access to the resources and experiences that nurture such development. Religious and cultural differences, as well historical legacies of inequity and oppression, require staffing and institutional resources that take these particular histories and injustices into account—including the unique burdens born by those who labor under them. A chaplain identified as Asali speaks of the unique role they occupy within their predominantly white institution,

> I'm the first black person to serve in this position, and I'm the only confidential source for faculty and staff, that means that black and brown faculty and staff on campus have never had a confidential source . . . And I am one of three for students . . . So that means I'm bombarded. And that's not to say that the people who held this position before me weren't great, but because of the dynamics of race . . . there's just some things black folk ain't gone come share or brown folk ain't gone come share. I'm holding these stories that have been held for decades.[150]

Rice-Jalloh's investigation into the work of Black chaplains provides narrative support for the argument that spiritual care needs to be adapted to the needs of students. Rice-

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[149] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 99-100.

[150] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 103.

Jalloh identifies themes in her interviews. Themes include the meaning and importance of representation—that students see someone who looks like them in a position of leadership; that spiritual well-being be understood not as a component of well-being but its foundation; and the healing of racialized trauma.[151] The legacies of oppression and trauma borne by Descendants of Enslaved Africans (to use Rice-Jalloh's term) point powerfully to the importance of a chaplaincy that is capable of ministering to the needs of students understood wholistically and with a commitment to equity. When it comes to cultivating the spirit, one size does not fit all.

## CONCLUSION

The struggle of chaplaincy to find its relevance and its place within higher education today is directly related to the identity crisis in higher education itself. Put simply: are values formation, meaning making and character development integral to the mission of higher education? In recent decades, more and more educators have answered this question in the affirmative. The work of chaplains capable of navigating the religiously and culturally diverse campus context is relevant to recovering a holistic vision of higher education. The work of Astin *et al* has provided the empirical data affirming what chaplains have always known—cultivating the spiritual lives of students leads to a range of positive outcomes that are relevant to the whole of the higher education enterprise. Yet, these positive outcomes are not equally distributed. As Critical Religious Pluralism Theory anticipates, religiously and culturally minoritized students do not experience spiritual engagement and support in the same sense as majority students.

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[151] Rice-Jalloh, *No More Gallery Sections,* 78-112.

White Christian hegemony is written into the structures of our institutions. The work of dismantling white Christian hegemony is part and parcel of dismantling racism itself—which is essential to ensuring the flourishing of all students. Rice-Jalloh's research on Black chaplains at Ivy League institutions illustrates this in a powerful way. Their ministry stands as an answer to Jenny L. Small's rhetorical question in the previous chapter, "While religious and spiritual resistance has been used to battle other forms of oppression, we are left with the question of whether they can be used to resist religious oppression and Christian hegemony itself. And if the answer to that question is 'yes,' what kind of religious or spiritual resistance could effectively be used?"[152]

A chaplaincy that is dedicated to the well-being of the whole person and that recognizes the reality of systemic oppression and the contemporary context of social and individual liberation is one form of religious and spiritual resistance. Such a chaplaincy must be diverse and responsive—recognizing that spiritual engagement and spiritual care include much that is beyond what is commonly understood as religious belief and practice. In practical terms, such a chaplaincy would be deeply collaborative with offices of multicultural affairs, offices of student affairs and student activities, as well as the curricular side of university life. It would include potential collaborations with local religious and cultural institutions to build a network of resources, connection and belonging that supplement campus resources, which are especially important for non-majority students. Such an approach to chaplaincy requires that institutions of higher

[152] Small, *Critical Religious Pluralism Theory*, 15.

education attend to student needs wholistically—what Rice-Jalloh identifies as well-being.

In the chapter that follows, we will draw these themes forward by considering as a case study an initiative by Native American students at Susquehanna University to build a Native land acknowledgment site on campus and to have a land acknowledgment statement become part of major university events. This student-led initiative rose out of a desire for justice for Native peoples and includes spiritual, communal, and political dimensions. What can chaplaincy at a predominantly white institutions like Susquehanna University learn from Native students in their push for recognition, visibility, support, and justice? The answers these questions map the future of chaplaincy itself.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## EXPERIENCES OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS AT SUSQUEHANNA

On an overcast spring day in 2021, a group of about seventy-five students, faculty and staff gathered on the edge of a wide lawn on the south side of the Susquehanna University campus. A wood fire burned in a raised stone fire pit. Four large benches formed a circle around the fire, with the spaces between the benches oriented in the four cardinal directions. Two huge TV monitors showed the faces of student leaders who had elected to study remotely for the semester due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while other student leaders held space in front of the fire. This was the campus dedication ceremony of the Susquehannock Tribute Circle, a land acknowledgement site representing more than two years of work by Native students at Susquehanna University.

The student leaders were members of SUNA, Susquehanna University Natives and Allies, a student club they had formed several years before. SUNA leaders spoke graciously and passionately, expressing a range of emotions and perspectives—there were abundant expressions of gratitude that this day had come to pass, but there was also grief that the site had been despoiled with beer cans and misuse before the dedication had taken place and frustration that Native practices like burning sage were poorly understood and in some cases actively suppressed. This land acknowledgment site—testifying to the Susquehannock peoples who were the Native inhabitants of the land on which the campus resides before European colonization—stands for several things at once: a wake-up call to the genocide upon which the United States was built, a tribute to Native

cultures, and a dedicated space for gathering and cultural practices for Native students at Susquehanna University today. The temporary sign marking the spot reads:

> Susquehannock Tribute Circle: in 2021, Susquehanna University Natives and Allies (SUNA) students dedicated this space to honor the Susquehannock Tribe (the Sas-k-we-an-og: those who live in a place where water is heard grating on shore), commonly known as river people because they lived in unanimity and balance with the river and land. This campus rests on their unsurrendered territory. We remember and pay tribute to the Sas-k-we-an-og people who were here first.

The dedication ended with a smudging ceremony, in which SUNA leaders burned sage as a cleansing and healing rite of dedication for the space, and then invited those who were attending to come forward and brush the sage smoke over their own bodies. It was a gesture of profound graciousness offered to everyone gathered. With this dedicated site on the edge of the campus green, Susquehanna University would not be the same.

What does the creation of the Susquehannock Tribute Circle mean to the students who labored to make it a reality? What difference does it make for their sense of belonging, meaning making, and connection—to their spiritual engagement and growth broadly conceived?[153] What can we learn about the renewal of chaplaincy in higher education?

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for my study is explained below under the headings of primary methodology, theoretical framework, and student voices and leadership.

### Primary Methodology: The Interviews

[153] Astin *et al, Cultivating the Spirit*, 1-2.

I am a white-identified, able-bodied, cis-gendered, Christian male. The social identities I bring to this research are freighted with legacies of power and privilege, especially vis-à-vis Native communities in this North American context. This research aims to interrogate and subvert such legacies in pursuit of greater spiritual equity in higher education. While blind spots surely remain, I have sought to mitigate the distortions of power and privilege by the methodological commitments I outline below.

My research methods follow a collaborative or participatory model which sees those being "studied" not as subjects but as co-equal partners. Swinton and Mowat write:

> Participatory research provides a framework in which people move from being *objects* of research to *subjects* and *co-researchers*. This goal is achieved by ensuring that the individuals who traditionally have been the object of the research process are given an active role in designing and conducting the research.[154]

Tim Sensing offers a list of principles that define collaborative or participatory research:

> The inquiry process involves participants in learning inquiry logic and skills . . .
>
> Participants own the inquiry. They are involved authentically in making major focus and design decisions. They draw and apply conclusions. Participation is real, not token.
>
> Participants work together as a group and the inquiry facilitator supports group cohesion and collective inquiry.
>
> All aspects of the inquiry, from research focus to data analysis, are undertaken in ways that are understandable and meaningful to participants.
>
> The researcher or evaluator acts as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource; participants are coequal.

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[154] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (London: SCM Press, 2011), 228.

> The inquiry facilitator recognizes and values participants' perspectives and expertise and works to help participants recognize and value their own and each other's expertise.
>
> Status and power differences between the inquiry facilitator and participants are minimized, as much as possible . . . without patronizing or game playing.[155]

While not every aspect of my research applies to the broad principles outlined by Sensing, my inquiry is based in an approach that seeks to center the voices and agency of the students and alumnae with whom I spoke and to minimize power differences between them and me as researcher. This was accomplished in several ways.

The agency of participants was upheld by giving them the interview questions in advance within the body of the participant consent form.[156] In this way, there were no surprises. In addition, I made it clear to participants that these questions were an invitation for them to say what they wanted on these or related topics. They were free to disclose as much or as little as they desired. The consent form further states that participants' identities would not be disclosed; names and other individually identifying descriptions would not be used. Finally, and most importantly, the consent form promises that participants will be allowed to review the draft and final forms of these research, and the research would not be submitted or published without participants' approval. In these ways, I have sought to be both participatory and collaborative in my research methods.

Participatory and collaborative research methods were chosen for several reasons. The history of colonialism and Native genocide casts a long shadow through American history. This shadow is cast particularly strongly through educational and religious

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[155] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 57-58.

[156] Appendix A, 161.

institutions, in which boarding schools were used as a means of cultural domination and Indigenous erasure. It is vital to me as a researcher, theologian, and chaplain to be aware of these histories, to name them in the context of my conversation with the participants, and to explicitly reflect on ongoing dynamics of power and privilege. As a chaplain and university administrator, I hold a position of power relative to the study participants.

My methodology has been informed by Indigenous scholars who are advancing research methods that seek to decolonize the study of Native American students in higher education. These scholars conduct research using Indigenous knowledge systems, which emphasize the cultural wealth that Indigenous communities and cultures bring to the research enterprise. Rather than a deficit approach that Western colonialist methodologies have taken, an Indigenous knowledge systems approach centers "Indigenous protocols and responsibilities."[157] These include sharing circles that center "tribal cultural protocols and storytelling," a methodology grounded in "recognition, responsibility, and relationships."[158]

While I cannot claim to have used Indigenous knowledge systems as a methodology due to not being Indigenous myself and to the relatively limited scope of my study, I have sought to be informed by the relational, egalitarian nature of these methodologies and instructed by their critique of traditional Western approaches. I take a social justice approach that seeks to be aware of inequities of power and centers the agency and distinct voices of the study participants. As Waterman writes,

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[157] Stephanie J. Waterman, "New Research Perspectives on Native American Students in Higher Education," *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (2019): 69.

[158] Waterman, "New Research Perspectives," 67.

> Indigenous scholars have been making the research our own through Indigenous Knowledge Systems and shared Sharing Circles as an example. Like the Three Sisters we are all related and reliant upon each other and respect the relationship and responsibility to our relations as foundational to our research.[159]

Grounded in these methodological commitments, I identified the participants through their membership in SUNA, all of whom I had known from previous interactions within the course of campus activities, such as interfaith programming, a SUNA-sponsored Indigenous Peoples Day die-in and attending the Susquehannock Tribute Circle dedication ceremony. I reached out to participants individually by email, explaining the nature of the project and why I was interested in interviewing them. All seven students/alumnae I contacted indicated an interest in participating in the project. Upon learning of their interest in participating, I emailed each individual the consent form outlining in more formal detail the parameters of the project.

The participants included four who were students at the time of the interviews and who graduated in May 2022 and three alumnae of the class of 2021. All interviews look place between January and June of 2022. All participants identity as Native American and were active or founding members of Susquehanna University Natives and Allies. These students formed SUNA in 2018. They are the first known cohort of Native students at Susquehanna University.

The participant consent form requires that I not use names of participants or other identifiers, so my descriptions below will be of a general nature.[160] The students I

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[159] Waterman, "New Research Perspectives," 75.

[160] Appendix A, 162.

interviewed are diverse in their backgrounds and identities. Several grew up on reservations in the Western US and have strong ties to tribal traditions, practices and cultures. Some have one or more tribal affiliation. Some did not grow up on a reservation, but occasionally visit family members who did or currently reside on a reservation. Some have undertaken as young adults an exploration of their Native identity that had not been emphasized when they were growing up, identifying as "reconnecting Natives." A majority identified with at least one other ethnic group in addition to their Native affiliations, such as African American or Mexican.

Five of my interviews were conducted over Zoom. Two were conducted in-person at the Susquehannock Tribute Circle described above. All followed a prescribed format of questions, which were given to participants in advance through the participant consent form:

> Why did you create/join SUNA and why was/has it been important to you at SU?
> Describe your cultural identities and how/where have you found support for those identities at SU?
> If you identify with spiritual or faith practices or traditions, have you been able to remain connected to that at SU? If so, how? If not, why?
> What was your involvement in the creation of the Susquehannock land acknowledgement site? Were you involved in the dedication ceremony? What did those experiences mean to you?
> Why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site?
> What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students at SU? And what is needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?
> What do you wish the field of higher education chaplaincy knew about supporting Native students?[161]

Theoretical Framework

[161] Appendix A, 162.

Through this study of higher education chaplaincy, we have seen the diversification of the religious landscape in higher education. Chaplaincy has adapted, sometimes reluctantly, often inadequately, to serve changing student needs. Susquehanna University has also sought to adapt to these changes. Native American students at Susquehanna are an important test case in the adaptation of the institution to supporting religious and cultural pluralism. Their small size and the lack of institutional history with Native students meant that there was no infrastructure of support in place. The students supported one another and built networks and structures of affiliation, most notably SUNA and the land acknowledgment site described above. Though small in number, the students had a strong sense of group solidarity and shared identity that gives them a distinct voice and perspective. This cohort of students was spiritually engaged in their traditions and practices but were not deeply engaged with the more established or mainstream religious and spiritual life opportunities on campus (though one student in the study identifies as Roman Catholic and occasionally attended Mass with that community). Because these students were both spiritually engaged in their own traditions and on the periphery of established religious and spiritual offerings, their experiences and perspectives offer important information about the reach, scope and efficacy of campus spiritual support.

For Native American students, the positive impact of cultural and spiritual support is well documented. On-campus social support has been shown to be a high persistence

factor for Native American students.[162] Another study of persistence of first-year Native students noted, "To support Native students' sense of belonging, institutions must validate and incorporate Native culture and perspectives within the ingrained Eurocentric cultures of non-Native colleges and universities."[163] A conscious engagement with Indigenous spirituality is seen as vital to "decolonizing" from the hegemony of Eurocentric assumption and structures. The efforts of SUNA are an example of such decolonizing movements, and understanding them will help us envision a chaplaincy rooted in a praxis of solidarity and liberation.

The specific work of creating a land acknowledgment is vital to this process, as Indigenous connectedness to the land is an assertion and celebration of realities that antedate colonialism and its master narrative, opening up alternative identities, stories, and possible futures. *In Decolonizing the Spirit in Education and Beyond: Resistance and Solidarity*, TwoTrees and Pinto write,

> The ongoing process of colonization attempts to separate Indigeneity, Land, and Spirit, continually obscuring the pathways and connections that make their relationship evident. Indigeneity, Land, and Spirit are all one. They are intertwined. They are not separate parts of something. Indigeneity is bestowed upon us by the Land, in its deepest expression and culturally by people who are part of ancestral lineages connected to the Land. The Land is Spirit-made manifest. Spirit, Land, and Indigeneity are all ephemeral and abundant. They are

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[162] Raphael M. Guillory and Mimi Wolverton, "It's About Family: Native American Student Persistence in Higher Education." *The Journal of Higher Education* 79, no.1 (2008): 58-87. doi:10.1353/jhe.2008.0001.

[163] Amanda R. Tachine, Nolan L. Cabrera, and Eliza Yellow Bird. "Home Away From Home: Native American Students' Sense of Belonging During the First Year of College," *The Journal of Higher Education* 88 no. 5 (2017): 785-807, DOI: 10.1080/00221546.2016.1257322.

> not defined by human constructs of oppression and liberation. . . . Spirit cannot be colonized.[164]

If is it true that colonization is the process of separation—people from land from spirit, the leadership and work of SUNA is an example of integration and repair, not only for themselves, but for the wider campus community. As we will see, the students frequently use the word "healing" to describe their work.

Throughout this study of chaplaincy, we have seen how chaplaincy was conceived to serve white Protestants. With the growing religious diversity within higher education, chaplaincy has slowly adapted its institutional shape. The SUNA student leaders present an opportunity to bring student voices and needs into this conversation about the transformation of chaplaincy. To analyze these interviews, I use several interpretive tools. The first is Howard Gardner's theory of narrative identity development. In his landmark study of the psychology of leadership, Gardner writes,

> The key to leadership, as well as the garnering of a following, is the effective communication of a story. [A story] calls attention to a common core. [T]he most fundamental stories fashioned by leaders concern issues of personal and group identity; those leaders who presume to bring about major alterations across a significant population must in some way help their audience members think through who they are.[165]

Gardner's theory of leadership is rooted in the insight that personal and social identities are constituted by narratives. These narratives precede any one individual. They are cultural and familial inheritances into which we are born and socialized. Yet, these narrative inheritances are not static. They are ever evolving. The process of individual

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[164] Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees and Sayra Pinto, "Forward," in *Decolonizing the Spirit in Education and Beyond: Resistance and Solidarity*, eds. Njoki Nathani Wane, Miglena S. Tordorova, Kimberly L. Todd (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave McMillan, 2019), vii-viii.

[165] Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: The Anatomy of Leadership*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 59.

identity formation involves drawing forward the narrative threads one has received. This may involve points of continuity as well as points of newness—even radical departures—that are woven into received stories. This process of identity construction is part of the maturation and individuation in every human life. In Gardner's account, an essential quality of effective leaders is their capacity to tell compelling stories that weave together personal and cultural narratives in ways that give their constituents, however conceived, a new sense of shared identity and possibility.

In *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-racial and Multi-cultural Congregations*, Jacqueline J. Lewis investigates the leadership qualities of pastors of multiracial congregations.[166] Lewis draws on Gardner's work on narrativity and identity development. In the US context, where W.E.B. Dubois named "the color line" as the most determinative cultural and political factor in our common life, and where Martin Luther King named eleven o'clock on Sunday morning as the most segregated hour of the week, leaders of multicultural congregations require a unique set of capacities. Such leaders must be able to tell a new story about race and identity, building a sense of shared identity out of our most polarized cultural stories. Summarizing Gardner, Lewis puts it this way:

> Leaders story a vision that revises the stories already existing in the minds of others, and the most compelling stories are the ones that have to do with personal and group identity. The content of the stories leaders tell originates in their childhood experiences; the stories address the ongoing existential concerns over the life cycle. *[E]ffective leaders convey a new version of a group's story that*

[166] Jacqueline J. Lewis, *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-racial and Multi-cultural Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008).

> *makes sense in terms of both where they have been and where they are going.* This is a critical competency for leading change.[167]

Theories of narrative identity development and leadership are important interpretive tools in two ways. First, as we listen to the voices of the SUNA students, we observe their evolving sense of individual and group identity. Group identity in this sense includes their identities as Native people and also their sense of identity as members of the Susquehanna University community. The students with whom I spoke exercised leadership in ways that reflect the power of narrativity and identity as a tool for creating change. These student leaders story (to use Lewis's verbal form) a new vision of Susquehanna University that connects their stories to a new future that others are invited to share. Through observing their sense of narrative identity, we witness their development as transformational campus leaders. Second, the nurturing and support of young leaders such as the SUNA students offers a way of reimaging the of role chaplaincy. We will return to this theme below.

We now turn to object relations theory, which will provide another interpretive framework, particularly the concept of the holding environment. Donald Winnicott's object relations theory addresses early childhood development and has been used to addresses challenges to human flourishing in a variety of cultural settings. I will be using Winnicott's insights to understand the cultural and institutional holding environments in which these students found themselves, and how their leadership and activism was a response to these holding environments. To understand this concept of the holding

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[167] Lewis, *The Power of Stories,* 17. Italics original.

environment, I will explain briefly how it fits within Winnicott's theory of child development, and then show how it applies to cultural and institutional contexts.

Winnicott's developmental theory advances the idea of "good enough mothering" (Winnicott is very mother-centric, and I will apply his terms more broadly to parents as appropriate) as the relational container within which child development unfolds. The mother creates for the infant a safe and nurturing space within which the child can develop, which Winnicott calls a holding environment. The first holding environment is the mother's arms and breast. At this point, the infant has no sense of self and other. The mother is an extension of the baby's subjectivity; when the baby cries for a feeding or a diaper change, the need is met as if by magic. The good enough parent responds to the child's needs attentively and appropriately (not making the baby wait too long for a feeding or a diaper change, for example). Not yet having a sense of self and other, the child develops a trust that the environment is a safe place where their needs are met. For healthy development, the parenting must be "good enough" to meet the needs of the child in appropriate ways. Within in the holding environment of good enough parenting, the child's development unfolds.

As the child grows in independence and agency, the holding environment expands, allowing the child the opportunity to take developmentally appropriate risks. The holding environment is the nurturing space within which a child can develop and grow in relation to the parent. Over the course of a lifetime, this holding environment appropriately expands from the parents' arms to the playpen to the house to the yard to the neighborhood to the weekly phone call of the adult child.

In holding, the good enough parent mirrors (another key concept for Winnicott) the child's emotions back to them, who does not yet have a sense of self and other. In mirroring, the parent is "giving back to the baby the baby's own self."[168] As the child grows, mirroring helps the child develop a sense that it is safe to express its subjective experience, aiding the development of what Winnicott calls the true or authentic self. A true self is able to negotiate one's inner world and the realities of human social existence with comfort and assurance, at ease communicating one's thoughts and emotions. By contrast, a false self is one "impinged" by the need to fit into the expectations of others, creating radical discontinuities between inner experience and outer or social expression. Winnicott's understanding of true self carries shades of theological meaning, echoing the divine name in Exodus 3: in the creative engagement (play) of transitional phenomena and the mirroring of the parent, "the individual can come together and exist as a unit, not as a defense against anxiety but as an expression of I AM, I am alive, I am myself."[169]

The cultural and institutional worlds in which we find ourselves also form holding environments and offer mirroring. Such cultural holding and mirroring are here more broadly applied to psychological and social experience. To the extent that cultural and institutional environments are not "good enough"—because of racism, for example—they create what Winnicott calls "impingements."

On the level of American culture and history, racism creates a negative holding environment and impinges its targets. Lewis points out that Winnicott's notion of

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[168] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2005), 158.

[169] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 76.

impingement is synonymous with what W.E.B. DuBois, writing over a century ago in *The Souls of Black Folk*, called "double-consciousness."[170] For Black Americans, DuBois wrote, the racist gaze becomes an internalized hyper-self-awareness. Seeing oneself as one truly is while simultaneously being aware of how one is being seen through the myopic racist gaze is to be burdened with double-consciousness. DuBois is writing about and within the specific historical experience of African Americans. I do not mean to conflate the experiences of racism among African and Native Americans, though there are many common threads. However, DuBois's larger point holds: racism creates a negative holding environment. Overcoming "not good enough" holding environments created by racism involves, in part, creating alternative holding environments that mirror safety, love, and justice. As we explore the leadership of the students with whom I spoke, we will see how they are responding to racist holding environments while creating new ones good enough for the flourishing of themselves and others.

In sharing the stories and voices that have been shared with me, I take a journalistic approach. That is, I follow storylines and themes, seeking to elevate the voices and concerns, dreams, hopes and visions, that have been shared with me. My approach focuses on narrativity over the extraction or abstraction of data. In this sense, I am returning to the insights of Howard Gardner, who takes a narrative approach to the study of leadership. To hear someone's story is to learn who they are, and to hear who they are is to get a glimpse of their vision of who we might be together.

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[170] Lewis, *The Power of Stories*, 27-29.

The SUNA Story: Student Voices, Student Leadership

The students who become SUNA were surprised and delighted to find each other at all. They did not show up to campus expecting to find a Native community or a cohort to call their own. Three of them matriculated in the fall of 2017 by way of College Horizons, an intensive summer program for Native high school sophomores and juniors which seeks to create pathways to higher education. Admissions counselors from affiliated colleges and universities participate in summer sessions with prospective students. Jessica Sullivan, Director of Admissions at Susquehanna, brought the program to Susquehanna from her involvement at a previous institution. Through College Horizons, she had a relationship with these students before they arrived at Susquehanna. Even though the students themselves had met through College Horizons, they did not know each other had committed to Susquehanna until a few weeks before arriving on campus. They had already prepared themselves for life at a predominantly white institution that had no history of Native students. It was a welcome sight, then, to find familiar faces during first-year orientation, and they knew they would be a support for one another on the journey ahead. The need to create an organization like SUNA was in their minds from the beginning. One student recalled,

> We knew going in that it was a PWI [predominantly white institution] . . . . And then we knew right away that this is something we're going to need to basically survive at the school and so that's kind of why we decided this is something we need and it's something we definitely want to have to create.[171]

[171] Participant 1, interview with author, February 7, 2022, Appendix B, 165. The quotes from participants are transcriptions of spoken interviews. They have the informal character of spoken language. I have kept editing to a minimum.

Another four of the SUNA members arrived at Susquehanna a year later in the fall of 2018 without any specific support for their Native identity, and without expectations that there would be opportunity for Native community on campus. SUNA was already beginning to take shape when they arrived. Several described the thrill of meeting other Native students and attending early SUNA meetings. Other identity-based groups, including the Black Student Union and the Association of Latinx and Allied Students, and campus offices like the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, were also mentioned frequently as important places of connection, belonging, and support. For students who had not come from reservations or had less or very little emphasis on Native culture in their families, the fellowship of other Native students was an opportunity to explore their Native identity in ways they had not before. One student summarized,

> As a reconnecting Native, I didn't really have as much support with this identity at home. . . . But being here has just given me so much more of an opportunity to feel comfortable claiming that part of myself. Because I get to be around other reconnecting Natives who are in the club too. So we're always talking about, you know, how we feel comfortable here. . . . But here, it's like no one was being judgmental. And everyone who like grew up on the res or just knew more about their identity, were supportive of the rest of us figuring that out. And I definitely made a lot of progress with what I can bring to my own family in the past four years. And yeah, I've always just felt very supported and loved. And it's just given me a great opportunity to explore this part of myself and to reconnect and to also fight for my community.[172]

The students described the fellowship they built through SUNA as a place of refuge on a predominantly white campus where they often felt othered, tokenized and misunderstood. It was a place in which to nurture shared identity as Natives while acknowledging that their stories, identities and perspectives were not the same. As one student pointed out,

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[172] Participant 6, interview with author, April 19, 2022, Appendix B, 210.

even for those within SUNA who shared a common tribal identity, "there's no one way" to live out that identity.[173] Diversity within the Native community and a pan-Native solidarity were both essential to the life of SUNA. These sensibilities were also essential to their growth as leaders and change-agents on campus. The connection and solidarity they found in each other would radiate in ever-widening circles as the possibility of building the Susquehannock Tribute Circle came into view.

While SUNA composed the only known cohort of Native students at Susquehanna, a Native student had preceded them in the fall of 2016 who dropped out following her first year. This student had also come through the College Horizons program. Among this student's negative experiences at Susquehanna was being told her Native practice of smudging was prohibited. This student's treatment and the lack of appreciation for her Native practices seemed to loom large in the minds of SUNA members, a point of sadness for a colleague who did not make it through, reenforcing the urgency of Native advocacy, solidarity and support if they were to be successful together.

This wouldn't be the only time Native practices were suppressed or misunderstood. The smell of burning sage was mistaken for smoking weed. Other times, this traditional practice of purification was dismissed out of hand by RAs and campus safety officials as a fire hazard. Participants described finding secluded places on campus to smoke Native tobacco, while looking over their shoulders out of concern that campus

[173] Participant 5, Appendix B, 201.

safety officials would question them. “Having to constantly explain oneself is exhausting,” commented one participant.[174]

Another experience that brought both grief to the SUNA students and renewed resolve was the despoiling of the land acknowledgment fire pit. In the spring of 2021 before the construction was complete, the fire pit was used in an unauthorized way and left littered with beer cans and trash. Students described feeling that campus safety officials did little to find the malefactors or safeguard the space. Eventually, through student persistence and insistence, a sign was erected prohibiting unauthorized use of the site. For the students with whom I spoke, this event as deeply upsetting, while deepening their commitment to completing the project and dedicating the site.

White Protestant students, whose religious and cultural assumptions are woven into the fabric of institutional life, may be surprised to hear their fellow students speak with such anguish and urgency. One participant’s story—which was referenced in the Introduction—speaks to both the spiritual challenges of college life and the life-giving power of Native practices despite the reality of misunderstanding and suppression. This student, a SUNA member, had been burdened with a recurring nightmare of a malevolent force and presence. It was deeply unsettling and disquieting, shaking their sense that Susquehanna itself was a place where they could flourish as a person. While this negative presence haunted their nights, it was very much present during waking hours as well. This student shared their struggle, which they very much understood in spiritual terms,

[174] Participant 1, Appendix B, 169.

with a fellow SUNA student. The fellow student, deeply rooted in Native spiritual practice, recognized immediately that an intervention was required, saying: "I'm going to bless you."[175] No campus suppression, lack of understanding of Native practices, or over-broad safety measures were going to get in the way—the need was too grave and urgent. The second student—the one giving the blessing—came to the dorm room of the afflicted student, taped a plastic bag over the smoke detector, opened the windows wide, and burned sage. The fragrant smoke and the prayers of blessing purified the space and gave peace to the student's deeply troubled spirit: "She blessed me from my head to toe." The impact of this spiritual intervention was profound for this student, and helped Susquehanna be a place where life and flourishing were possible for them. The student described this experience as pivotal: "If I didn't meet another Native student on campus who shared, 'Hey this is how I'm able to practice what I believe, and this is how I'm able to cope being here,' . . . I don't know what would have happened. I probably would have been like I can't do this anymore."[176] As other participants also noted, they found a way to practice smudging here and there, always needing to work around campus regulations and the prying eyes of RAs, fellow students who did not understand, and campus safety officers who had no models for distinguishing between an actual fire hazard and the spiritual hazard to Native students caused by suppressing their practices.

As these students developed their sense of agency on campus through the creation of SUNA and finding ways of staying connected to their traditions, interaction with

[175] Participant 3, Appendix B, 187.

[176] Participant 3, Appendix B, 188-189.

Native students on other campuses began to expand their sense of what was possible. The Ivy Natives Council, a conference held each year at one of the Ivy League universities, brings together Native students from the Ivies and beyond. Many of these students are alumni of the College Horizons program. SUNA students attended the conference in successive years at Harvard, Brown and Columbia universities. One student spoke of how affirming and influential attending those conferences was for their growing Native identity and sense of pan-Native solidarity.[177] One particularly meaningful experience was shared about visiting the land acknowledgment site at Columbia, which was difficult to find and obscured by a bush. A participant recalled,

> So we were like wow that really sucks because you're a huge institution and clearly you have all of these things going [for you] in terms of resources but then they still kind of find a way to like make it [the land acknowledgment] non-essential to this [campus] community. So you know, ever since then we had talked about . . . if we did have a land acknowledgement, what would that look like in our case.[178]

The lesson learned was one of inspiration, encouragement and a sense of mission. Yes, Susquehanna could have a land acknowledgment too, which would be prominent and visible. The process of creating the land acknowledgment site at Susquehanna would unfold over the next two years and challenge the SUNA students to grow as leaders even as they challenged Susquehanna University to have a new vision of its past and its future.

Institutions move slowly and the power to create change requires partnerships and collaboration. Conversations began with Amy Davis, the assistant director for diversity and inclusion and director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, and Dena Salerno,

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[177] Participant 3, Appendix B, 192.

[178] Participant 1, Appendix B, 170.

senior director for diversity and inclusion. The allyship of Amy and Dena would help SUNA navigate the power structures of the institution, which included coordination with the office of the university president and the practical matters related to the facilities department. The goals would be twofold: the composition of a land acknowledgment statement to be read at major university events and the creation of a land acknowledgment site and plaque on campus. A gathering space, envisioned as a fire pit with benches and Native trees, represented Native values of community and would allow for ongoing use by subsequent generations of students. Amy Davis commented that Native values were evident to her in the way the SUNA students approached the process. Honor, cooperation and shared input were guiding values throughout.[179]

From the beginning, the goal for the land acknowledgment was to be about more than words, but words were also important. The students and staff advisors began research to learn whatever they could about the Susquehannock people, including what is known about their culture and history. None of the SUNA students had previous knowledge of the Susquehannocks, and they did not want to replicate colonialist injustices by speaking for or about a culture in inappropriate or presumptuous ways. The first and most important question was: Are there any descendants of the Susquehannock people today to whom they could speak or with whom they could consult? The Susquehannocks disappeared from the historical record in the 1700s.[180] To this day, it is

[179] Personal communication with the author.

[180] David J. Minderhout, "Native Americans in the Susquehanna River Region, 1550 to Today," in *Native Americans in the Susquehanna River Valley, Past and Present*, ed. David J. Minderhout (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 77-111.

not known what they called themselves, as the name Susquehannock was apparently the name given by other groups.

One participant spoke of their awakening to the power and importance of land acknowledgments through living in Australia for four years prior to college, where Indigenous land acknowledgment statements are a common practice, from the highest levels of government on down. They reflected,

> I think every place needs a land acknowledgement. When I was living in Australia before any assembly at schools, they would always do an acknowledgement and that was the first experience that I saw [of land acknowledgments]. . . . And the people who were conducting the land acknowledgement weren't of the tribe or anything, so it really opened my eyes to see that. You don't have to be a part of a group to care about others.[181]

Fueled by this growing passion for land acknowledgments, and knowing that they wanted to do better than places like Columbia University, SUNA students undertook the creation of a site that would be both a tribute site and gathering space, a site that not only invited reflection on the past but that invited active community engagement in the present.

At the heart of the site would be a fire pit surrounded by benches for seating. It would be a place for gathering, expressing Native values of community and hospitality, inviting not only the campus Native community but other members of the campus community who come with respect and reverence. It would connect to the universal

[181] Participant 2, February 2, 2022, Appendix B, 181.

human symbolism of fire as well as meanings and practices specific to Native cultures. A participant reflected on how they thought through the design process:

> A central gathering place around the fire was brought up so we said okay, we could make a fire pit, and then we branched out from that single idea of fire pit and what it is we do with fire, you know the sense of comfort that comes from being around a campfire even. [In my culture], we use flame and fire as a way to not just purify but also, we use it as a way to communicate to our ancestors, and the way we do that is through the burning of a specific herb which is cedar or juniper. And that is how we pray and you know that's also how we give offerings to our deities and it's also a way of recentering ourselves and almost like sanctify something you know, making something holy again.[182]

Other students reflected on how a fire pit would evoke the Cherokee story of the first fire as well as standing as a symbol of community.[183] Circular benches would reinforce the theme of a fire pit as a gathering place, while the four gaps in the benches pointing north, south, east and west gave an orientation to the site according to the four directions. Like the fire pit, the four directions were an opportunity to express Native values and knowledge while inviting campus members into reflection.

> We believe [in my culture] that each direction has a specific association or a connotation to it, and that these directions are specific points, so it's just a way that we could . . . visually show that to everybody and remind others of that.
>
> The way that we've structured that also went back to both our culture's view of the four cardinal directions and how we wanted to kind of also give students that sense of direction like knowing [where] they were on campus. If people were very cognizant of our position within life, our position within you know the world, our position in relation to nature, our position, you know, [toward] one another, we figured that could also be exemplified within the land acknowledgment.[184]

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[182] Participant 5, Appendix B, 203.

[183] Participants 3, Appendix B, 184. Participant 4, interview with the author, April 20, 2022, Appendix B, 187.

[184] Participant 5, Appendix B, 203-204.

This statement highlights a theme within the interviews. The SUNA students not only sought to create a space of connection and belonging for themselves as Native students at Susquehanna, but also moral and spiritual orientation to all students and to the institution as a whole. Here we get a window into their growth as leaders and campus change agents. The land acknowledgment reflected not only an expression of their identities and values as Native peoples, but a new vision for the institution. It invites all people into reflection about their place on the land and their relationship others, as well as to the past and the future. Another participant reflected on the ways the land acknowledgment opened up a new relationship to history and the land while also being a call to transformational change in the present.

> It's just very important for us to be able to, like, bless the land, most of all, like it is a dedication to the Susquehannock people, above all, because this is their land, and you don't want to take away from that. But it's also a means to say Indigenous people are here, Indigenous students are going to be on this campus. And they deserve a space. And also, we need to protect the land, there is a lot of layers.
>
> I know, we always talk about how to share with the campus about the connection that we feel because . . . you know, reconnecting to the Earth is not just something for Indigenous people to do. We have been doing it and things are still happening, like the IPCC report, which in 2022, the first time they said that colonization is the reason for climate change, which is true, it took it till 2022 but I kind of wish it was 200 years earlier . . . but we always just want to like invite people to reevaluate the ways in which their mindsets are contributing to the erasure of Indigenous people. And, you know, we can sit there and make as much fiery speeches as we want. But not until people can like actually sit with their own spirit, and evaluate, like what they need to do on a personal level. Like, that's when changes start happening when we do ceremony together. And we're all together. And we're like looking at each other. And we're seeing like, we have a responsibility to each other, that's when the most effect happens.[185]

Through their time at Susquehanna, the SUNA students grew as leaders, and as they grew as leaders, they began to tell a new story that made transformational change possible. We

[185] Participant 6, Appendix B, 212.

now return to the theoretical tools of leadership studies and object relations theory to further unpack their important work.

SUNA Leadership Through a Narrative Lens

Through the work of Howard Gardner and Jaqueline J. Lewis, we've seen that leadership is an art of storytelling linked to personal and social identities. Effective leaders, in the words of Marshall Ganz, tell a story that connects the threads of personal and social identities to the urgency of action in the present, connecting "self, us, and now."[186] In many ways, the leadership of SUNA students was implicit. They were not positioning themselves as "campus leaders" and did not hold elected offices or highly placed appointments. Some of them held executive positions within SUNA, and some did not. Here, leadership is not measured by formal title but by the capacity to be agents of change. Defined in this way, these students were undoubtedly leaders.

My interviews with SUNA students were by no means exhaustive and did not provide a complete narrative picture of any one individual's experience at Susquehanna. Their interviews yield vignettes that together create a mosaic of leaders in the process of growth and change. Within these vignettes, a picture emerges of leaders beginning to tell a story that links their stories to a larger story which becomes the stage of their leadership. I will focus below on vignettes from the beginning and the toward the end of their time at Susquehanna, comparing these early-college and later-college perspectives as evidence of their development as leaders.

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[186] Marshall Ganz, "Public Action, Collective Narrative, and Power," in *Accountability Through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action*, eds. Sina Odugbemi and Taeku Lee (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011), 283.

Toward the beginning of their Susquehanna journey, these students' narratives and reflections focused on their search for belonging. One student spoke of the culture shock of suddenly being a "minority" at Susquehanna, having grown up on a reservation immersed in Native culture only to find themselves in the foreign environment of a predominantly white institution. Another spoke of feeling homesick and overwhelmed by the demands of college and finding solace, solidarity and renewal in smoking Native tobacco with SUNA friends in a secluded place on campus.[187] One student described the thrill and surprise of seeing another Native student on campus and getting together and making them fry bread, forming an enduring bond.[188] We've heard previously of the intervention of one SUNA student to support another through a ritual of blessing and prayer. The student who received the blessing added, "I'm forever grateful like that I was lucky to have someone who was an upperclassman" who could offer mentorship and support through such a difficult time.[189] Another student found very limited support in their degree program, where there were very few faculty of color and little knowledge of Native culture and experience, but found important solidarity and friendship within SUNA. The Susquehanna Tribute Circle was an important touchstone in their development as a future teacher, contributing vitally to their professional training even though it was not part of the academic program.[190] Another student reflected,

> What did it mean to have SUNA as a community? It meant everything . . . coming here to a new space. I felt a little disconnected from my culture as it was a

[187] Participant 1, Appendix B, 168.

[188] Participant 6, Appendix B, 208.

[189] Participant 3, Appendix B, 188.

[190] Participant 2, Appendix B, 182.

> PWI. So finding other Native students really helped me. It helped ground me. . . I was really looking for that community. And I found it. And I'm so grateful that I found it.[191]

The search for belonging evident in these vignettes focuses on finding each other and, through finding each other, finding a place they could call their own within the larger institution. These stories of the first year or two focus on what they personally needed to survive and thrive.

A shift is evident as they reflected on the Tribute Circle and their later college years. The focus moves outward from a primary concern for a personal sense of belonging to a desire to make a positive impact on the campus and their fellow students, Native and non-Native alike. The mosaic reveals a picture of leaders moving, in Ganz's terms, from a necessary concern for self to an expansive sense of "us."

One student, who had been influenced by the land acknowledgment at Columbia University, spoke of the personal feeling of wanting to make a difference on the Susquehanna University campus that had a lasting impact.

> [W]e knew that like this is definitely something that is important we want for our university. We want this place that we've come to love to be you know, accepting and basically just a space that at least recognizes this past, present and future relationship with Natives.[192]

Another student spoke of the pride it brought them to have been part of creating the land acknowledgment, and that it would make a difference not only for current students, but for education majors who would need to serve diverse students as future teachers.

> Having [the land acknowledgment] brought to SU I think is especially important, just because we are so predominantly white. It's sometimes concerning looking around my [education] classes and seeing how we're talking about Brown and

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[191] Participant 4, Appendix B, 194.

[192] Participant 1, Appendix B, 170-171.

> Black students and I know that not many of my other classmates can relate to them, and knowing that they're going to be that kid's future. So just having something that's going to stay here and that's going to be put into place. That leaves me a little bit more at ease when I graduate knowing that I was a part of something that has changed a campus and whether people acknowledge that or not.[193]

Here we see a connection of the land acknowledgment to the educational mission of Susquehanna University and the impact on the wider world.

As mentioned previously, the Susquehannock Tribute Circle was misused before it was dedicated, angering and saddening the students but instilling in them a deep sense of purpose.

> We wanted to invite the campus and you know—you attended, as well as some other department heads or people around campus. President Green was there. We really want to express that yes, this is a space open to the campus, but it has a meaning. And when you come here, you should be reflecting. You shouldn't be just fun willy nilly. No, it has a purpose and we wanted to highlight that.[194]

The student was able to look with pride on what SUNA accomplished, "We made a mark for Native students."[195]

Another student spoke of their hopes for the Tribute Circle and how it would be a place of learning, reflection and healing for the entire campus.

> I hope people can really come here to breathe, to learn, to recognize and reflect. Honestly, that's why we created [it], if people don't know the space that they reside, or [are] even just curious of what this space holds, that they come up, read the plaque, sit with it. That's all together, we want the community to be open and utilize the space.[196]

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[193] Participant 2, Appendix B, 173.

[194] Participant 3, Appendix B, 190.

[195] Participant 3, Appendix B, 184-193.

[196] Participant 4, Appendix B, 196.

As noted previously, the dedication ceremony included smudging and an invitation to all who were present to come forward and receive the smoke brushed over their body in a ritual of purification, blessing and healing. In the course of my interview with this student, I commented on how I experienced this as a moving act of generosity to those in attendance. The student reflected, "I really like sharing the knowledge and healing. Again, that space helped so much healing. So I really wanted to share the medicine with everybody and to create this connection again."[197] Here emerges a theme in the SUNA interviews of seeking to share Native cultural values with the wider campus, not only so that Native people would be understood, valued, and accepted within the institution, but to make a positive impact through a spirit of generosity. This marks another window into the collective picture of their growth as campus leaders. Though this may have included the burden of educating others about their culture that minoritized groups often bear, I feel it pointed to a cultural value of generosity rooted in reciprocity and mutual regard. Asked about their vision for the Tribute Circle, another student reflected,

> We're asking ourselves what type of space do we want to leave here, what is the legacy of SUNA that we want to leave here when we're finished and how do we want the space to either help. . . . other Native students that come after us, as well as any other minority students that may have felt othered in that time. We wanted to make sure that this space that we created would be an area of healing, rejuvenation and a very comfortable space for students to enjoy and partake in. Because while we were there a sense of . . . belonging . . . was a big barrier like I mentioned earlier. We wanted that to be a place of belonging for other students.[198]

[197] Participant 4, Appendix B, 196.

[198] Participant 5, Appendix B, 202-203.

The Tribute Circle would be a space of learning and sharing, "allowing the students to share, either inviting people to pray with them as they traditionally do, [or] would be a great opportunity for Native students to . . . speak in their language through the form of prayer [and] to share that with others, so that they can be aware of it."[199]

Another student (as noted previously), also expanded on this theme of the cultural value of sharing, "I know, we always talk about how to share with the campus about . . . the connection that we feel because even in my speech, I was like, you know, reconnecting to the Earth is not just something for Indigenous people to do." They added,

> I think what I can say is that a land acknowledgement is the absolute bare minimum for a campus to have, for any space really to honor Indigenous people. I mean, this is not in the private property sense. But this is our land. This is the land that our ancestors have cultivated, that we're cultivating. And that we're trying to help. And so, you know, the campus, there could be some other policies where people can help the land. There could be some things that we can change institutionally that will help mitigate the effects of climate change.[200]

Honoring the land is honoring people, and honoring people means working to make the community and campus a safe place for everyone.

> How can we start, like, affecting the community around us so that not just Indigenous students, but all other students of color, and all people of color in the community can feel safe. There are so many things. . . like honoring the land is honoring Indigenous people. And honoring a person's personhood, their humanity, is honoring Indigenous people, because that is what we believe in. We want to see who the other person is, and we want to connect with them. And we also want to connect with the land. Because that's how we can all take care of each other. Like, at the end of the day, like that's what's the most important.[201]

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[199] Participant 5, Appendix B, 205.

[200] Participant 6, Appendix B, 213.

[201] Participant 6, Appendix B, 213.

The leadership mosaic that is coming into view is an expanding vision pointing beyond SUNA to the transformation of the institution in relation to its past and its future. Another participant, reflecting on why SUNA was important for their time at SU, added,

> Just like being a part of creating something that impacts a lot of students there and they continue to learn about Native issues [is so meaningful]. I just see the impact that I had there and it really makes me feel good inside . . . When you're a part of something bigger than yourself . . . it makes you feel hopeful for the future to for Native students to go there.[202]

SUNA and Transformational Holding Environments

Through their development as leaders, the SUNA students sought the transformation of the holding environments in which they found themselves. As noted above, the concept of holding environments can be extended beyond the idea of child development and parenting to cultural spaces. Lewis writes,

> [T]he relationships (with persons, concepts, memories and experiences) that nurture one's sense of race and ethnicity, gender and theo-ethics can be conceptualized in terms of holding, mirroring, object presenting, and playing. For example, not only do our caregivers hold us, but the culture holds each of us as we grow and develop in ways that are either good enough or not.[203]

We can imagine at least two cultural spaces to which SUNA was responding. The first is the culture of the United States. While US culture is not monolithic, it is can be asserted in broad terms that mainstream European-American culture has historically been a negative holding environment for Native American people. This is a point that hardly needs defending, but to take the most jarring evidence, David Michael Smith estimates

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[202] Participant 7, interview with the author, June 8, 2020, Appendix B, 219.

[203] Jacqueline Janette Lewis. "Authoring Stories for the New Religious Frontier: A Theo-Ethical Narrative Analysis of Clergy Serving Multiracial /multicultural Congregations." Order No. 3123403, Drew University, 2004, 45. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, http://libgateway.susqu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/authoring-stories-new-religious-frontier-theo/docview/305175030/se-2.

the total Native deaths throughout the Western Hemisphere as a result European colonization to be 175 million. Smith writes:

> In sum, for the entire present-day United States from 1492 to the present, the total number of Indigenous deaths includes the 12 million estimated by Thornton; the additional approximately 790,000 deaths that occurred in Hawaii, Alaska, in Puerto Rico; and about 200,000 excess deaths since 1900. Thus, the Indigenous Holocaust in this country appears to have taken around 13 million lives. Signally, this horrific number of deaths was only a very small portion of the mind-numbing Holocaust throughout the Western Hemisphere. When Thornton's estimated hemispheric population decline of 70 million is multiplied by 2.5, the total number of Indigenous deaths throughout the Western Hemisphere between 1492 and 1900 appears to be about 175 million. And the number of Indigenous people who have died in the hemisphere because of war, repression, racism, and harsh conditions of life since 1900 surely runs into the millions.
>
> By any reckoning, the Indigenous Holocaust in the Western Hemisphere was, as Stannard has pointed out, "the worst human holocaust the world had ever witnessed." No words or numbers can adequately convey the scale of the horror and tragedy involved in the greatest sustained loss of human life in history. Still, it seems to this researcher that understanding the scope and dimensions of the Indigenous Holocaust is an important first step toward collective political action which addresses the needs, interests, and aspirations of Indigenous people today—and which ensures that such a holocaust will never happen again.[204]

There can be no stronger evidence of a negative holding environment than one that resulted in such a staggering scale of death, theft, and cultural erasure. If the United States is seen as a negative cultural holding environment for Native peoples, Susquehanna University has been a more ambiguous one. On the one hand, there are elements of institutional support and affirmation. Susquehanna's engagement with the College Horizon's program brought some of the SUNA students to campus. Resources like the Center for Diversity and Inclusion are places of support and encouragement, and

[204] David Michael Smith "Counting the Dead: Estimating the Loss of Life in the Indigenous Holocaust, 1492-Present" Southeast Oklahoma 2017 Native American Symposium, accessed July 21, 2022, https://www.se.edu/native-american/2017-native-american-symposium/.

affinity groups like the Black Student Union and the Association of Latinx and Allied Students helped create a network of solidarity for SUNA. In the interviews, certain faculty and staff were spoken of as particularly supportive. University resources helped make possible SUNA students attending of the Ivy Natives Council. The administration provided the space and material support to build the Susquehannock Tribute Circle. At the same time, SUNA students attested to feeling othered and tokenized on campus, and having their cultural practices suppressed. For SUNA students, Susquehanna University has been both a place of affirmation and support and a place of racism and alienation. Taken together, Susquehanna University has been an ambiguous holding environment.

In creating SUNA, these students sought to create for themselves a "good enough" holding environment—a place where, in their own words, they could belong. A place where they could extend affirmation and care to one another, and from which they could share their cultural traditions with others. The space they sought to create was not only for them. As we saw in the analysis of SUNA leadership development over the course of their college journey, the holding environment they sought to create, as exemplified in the Susquehannock Tribute Circle, rippled outward to include other minoritized groups, and ultimately the entire campus. Their vision was of a transformed institution/holding environment with a new relationship to its past and its future.

## CONCLUSION

SUNA students have a story to tell. In the challenges they faced and the amazing things they accomplished, they testify to what it looks like for institutions to support the spiritual lives of minorized students on a spiritually and culturally diverse campus. The transformation they underwent as individuals and the transformation they brought to the

campus points to the importance of leadership development and mentorship. The SUNA students carried within themselves a theological and ethical vision which flowered of its own accord. They only require being honored and supported as aspiring leaders while university leaders—including chaplains—partner with them as we together build institutions that are good enough holding environments for all.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONCLUSION: TOWARD THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHAPLAINCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Throughout this study, we've seen how the relationship between religion and higher education in the United States has changed over the centuries, through what Jacobsen *et al* describe as the eras of Protestant hegemony, individualization, and pluriformity.[205] We've followed these cultural trends with a specific eye toward Susquehanna University and the way in which they have worked themselves out at this small, rural liberal arts college connected to the Lutheran church. While American higher education was a white Protestant enterprise from the beginning, the large-scale establishment of chaplaincies did not gain steam until after World War II. This was attributable in part to the professionalization of university life but also to the growing diversity of campus populations. Protestant chaplains began showing up on campuses as Protestant homogeneity was being called into question by the post-war cultural consensus that understood American society as founded on a "Judeo-Christian" heritage of Protestant/Catholic/Jew. Thus, Protestant chaplaincies were paradoxically both a sign of Protestant cultural power and also a sign that its cultural pride of place was beginning to fade. That is to say, higher education chaplaincies have in part been conceived as a

[205] Jacobsen *et al*, *No Longer Invisible*, 16-30.

response to religious diversity, despite the fact that they have not aways made serving the interests of a diverse student body a priority.

Religious diversity poses many questions for chaplaincy. Among the most pressing is the question of religious and spiritual equity. Making equity a primary concern means critiquing and dismantling the ingrained white Protestant hegemony woven into the fabric of our institutions. Indeed, Protestant hegemony and white supremacy have been shown to be deeply intertwined. The advancement of religious equity and the work of anti-racism are deeply connected.

The work of SUNA as presented in the previous chapter represents a disruption of white Protestant hegemony at Susquehanna University. The presence of a land acknowledgment forces the institution to reckon with the fact that, despite the lofty spiritual aspirations of its founding, it was not conceived in innocence. It exists on stolen land. To be clear, the founders of the university did not themselves steal the land. The school is an inheritor of the history of colonialism and genocide which allowed European Americans to found the village of Selinsgrove in the late 18th century. The impact of the land acknowledgment goes far beyond an historical reassessment. The SUNA students—in their insistence on celebrating themselves and their unique identities within an institution where they often felt overlooked and misunderstood—are voices of what philosopher Jacques Ranciére calls dissensus.[206] The work and witness of the SUNA students point to the limits and holes in our spiritual support structures on campus, while also pointing to how vitally important such support is. Further, their voices and their

[206] Jacques Ranciére, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010), 38.

development as leaders point to what spiritual support for minoritized students might look like, and how our institutions might be transformed in the process. I will conclude this study with a proposal for a constructive theology for chaplaincy in a multifaith setting.

## TOWARD AN INTERSECTIONAL THEOLOGY OF CHAPLAINCY

In the New Testament epistle of 1 Peter, the author appeals to his readers to bear with and support one another in whatever way they are able, recognizing that each have been given grace in their own particular way, "like good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). The Greek word translated manifold, *poikilies*, is more precisely translated many-colored or dappled. The idea is the diverse ways in which God's grace is poured out, as varied as the rainbow—the many-colored grace of God. A theology of chaplaincy in higher education must begin with the bold affirmation that the creating and sustaining Spirit of God is abundantly present with all and for all people. The theology of chaplaincy I advance below is built upon three pillars: intersectional methodology, progressive Christian in roots and tradition, and pastorally informed by spiritual development theory.

As Jenny L. Small persuasively argues, attention to religious diversity in higher education that does not strive toward religious equity leaves systemic issues of white Christian hegemony unexamined. A theology for chaplaincy in multifaith higher education contexts must take a critical approach to dismantling inequity through a theological lens. Intersectional analysis offers a methodological starting point. In *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide*, Kim and Shaw offer a definition of intersectional theology, which is worth quoting at length:

> Embracing intersectional thinking means that we should approach doing theology by questioning assumptions that are rooted in the norms of dominant culture, purposely pursuing justice, embracing the complexities and contradictions, and refusing to do theology as usual. . . . [I]ntersectional thinking adds complexity to our theologies that is more reflective of our diverse realities and differently situated lives. The ever-changing subjects of intersectional thinking challenge theologies that declare themselves absolute truth and remind us that none of us has a decontextualized and unmediated knowledge of ultimate reality or the divine. To approach an approximation of larger realities we must be inclusive in our analysis to account for diversity, and we must be directed toward justice as we center our examinations of power and hierarchy as inherent parts of our theologies.
>
> Intersectional theology is . . . a kaleidoscope theology . . . one that is constantly changing with each turn of perspective; it holds multiple (and sometimes competing) views in mind at the same time. It makes visible the differently situated knowers and the complex web of relationships and social institutions in which it is embedded. It is contingent and recognizes its own rootedness in the social location of the theologian within interlocking systems of oppression. Significantly, it is also self-reflective, always interrogating itself for possible complicities with structures of subordinating power and seeking relevancy toward social justice for all people.[207]

Intersectional theology proceeds from the premise that we live within complex systems of power in which the many facets of individual and group identity interact with vectors of power in different settings to create advantage and disadvantage. An intersectional theology takes into account all these elements in the course of doing theology. As such, an intersectional theology is never a fixed perspective or a reified doctrine. It is rather a method of inquiry, a way of interrogating texts, social systems, power relations, the Bible, institutions and theological discourse itself that is "biased toward justice."[208] In this respect, intersectional theology is an action, it is a commitment to ongoing critical analysis. Intersectional theology requires both/and thinking, seeing systems of power and

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[207] Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 16-17.

[208] Kim and Shaw, *Intersectional Theology,* 10.

identities as complex and multivalent. Individuals can be privileged in some settings and oppressed in others, and an intersectional theology is attentive to the fact that liberation is a complex praxis. A theology for chaplaincy in higher education must be intersectional in its methodology, asking critical questions about the ways in which resources are allocated within the institution to different groups and organizations.

The SUNA students approached their work from a profoundly intersectional perspective. Not only were they diverse within their group, honoring the multiple identities each held as Native people, but they recognized that the Tribute Circle was a place for all minoritized students to find a home. Their work ran "against the grain" of the institution in which non-majority students are implicitly and explicitly told to stay in their proscribed institutional spaces, instead building solidarity across identity groups while inviting all who desired to engage in moral reflection on their relation to colonialism, the campus community, and the land.

While advocating for equity is a laudable and necessary goal, it is not enough. A theology for chaplaincy in higher education needs to present a positive vision of what is possible, a passionate and persuasive moral and theological discourse that speaks a prophetic word to the academy and to students we serve. From an intersectional theological perspective, there can be no one, singular theology for higher education chaplaincy.

My theological perspective is that of a progressive Lutheran Christian chaplain doing multifaith chaplaincy that is at once anchored in the Christian tradition and serving a student body diverse in religious and non-religious perspectives. My theology of chaplaincy is rooted in the biblical notion of the sacred equality of human beings as

bearers of the *imago dei* and the inherent blessedness of all creation. The flourishing and goodness of human beings and all creation are my grounding faith commitments. Human life is an inescapably moral enterprise, as our lives are bound up in each other. Our flourishing and happiness are found in giving ourselves to one another in self-giving love and mutual care. We discover our deepest joy and our highest good in community with one another. The work of creating a more just and peaceful world—far from being the faddish pursuit of "social justice warriors" as characterized by right-wing media—is connected root-and-branch to this biblical vision of the meaning and purpose of human life. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, far from being an other-worldly orientation, was grounded in the Jewish trust in the goodness God as Creator and the blessedness of creation itself. The injustices of Jesus' time and place—robbing of Galilean peasants of the fruitfulness of the land and their labor by Roman occupiers, holiness codes that shamed and shunned society's most vulnerable, the unholy alliance between religious elites and Roman power—were to Jesus a blasphemous afront to the Creator who intends flourishing and abundance for all. This is to say, the liberatory message and mission of Jesus is rooted not in political ideology but in his faith in the God of creation. As Norman Wirzba puts it,

> [The early Christians] understood [Jesus'] preaching of the kingdom of God and his ministry to be the incarnation of God's delight and peace in a world of pain and violence. As lord of the Sabbath, Jesus takes within himself the aspirations of Sabbath life and gives them concrete expression in the ministries of feeding, healing, exorcism, companionship, and service. As Moltmann summarizes it, 'Jesus proclamation of the immanent kingdom makes the whole of life a sabbath feast.' If we want to see what a creation liberated into the rest of God looks like and what our role in that liberation can be, we should consider the life of Jesus. Jesus heals the sick, feeds the hungry, cleanses lepers, restores sight to the blind,

> exorcises demons, and raises the dead—all so that creation can be made whole, all so that we might be saved and made healthy in the company of others.[209]

This liberatory vision of the gospel message is the animating heart of my vision of a theology of chaplaincy, a theology that celebrates difference as an expression of the *poilikies* of divine abundance, including religious difference. The God of creation is present in all peoples and cultures. A vital aspect of this theological vision as it relates to religious diversity is that it does not require the conversion of the religious other. This is not to say that I check by my theological convictions at the door, or that theological convictions are rendered private or irrelevant, but rather that the Christian gospel is most clearly expressed not through argumentation or doctrinal formulas but through the human dignity with which we regard others—the compassion, care, and generosity-of-spirit shown them. Serving Jesus in the other, as Jesus himself implores his followers to do, includes the religious other.[210] Supporting religious diversity through the equitable distribution of institutional resources, granting of accommodations for diverse religious practices, and thoughtful interfaith engagement through dialogues and shared service is itself an expression of this vision of the gospel.

The third leg of this theology for chaplaincy is a pastoral perspective informed by spiritual development theory. Higher education chaplaincy involves multifaceted engagement with emerging adults as they formulate beliefs and values and discern life commitments and vocational directions, all in a religiously diverse world. A theology of

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[209] Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40.

[210] Matthew 25:31-40. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is a case of Jesus asking his Jewish audience to take the religious other (the Samaritan) as their spiritual and ethical exemplar. I'm indebted to Eboo Patel for helping me see the interfaith aspect of the parable.

chaplaincy needs to be informed by an understanding of the unique developmental stage of emerging adults, while being attuned to the ways that power and privilege may cause students to experience spiritual development differently. Throughout this study we have been asking the question of how our institutions and chaplaincies can change so that spiritual support for students is built on a foundation of equity.

James Fowler has written about faith from a developmental perspective, building on the developmental theories of Erik Erickson and Jean Piaget and the philosophy of religion advanced by Paul Tillich and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. In dialogue with these psychological and theological voices, Fowler formulates a definition of faith as a universal human phenomenon that is both inclusive of and transcendent of religious traditions or expression.

> Faith is not always religious in its content or context. To ask . . . questions [about faith] seriously of oneself or others does not necessarily mean to elicit answers about commitment or belief. Faith is a person's or group's way of moving through the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose.[211]

Fowler's definition is helpful because it frames questions of faith not as a discourse exclusive to theistic belief but rather as an open-ended exploration of the human phenomenon of making meaning of life, whether framed in traditional religious terms or not. In light of Fowler, the SUNA interviews showed students engaged in such faith exploration.

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[211] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), 4.

Sharon Daloz Parks has built on Fowler's faith development models in her work studying identity and faith development in emerging adults. Her work provides a vital link between our discussion of religious diversity and the spiritual care and mentorship that are vital to chaplaincy on the ground.

Parks presents the ways in which emerging adults shape their identity and make meaning in a diverse world. Like Fowler, she defines faith independent of religious traditions and beliefs. The development of faith, in Parks's terms, is the creation of a sense of meaning, purpose, and being "at home" in the world. It is a process that is never complete; to be alive is to be actively engaged in meaning making. Parks writes:

> To suffer shipwreck, gladness, and amazement on the journey of faith is to relinquish the pattern of ultimacy one has seen, known, felt, and acted on—and to discover a new faith. Therefore, even as we recognize the word faith as a verb, it remains also a noun. Faith is a composing and a composition. Faith is not only the act of setting one's heart, but it is also what one sets the heart on. When we say people have a strong faith, we mean first that they confidently engage in the activity of faith in their ongoing meaning-making, testing, trusting, and acting; and second that they have found the pattern of shipwreck, gladness, and amazement to be true and trustworthy. They dwell in a consciousness of an intricate, intimate pattern of life that is continually in motion yet holds ultimacy.[212]

For Parks, faith (both as a noun and a verb) is a "human universal."[213] This conception of faith can be used to understand the ways people find meaning and purpose in life—the way "faith" is constructed and evolves— whether conceived within a religious tradition or not. This is enormously important for chaplains who are providing spiritual care in religiously diverse settings.

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[212] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith* (Hoboken, NJ: 2011), 45.

[213] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 24.

Spiritual growth occurs in the context of encounter with otherness, which both troubles the waters and enables growth. Emerging adulthood is a stage of exploring borders and otherness, bringing opportunities for transformation, especially as relates to the religious other. Parks writes:

> One young woman, discovering a whole new horizon of opportunity and promise for her life, spoke poignantly of a sense of loss: knowing that she 'would never be at home again in the same way—with my extended family or in the place where I worked during high school.' These would remain part of her life and landscape but she knew she was choosing to participate also in a wider world—cognitively, emotionally, and geographically—and that these familiar people and places would be recast within a larger frame of belonging and choice. Her ecology of depending would be reordered as she began to make meaning in new ways.[214]

In my work with emerging adults, this affective aspect of development is deeply important and is especially relevant to religious diversity. Friendships and personal connections across lines of religious or spiritual identity create rich opportunities for learning and growth. As a chaplain, creating opportunities for such relationships to occur is one of the essential aspects of the work. It is also among the most difficult, as many students are reluctant to venture beyond the safety of their social group. This leads to the Parks's third dimension of the developmental process: community and belonging.

As diverse experience expands the borders, a sense of belonging enters a new stage of testing and experimentation. However, a sturdy and supportive experience of community is vital for continued growth. Mentors are particularly vital. Here, Parks's focus on higher education as a crucible of growth and becoming is clearly seen.

> [I]t is the combination of the developmental stance of the emerging adult with the challenge and encouragement of a mentor, grounded in belonging to a compatible

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[214] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 107.

> social group that ignites the transforming power of the emerging adult era. A mentoring community can confirm the hope that meaning can be reconstituted beyond the Abyss—there will be a new home"[215]

Mentoring is a key aspect of higher education chaplaincy, so Parks's insight here is particularly salient. Mentoring that opens up a sense of belonging within a social group in which religious diversity is valued and embraced can be transformative.

> This developmental perspective celebrates the promise for human life inherent in the ongoing encounter with a world inhabited by other selves and other beings with their own needs, an encounter that requires incessant recomposing of what is true for the self in relationship to a world of others. . . . The fundamental yearning for a fitting network of belonging may finally yield to a still more profound understanding and practice of inclusiveness, because it is truer.[216]

Parks's model provides a way of thinking about human development and spiritual care in the context of religious diversity, which is essential to an intersectional theology that is "biased toward justice." Chaplains must be able to both engage multiple types of religious diversity, and help students navigate those waters in ways that assist them in their own being and becoming.

## CONCLUSION

Where do we go from here? With the pluralization of religion in higher education in the past fifty years, chaplaincy is confronting a question it had not dealt with before: how to effectively and equitably serve a student population that is diverse in religious and non-religious perspectives. If institutions ignore the question of equity (which many did and still do), one could simply carry on as before, offering chaplaincy services through a denominationally affiliated chaplain to a diminishing pool of denominationally affiliated

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[215] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 121.

[216] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,*130-131.

students. Within this model, it is possible to offer limited accommodation to other religious traditions, depending on student needs, while the established chaplaincy structure remains intact. On the other hand, and by way of conclusion, I'll offer possibilities for a new vision of chaplaincy at my institution, Susquehanna University.

Staffing Structure

The single largest impact on student engagement with chaplaincy relates to staffing. A religiously and spiritually diverse staffing structure creates multiple points of contact for a diverse student body. This can be accomplished in different ways depending on the size, resources, and student population of an institution. A current proposal at Susquehanna University involves hiring multiple part-time faculty/staff coordinators for various communities, including students who identify as spiritual-but-not-religious. An intersectional approach includes a recognition that race, gender, and other identity markers require consideration. For instance, an affiliate staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship who is Black started a Black Christian Ministry at Susquehanna in the fall of 2022. While this person is not officially employed by the institution, this is an example of the kinds of steps institutions must take to advance spiritual equity. With diversified staffing, the position of University Chaplain, such as mine, increasingly takes on a role of coordinating a diverse staff as well as interfaith programming.

It may be argued that the cause of equity requires religiously affiliated institutions to give up their religious particularity. Many higher education institutions have followed the path of religious disaffiliation. The colonial colleges which all began with religious affiliations in the 17th and 18th centuries are today formally secular. I do not argue that religious disaffiliation is necessary to advance the cause of religious equity. One can

advocate religious equity as an expression of religious conviction, as I do above. While it could be argued that this leaves Christian hegemony unexamined, I would respond that religious conviction is capable of bringing invaluable moral and spiritual urgency to the cause of equity.

Collaboration with Diversity Infrastructure

It is vital that chaplaincy offices collaborate with diversity support structures on campus. This is increasingly common. As described in chapter one, at Susquehanna, the office of religious and spiritual life is now part of the division of inclusive excellence. This structure allows religious life to collaborate with other diversity initiatives, thereby building an intersectional approach into the structure of the institution.

Interfaith Learning

In chapter three, we learned of the tension between models of religious difference that prioritize interfaith understanding versus those that prioritize religious equity. While it is true some models of interfaith work leave Christian hegemony unexamined, I believe religious equity and interfaith understanding need not be in tension. Chaplains are uniquely positioned to both advocate for the equitable treatment of religious groups on campus and facilitate engagement that builds understanding and cooperation between those who orient around religion differently. Indeed, it is opportunities for engagement with the religious other that are consistently rated as the most formative and meaningful experiences by the undergraduates with whom I work.

Mentorship

The story of the SUNA students and the creation of the Tribute Circle is one of student creativity, grit and passion. University staff came alongside and supported them in important ways and at critical times. This is not a story of the institution doing something for students, but of students creating for themselves networks of community and solidarity that both enhanced their own flourishing and changed the institution in the process. A new vision for chaplaincy might take its cues from Sharon Daloz Parks's vision of meaning making and mentorship. It would call for a new way of relating to students, who are treated not as consumers of campus programs or empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but moral and spiritual agents in their own right. While the recommendations involving diversified staffing and interfaith programming are important, the bigger story here is the ways in which the SUNA students carried within themselves the potential for leadership and transformational change, which required only the opportunity to take root and flourish.

This study began with the voices of SUNA students who spoke powerfully and poignantly about why their spiritual lives are important to them. They have been a touchstone throughout, a grounding reminder of the urgency of spiritual support for students and the importance of a reinvention of chaplaincy in a way that supports students in all their diverse traditions and perspectives. In closing, we return to a voice with which

we began: “We cannot separate ourselves from our spirituality. It’s where we’re alive. It’s who we are. It’s a living thing. You cannot separate the two.”[217]

[217] Participant 5, Appendix B, 205.

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# APPENDIX A

## NATIVE LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT AT SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY: IMPACTS FOR STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION CHAPLAINCY

## CONSENT FORM

1. **SUMMARY and KEY INFORMATION**

You are invited to participate in a research study about the creation of the Susquehannock land acknowledgement site at Susquehanna University. Your participation is voluntary. You were selected as a possible participant because of your involvement in the creation of the land acknowledgement.

The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons for and impact of the creation of the land acknowledgement site on the institution and the individuals involved. As part of the study, you will be asked questions about your involvement and experience at Susquehanna. Are there risks involved? As part of the participating in the study, it is possible you could re-experience traumas associated with revisiting painful histories or personal experiences. What are the benefits? While confidentiality will be maintained through the methods outlined below, the impact of your work will be shared with other others, including higher education administrators and chaplains who be allowed to understand the importance of such initiatives and will hopefully be more likely to support them in the future. The study is being conducted by Scott Kershner, university chaplain at Susquehanna University.

We ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**2. BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this study is to understand the impacts of the creation of the Susquehannock land acknowledgment site on the students involved, and how such initiatives can inform chaplaincy in higher education. Currently, there is little research that has been done in the area of the experience of Native students at predominantly white higher education institutions and chaplaincy.

**3. DURATION**

The research interview will last 1-1.5 hours.

**4. PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in an interview using the questions listed below. Participants are free to interpret questions and answer questions in whatever way they chose. Not all questions need to be answered. Participants may end their participation at any time without consequence or penalty. As a researcher, I consider

the interviewees to be collaborators in this project. I will submit to participants my writing based upon the interviews for their input, suggestions, edits, and corrections. I will not publish anything without their consent to what I have written.
The interview will be recorded and will take place over Zoom or in person, depending on the convenience of the interviewee. The interviews will be transcribed. I will make the transcriptions available to the participants allowing them to share additional informational or amend their statements.
Research questions:

- Why did you create/join SUNA and why was/has it been important to you at SU?
- Describe your cultural identities and how/where have you found support for those identities at SU?
- If you identify with spiritual or faith practices or traditions, have you been able to remain connected to that at SU? If so, how? If not, why?
- What was your involvement in the creation of the Susquehannock land acknowledgement site? Were you involved in the dedication ceremony? What did those experiences mean to you?
- Why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site?
- What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students at SU? And what is needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?
- What do you wish the field of higher education chaplaincy knew about supporting Native students?

**5. RISKS/BENEFITS**
Because students involved in this project were publicly supported and lauded by their university administration for their efforts, there are no apparent educational or professional risks. Any risks may have to do with re-experiencing traumas associated with painful histories or personal experiences. If you need support in any way, Counseling and Psychological Services is available for call Susquehanna students (call: 570-372-4751; on evenings or weekends, call: 570-372-4751).

The benefits of participation are: influencing the future of higher education beyond the SU campus by telling the story of the impact of the creation of a Native land acknowledgment site on SU students and the campus, as well as having the personal satisfaction of these accomplishments at SU being known and understood.

**6. CONFIDENTIALITY**
Measures will be taken to guard confidentiality. Names of participants will not be used and the use of identifying details kept to a minimum. I will describe broad themes rather individual stories or experiences. Additionally, I will share my writing with participants for review, correction, or editing before it is submitted to ensure that all participants are comfortable with the way information is conveyed. It is my hope I would be able to list the participants as “consultants” on the Acknowledgments page when the research is complete. Again, this would be done only with their expressed consent.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, as which time recordings will be destroyed. Study materials will be maintained for three years. Study materials will be stored in a password protected file to which only the researcher has access.

**7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY**

Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect your current or future relations with Susquehanna University. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships and without penalty. If you withdraw, the recording will be deleted and none of the responses will be used in the study.

**8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

The researcher conducting this study is Scott Kershner. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at: kershner@susqu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Christopher Medvecky, Chair of the Drew University Institutional Review Board (cmedvecky@drew.edu).

**9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

Please verify the following: The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Dr. Christopher Medvecky, Chair of the Drew University Institutional Review Board (cmedvecky@drew.edu) regarding any concerns.

**Participant signature**_____ **Date**_____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS WITH SUNA MEMBERS

Participant 1
Zoom
February 7, 2022

SK: How are you?

**P1: I'm fine. Good to see you.**

SK: You too. Thanks so much for taking the time. I'm so appreciative.

Once again, these questions are for you to interpret. It's really your opportunity to go with whatever you want to. Just to kind of come back to what I'm doing in my research I'm studying basically how we can help students to flourish in higher education and my big picture is that that in higher education we're not as supportive of the holistic part of students' lives as we need to be. When I use the language of spirituality it's really comprehensive. It could include religion but it's not exclusive at all of religion. It's about cultivating the inner person, values development how we understand ourselves in relation to others in our community.

All those things are how I think about what spirituality is about, and so I think that education is really about cultivating all of that in a holistic sense.

But there are inequities in our systems and all sorts of ways, of course. Because those whose identities are supported and nurtured within the institutions and culture have a better time and are supported in a bigger way right and so that's the bigger stuff I'm looking at. And specifically I'm interested in SUNA and the land acknowledgment.

So I'll just jump in with the first question, which I had shared before. Why did you create or join sooner and why was or has it been important to you at SU?

**P1: Okay, so we decided—we being [redacted], [redacted] and, at the time, [redacted] and I. We had just come straight out of the summer program. With this group called College Horizons and it was very much like Native centered.**

**Specifically, talking about our connections to culture to tradition to community what that looks like while we're away at school, and I really liked their program because of the whole holistic idea was definitely like centered, so they had touched base with us for three weeks on a lot of really good information.**

**And, before going to school that's when we actually found out that we would all be going to the same school.**

**Yeah, it's kind of interesting how that happened but they're like oh like that's crazy you guys are actually all going to the same institution so like that's really cool um.**

**And beforehand, we had looked up at the statistics of what SU's demographics look like. We knew going that it was a PWI. And we knew that there were very little Native students attending and the only one who had been in contact with at that time is [redacted] who had also had also been in the program but like at an earlier time.**

**So that's kind of how we first got to start knowing each other and going through that and then come to school, we had already established this notion that, "Okay, this is something that our institution doesn't have that we know that we want for us and that we know that we can create based on all the tools and the knowledge that we gain."**

**From this like summer experience that we all had we knew that that was something our campus lacked and needed. It was like, "Clearly, this is something that we thrive with because we could tell that we were doing really well." In this summer program it was all Natives so we knew that this was important to us. And then we knew the right away that this is something we're going to need to basically survive at the school and so that's kind of why we decided this is something we need and it's something we definitely have to create.**

SK: Did you did you find yourself, when you went about creating that and realizing you wanted it, did find support? Was it hard to get that going?

**P1: So, with the way that the program that I previously mentioned work was there is actually a person I don't remember the official name of her title, but she is associated with the program that I previously mentioned so she was kind of like our anchor person and, like our starting point. So she had known that we were all coming, and we were in contact with her. We knew that this is something we wanted to do and her name is Jessica [Sullivan, assistant director of admissions].**

**So she's um she is the person who's like the point of contact for the program and so that's where we first started. She was one of the first people we had met going on campus we had a lot of communication with her and she was definitely supportive of us like. Being on campus and knowing our needs because she's been with the program for a while now, and so, she was really excited that she had a very solid group coming in.**

**After that, because [redacted] was a year older than us, she was the one who kind of helped us like situate everything in terms who we needed to talk to to get our club going, what these initial meetings look like for pitching our club idea. But so she was**

**really important, in terms of like helping steps, because she was an exec position with the BSU.**

**So, and she had kind of already started laying the foundation, because she already had previous ideas of like what it would look and then she didn't really have the support she needed. And so, that's when we all kind of came together and basically started to make things happen. It didn't happen until our sophomore year.**

SK: Okay that gives me more of a sense of how that unfolded.

**P1: I'm gonna say another really important person throughout all this was on Dena [Salerno] who was at the time working with diversity and inclusion. I forget the title of these important people but she was really important because we had spent a lot of time there and then just kind of developing friends with people in BSU or ALAS.**

**Kind of like seeing how they run their meetings and like not only being allies to them, but like also being really influential in the way that we set up our club. There was another club, I want to say it was maybe GSA and they had given us like a copy of what their constitution had looked like. Basically, the initial documents of how they started and like what they wanted their club layout to look like. So they gave us we knew would be more relevant to our organization.**

**Yeah, but a lot of it was like us taking initiative to talk to these people or to like ask these questions, and I remember one of the first times we have like we were at SU. There was this event, it was more like the meet-the-Natives type situation because there was all of us and then there's just a bunch of people who had come to like talk to us and get to know us. So, that was really interesting, that was one of the points you're like okay we see that clearly people are interested in what we have to offer and who we are. I remember you were there and Dr. Bodinger was there and one of the main things that that I picked up on was like okay you guys are clearly here, this is a little new for us, but like we're here to help in like whatever ways you need us to help you.**

**And I think at first, we were pretty hesitant. At least I was because, like this was a PWI very out of my comfort zone. I grew up in on the reservation going to school with mostly Natives.**

**So Native was the majority and then, bam, there we were the minority. We were going into this institution that like may not completely value us or understand us so we were kind of really hesitant to share things and really start things but we knew was something that needed to get done.**

**And then I think. The next time we actually had like support was, I want to say it was also Maybe my sophomore year. We had one of our club members, she ran into some conflicts with campus safety about smudging. And like it was it became this**

**whole situation and, at the time, I had written like some think-piece on it, or something for Dr. Bodinger's class.**

**He read it, and he was like, "Red flag. This shouldn't be happening to our students." And then he was he reached out and he was like, "I read your assignment, it was really good, really thought provoking, but also very concerning." And so this was kind of our first like real like move from like okay like we do have all these people in terms of like classmates and friends who support us and then at this point, our professors and then more admin starting to step in, because after I had written about the whole smudging situation, Dr Bodinger actually put us in contact with you to see if there was something that we could figure out.**

**I don't know if interfaith started then but I feel like that's when I started getting more like attention from like admin or like staff in general.**

SK: And so that's kind of when more activism and advocacy kind of started it sounds like. You've kind of gotten into the second question. How do you characterize your own identities?

**P1: OK, so I guess I should have started by saying my clans just something that we typically do but it's okay. So whenever we introduce ourselves, we introduce ourselves based on like who we are, who are parents are and then like these four clans. My first clan is [redacted] people and that's my mom's clan I second clan is [redacted] which is my dad's clan. My third clan is [redacted] and then my last clan is [redacted] that's my grandparents on my mom's side, and then the last one, is my grandparents on my dad's side. So it's kind of who I am and for the most part, I identify or I do identify as a [redacted] or [redacted] woman.**

**Basically, my mom's father he's Mexican. So I because I didn't get to know him, I didn't really get to explore that cultural identity of myself. A lot of people assume I'm Mexican so that's probably the closest I've gotten to that. I think a lot of the support that we found was a lot through like our friends who were going through similar situations.**

**And that being said, like mostly being students of color or yeah POC and I feel like we also got a lot of support from like the sociology/anthropology department and then also philosophy, Dr. Zoller.**

**Yeah, so for the most part, I would say, like maybe going to BSU and ALAS. Those places for sure supported us and our identity but also challenged us in ways that, like, I guess, we hadn't previously like thought it's really, I think, important and beneficial. Also the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. Yeah, I feel like those places for sure supported us.**

**We also wanted to like increase Native applicants and also just like Native enrollment in general is you have those conversations didn't really get as far as we wanted.**

SK: Why do you think that is?

**P1: I think a lot of it was that we were we definitely overworked ourselves cuz I mean like we were students. We run these different clubs, we participated in a lot of different things and then our junior years we had all like started going abroad, and then you know Covid happened.**

SK: All right, my next question is, Do you identify with spiritual or faith practices and traditions and were you able to maintain connection to those while at SU?

**P1: So I feel like personally before I had come to SU I identified as being a Latter Day Saint or Mormon. I got to college and I started doing a lot of other things, and then I sort of stopped identifying with that.**

And then.

I feel like this is sort of when I started to **definitely include more like traditional elements into my life, and I feel like the biggest influence for that would probably have to be [redacted]. I mean I did include these things in my life previous, but I feel like it just became more important now that I was away from home and I couldn't just do that and people would understand me and it kind of became this situation where like we would sort of have to sneak off and do our little things in private because, like they mean so much to us, but having to explain that to Psafe [student shorthand for Public Safety] or to somebody else is just exhausting. So that's kind of what had happened with that and I feel like one of our examples, or one of the examples I would have been during really stressful times, or like missing home. We would bring these like mountain tobacco pre-rolls or whatever.**
**It just kind of like helps us recenter and focus and sort of get us back into this like state of balance. And so, a lot of the times, especially if it's really stressful times, I want to say, like a like maybe during finals or midterms, we'd smoke our tobacco and pray and like get us back into the space of like, "Okay, I can continue doing what I'm doing now, because now you've taken that time for yourself."**

**We were really scared and nervous to go out and do it because one we can't do it in our rooms, because you know safety issues, even though it's something we would typically do in our homes. So then we're like okay we'll move outside and I remember one time it was like super cold dead of winter, we went out to the track, and we were sitting on the bleachers taking the time for ourselves.**

**And it was like really nice but also, we were like we kept looking over our shoulder because, like we don't want campus safety to get the wrong idea that like we were doing something illegal and completely not okay.**

**So it was kind of this thing were we're trying to recenter ourselves and get back to this point, [Native word] or of balance. But then we couldn't really do that because we were constantly looking over our shoulders.**

**And like a lot of the times, we would do cultural games or share cultural stories, especially during like the winter season, because this is when a lot of like our winter stories will come out or our winter songs. All of which we would share with like people in SUNA. It was really nice.**

SK: Is sounds like you were able in different ways to do what you needed to do and wanting to do, and yet it was also stressful because you were being felt like you were kind of out of sync with what people's expectations were around here.

What was your involvement in the creation of the Susquehannock Tribute Circle?

**P1: Coming out of the summer program we were in involved in, we also have these like alumni connections with like you know people at other universities, mostly Ivy League, which was nice. And we so we got to meet like current students and alumni of those places and they recommended that we do this. The program is called the Ivy Native Conference and it's like a three-day conference going over specific themes or topics.**

**And so, one of the first ones that we had gone to was at Columbia University. So, [redacted] has a friend or had a friend who went to school there, and he had invited like our group to come.**

**So we ended up going and they like showed us around campus and they told us about some of the stuff that they've done as far as being Native students at Columbia, what their organization looks like.**

**Clearly, we have a lot of the same like ideas in mind, how do you guys go about it, what are the policies of your institution like, how does that limit you? So we've had, like all these conversations and one of the things that they had showed us on the tour of** campus **was a land acknowledgement.**

**And so, when we had time to ourselves [redacted] friend showed us around campus and then he showed us their land acknowledgement and it was in some obscure little corner covered by like shrubs and things like that.**

**So we were like wow like you know that really sucks because you're a huge institution and like clearly you have, like all of these things going in terms of resources um but then they still kind of find a way to like make it non-essential to this community.**

**So you know, ever since then we had talked about if we did have a land acknowledgement, what would that look like in our case.**

**We research in terms of Who were the original inhabitants? Were there any living relatives of this specific people? So a lot of them had either been like massacred, or they had been adopted by other tribes.**

**So, right from the start, we were like Okay, because if we were going to do this, then we do want that specific Community to have some sort of, say, in the way that we do this because, like us, we come from the [redacted] reservation or the [redacted] reservation.**

**So, for us to come in and build this without community say-so, is also problematic in itself. Sure, we want to make sure that this community has some say in this because it's supposed to be for them.**

**And they should have you know word and how that has worked so um but because there wasn't that community we were like okay, just because that doesn't exist doesn't mean that this shouldn't exist. So we went back and forth a lot because there was a lot of like hesitation. Because we know we want to do this right, we want to do this in a way that's meaningful but also not like problematic. I feel like that's not the right word I'm trying to say, but basically that's not harmful, I think, is what I'm trying to say. Cuz, you know good intentions don't always mean you have great impact.**

SK: Right.

**P1: So um so there was a lot of conversation about that, and like we should because it's important and it's something that we do, but also like taking things a little bit deeper.**

**We don't want this to be something that is these big speeches and then completely disregarded, with no like actual effort to make sure that this community or Indigenous communities in general are acknowledged.**

**I don't know how I'm trying to say this, but like, but there is a relationship there, and that is one that is being worked on and not something that is just acknowledged and that it.**

SK: So you're just kind of virtue signaling or whatever.

**P1: Yeah, and that's one thing we definitely didn't want it to be.**

**We knew that this is definitely something that is important we want for our university. We want this place but we've come to love to be accepting and basically**

**just a space that at least recognizes this past, present and future relationship with Natives.**

SK: Was it your sophomore year that you began the conversation or was it your first year?

**P1: I believe it was our first year when we had started the conversations. And then we'd also like got more after we had realized that the organization itself was approved and, yes, a funded.**

**That, clearly, we would have more now that we have some resources that this is something we could definitely work on and do and we knew it wasn't going to happen right away.**

**But The other thing was that, the program that I had mentioned previously, College Horizons. . . a lot of the partner schools have land acknowledgments. And so we had talked with Jessica and Jessica was saying, "Oh, you know this works out great because College Horizons may make it a requirement for their partner schools to have land acknowledgments."**

**And so, she was like, and you know, because our school is lacking one, we would definitely need one and who best to do it than this group of Natives.**

**But also the same time, like you know, there we were like okay, that problematic that they would have to make you do it instead of you wanting to do it before they made it a requirement.**

**The conversations I feel started, maybe, the spring semester of freshman year and then kind of just kept going since then. It was my senior year when it when it was completed.**

SK: What a journey.

**P1: Yeah, it really was. It kind of felt like strange I couldn't be there in person. I don't remember how we initially set up like how the dedication was going to go.**

**We had, like several conversations about what the plaque would say how it would be worded and things along those lines. And then eventually they were just like okay well like.**

**Like you know this person to start us off with this and I just ended up coming together really well it was crazy, because I feel like we didn't necessarily plan it that way, but the fact that it happened that way, so it was really beautiful.**

**And we all like hadn't rehearsed or anything we kind of just like okay, like, I know you guys you this person will work on this part of dedication this person will do this and then this person will do this and.**

**And then like the day came and I was really nervous because, like I didn't know if my internet's gonna be spotty.**

**It was beautiful me and [redacted] had given our speeches over zoom. And then [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] I believe they all gave their speeches. Out of there and they also tried to do what the social distancing and mask wearing.**

SK: I thought it was amazing given that you and [redacted] were on zoom you know, we had these really big screens. It was amazing that that could all be stitched together, you know, out there on the edge of the Deg lawn.

**P1: [redacted] did a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of like contacting people and making sure this is getting done and it was in this particular way, so she really spearheaded that, which was really great, and I feel like that's kind of been her role, like the whole time. She's definitely been the one that's like the more public figure for us and then [redacted] and I kind of.**

**And she would share updates with us, like when the whole thing had happened with like a group of people come there and leaving trash and you know, like all of these things. It was in the process of being built, and she was really upset and we were upset because we couldn't do anything not being there.**

**So when that happened, we felt very hurt and very disrespected. I'm sure that's not what their intentions were but that's kind of what had happened.**

**We definitely were just like super exhausted, we were taking his left and right like [redacted] and I were here, dealing with the effects of Covid on the [redacted] reservation.**

**We were dealing with assignments, connectivity issues in terms of Wi-Fi. It was a whole load of stuff and then we hear about this [desecration of the site) and we're just like wow the hits just kept coming, so it was really like an interesting time for all of us.**

**Like that sort of first like disrespecting like use of it made us like okay like let's be clear, we want people to use it, but like we also want to make sure that it's like this is a particular thing, and it means something and it's not just there.**

**So that's kind of how like, then, we were like okay well, clearly, we ought to have opening ceremony and that's kind of how we see it. Which is why, like you know the smudging was there and we had invited people to come and do it if it was something that they wanted to be a part of.**

**And then we knew that like we would have some sort of like an opening prayer or things along those lines or a song because we kind of really just went off of our own cultural practices in terms of what ceremony looks like and then replicated it in a way that was meaningful and impactful not only for us, but like for the community, being part of it because, like I said, this goes beyond like us that we want this to be something that is used and inviting to those who are non-Native. So yeah so, we have a lot of conversation about how, what that looks like. Because we didn't want to be appropriating or like misusing any of these cultural elements because they mean the world to us and should be protected and preserved or practice in a way that is, basically, acceptable. I think I gave the second to last speech so I think it was me and then it was [redacted].**

**I think like there was definitely a range of motion like emotions that have happened, because there was definitely a more activist piece when [redacted] gave her speech and with me and [redacted] we definitely were able to calm it down and like really recenter and, like all of the elements, I feel worked together in a way that we didn't see coming so it's really beautiful like the way that it turned out. It was all stuff that we truly believe and felt.**

SK: Can you tell me about the look and shape and everything of the site, the acknowledgment site itself like how did you decide on the fire and the seating and the trees?

**P1: What well when we first started, we took a lot of elements from our culture because, again, there was no actual direct community tied to the Susquehannock. And for us to take from their culture and then build it we thought was not okay, or at least wouldn't be without their permission and because we didn't have that we knew that was something we didn't want to abuse.**

**And so what we did was we kind of took from what we knew and some more like pan Native ceremony culture. There was a lot of like nos like probably nots. Like for us whenever we have like these ceremonies fire is an essential part of the meeting.**

**And again, there is also the medicine and when we're seated a lot of our ceremonies, they take place in what is called a hogan and it's circular and the way that it works is you enter from the East because the door faces the East. So when you enter you go in and you, you go around so clockwise so the left half is basically the male side and on the right side is the female side.**

**And so that's kind of like this concept of what okay it's going to be circular like this there's also the medicine wheel. And then [redacted] and yeah, I think that's basically [redacted] and [redacted], and they also incorporated how the circle is incorporated in like [redacted] and like [redacted] culture so. We kind of essentially knew that the circle was definitely or of significance to multiple cultures and quite possibly the Susquehannock that we're not sure, but kind of just taking all these elements from**

**our own cultural traditions and then like bringing them all together, is what we did so that's kind of how we decided on that.**

**As far as the trees go, I'm not exactly sure. I think they had to do with they were Native species, maybe or something along those lines. So I remember it was something along those lines, but that's not a conversation I was very much a part of.**

SK: So yeah, cool yeah that's yeah, I mean the way you know so thoughtfully were. You know, investigating what you could of the Susquehannock peoples and not wanting to, wanting to have utmost respect for them, while incorporating your own. Your own cultural perspective and kind of a pan Native sensibility, to the extent that you could, and that makes a lot of sense yeah.

What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students at SU and, what is needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?

**P1: A really big question. Let's see. I feel like ideally, I'm going to go with ideals, because I feel like this is something that we've all sort of you know, thought about but couldn't actually do in the way that we had wanted.**

**I don't even know where I want to start with this question because, like you want to be able to practice what you believe, without having to explain every part of it to somebody else.**

**But then again because you're two different cultures, how do you expect one to you know just let you do it without being curious, especially because we are the ones going to the institution. Well, I think, for one having some sort of exception for like smudging or like smoking in places where we actually live in super important at least there was for us.**

**I know that there are other maybe ceremonial practices that are important to other cultures, like, I know, like having a sweat lodge might be something that that would be like super important because we're all female like we didn't focus on a whole lot of like Native male experiences because that's not like our realm or expertise. But I feel like having to go to institutions and tell them what you need can honestly be very exhausting because they pick apart everything.**

SK: I wonder, if you were coming into SU and there was already the land acknowledgement site in place.

It would maybe a pretty different experience, maybe because there would be that established. There would already the framework that there are ceremonial things and practices that are going to happen in that space. So you know, campus safety and whoever else, the chaplain, know that's going on. Would that create a different experience for Native students?

**P1: I think it would be significantly different. Because we came in and we had to create these places and we had to make sure that people understood the importance or the significance like not only to us, but like to what it would mean for us to us as a campus community.**

**In general, because we don't just see ourselves as like an individual group of outsiders, we definitely try and take in consideration that we are in this space with these other people, you know these different people. Like we want them to also have access to this and to do these different things. I really don't know because I haven't even had a chance to use the space.**

SK: Yeah, you're kind of robbed of the fruits of your labor. You had the culminating moment, but you laid the groundwork for another generation without seeing the full benefits yourself.

**P1: Yeah, which is, which is fine, my I'm super glad and super excited that other people get to use it.**

SK: And you know I'm you know my last question, What would you wish the field of higher ED chaplaincy knew about supporting Native students?

You know, Dr. Bodinger right, you know reached out to me, and when smudging questions were coming up, and I think I was wanting to do my best but it was pretty ineffectual because I wanted to support you but I was kind of stuck about how to be effective in that.

How to be supportive and build that sense of connectedness and belonging around all students and for our Native students, which is how I seen I work, you know, is to help students make those connections.

So, can you can you think of anything about the field of higher ED chaplaincy and how we could support Native students better?

P1: So some of the first things that come to my mind, **I think definitely do your own research when it comes to like you know, this is a community that you wanted like to serve or to like help in some way. And that looks different for all types of Native communities. There's you know, there's reservation Natives and then there's others' experience of being Native but in completely different environments, so I think. I think in terms of what that looks like I think definitely knowing some Native issues is really important.**

**Because those effect us on a daily scale. Like a lot of our worries weren't always about school, but they are always about what was happening at home as well. I think, keeping those types of things in mind, because this again is like about a**

**holistic part of a person. Sure um, so I think there's understanding, at least, that I was like you know, like a basis.**

**And I think what once you start to show Okay, I am invested in who you are, as a person, I acknowledge that this is your experience that this is your being.**

**And I feel like once that groundwork is laid out that provides the connection that this is somebody who definitely understands, you know this is going on in my community that this is important to me that you know, this is a big part of my stress or my concern or my pride, when I like come to these universities are and then what that does is opens up this relationship between like okay like I'm inviting you into knowing who I am what my community looks like.**

**Which I think is super important, and I think it's kind of like how a lot of the interfaith stuff had worked because I remember, like the main basis was like you have a relationship with people.**

**I feel like that becomes very important and then like understanding that. I don't know the biggest thing would just be to like show up.**

**I feel like, then, one of the number one thing is to recognize your religious institutions past relationship with Native peoples, I think, is really important. Because, for a number of reasons, I mean in terms of like you know traumatic experiences like boarding school and. Just overall like massacring things like that I feel like it would have been really nice to have somebody say like. You know, I understand that, like I am with this institution, but like I recognize this institution's past relationship with your community and with your people.**

**I'm not saying like you want to fix it, but like moving forward that there's a relationship that is in focus so much on the trauma that happened, and much more about building a new relationship or a new foundation for something beautiful happen.**

SK: That's a really terrific point I've been doing some looking in the archives, to see if I could find any connection between SU and boarding schools, that whole history.

**P1: I personally haven't found anything because I also tried to look. I recognize that, like when he started out, it was Lutheran I believe. It is Lutheran. So I was like okay clearly there's got to be some sort of connection or relationship with this religious institution to like the community that was here. So I tried to look into it, but I personally didn't get anywhere.**

SK: But I've done a little bit of digging but haven't found anything. I don't know how historical this is but it's an artifact, and that is that when SU gives away their, alumni medals, I don't know if you've ever seen these things but they're these medals, that hang around the neck like an Olympic medal.

And they're cast in whatever precious metal and there's a Native woman, you know some artists imagining and it's supposed to represent a Susquehannock person. I think those were first cast maybe in the 60s it's the same one.

**P1: I don't think I've seen it personally but I feel like maybe Dr. Bodinger might have said something about it. But yeah, personally I didn't come into any like actual document or anything related to like.**

**Because I was specifically looking for Native enrollment or something with SU because I was mostly intrigued by, I think it was Dartmouth, they had started off as another Christian-based place and then they recruited and Natives to go there and it was a part of the whole you know, like, assimilating them to English.**

**And so I was like maybe there's like some sort of situation where it was similar and like they wanted to like bring Natives in to assimilate them and then like produce them as these Eurocentric "productive" people but I couldn't find anything so.**

SK: If I find anything I'll let you know, because I'm looking too. This is a really awesome conversation I really, really appreciate it [redacted].

Participant 2
Feb 8, 2022
Zoom

SK: Thank you so much for your willingness to be in conversation with me about this and I'll just you know I know I explained it before but I'll just kind of reiterate a little bit about the overall context. I'm doing my doctorate in ministry and I'm looking at what helps students to flourish in higher education, basically, what it means to support students and the impact of spiritual support for students. I'm using the language of spirituality in the broadest possible terms that it's about cultivating one's connectedness to oneself and others formation of values and identity formation. So it's not bounded by religion in any sense but could be inclusive of religion so it's expansive. There are inequities, not surprisingly, within our structures about how students are supported and these kind of ways and what students sometimes aren't. And so, given all that. I'm really interested in looking at the land acknowledgement that SUNA under took and what to know what they meant for you who were involved. No expectation as to what that is but would love to be able to hear that story, however, you want to tell it, or whatever you want to share, so you're in the driver's seat. And I've got these questions which I shared previously. They are guiding questions but we're not limited to those either. So the first question is why did you join or create SUNA?

**P2: I wasn't originally set out on joining any clubs on when I first came to college just because it wasn't like really my thing, I'm more okay with like working by myself, or like small groups of people and then [redacted] and [redacted] was a part of it, and they were like you need a community, you need to come. Just because I'm in the education major and I don't see many other students of color so having that separation from academics and personal life, where I was able to be understood that really drew me and which was really nice. And like through that, then I was able to like get more in touch with like my Indigenous heritage and stuff and that was really, really helpful and, like the Susquehannock people there's not a lot on. My people, which is a shame. Just because when you want to do your research there's not much there for you.**

**And so I think that was one of the reasons that the land acknowledgement was so important because there isn't a lot left of you know that tribe, and what is left of it we need to preserve it, we need for other people to acknowledge it honestly. And I think the work that we have done, and especially with Amy in the Center for Diversity and Inclusion and Ariana in the GO Office they have definitely been a really big help pushing us and then pushing the school to be more inclusive of Native students.**

**We've worked with Admissions to try to reach out to possible Native students and that was a big project of ours and then Covid hit….**

**But yeah, I think SUNA is has been really important for me to grow as a person, you know with my Indigenous heritage, but then also for my future students. Just because I could talk days and days and days about my Mexican side, but further than that there wasn't much I could go into. So, bringing in what is still alive of like Native culture, bringing that into my classroom is really, really important to me.**

SK: How do you bring that into your classroom?

**P2: So a lot of books. It's really easy with K-4. We do a lot of read alouds and going through books and finding the important parts of it, which is pretty good for their age. And bringing that into the classroom and having those conversations and the first grade that I'm going to be teaching with soon. Like around thanksgiving time my co-op did not include pictures of like Native Americans with the feathers on their heads or anything like that or feathers in general, she just kept it pretty generic like here's a Turkey and vegetables on a table.**

**Making sure that students know that you know when you are bringing something in that doesn't look right like. The redskins like logo like you can bring that into the classroom but then have a discussion as to you know why we don't use this anymore, and use this language and use this picture imagery all that stuff. So I think having those discussions and it depends on the students but most students can engage with that and they can understand Oh, this is bad because, especially if you try to bring it on their levels like okay well if someone took away your land and how would you feel and having them make that connection themselves.**

SK: Have you ever talked about this land acknowledgment itself in your classroom, saying, "We did this thing at SU." Have you done that yet?

**P2: I haven't yet just because last semester I was like more in the behind-the-scenes type of thing. But when I teach first grade will be talking about land.**

SK: So, then the next question is about your cultural identities and how and if you found support for them at SU.

**P2: I would just describe myself as Mexican. My dad is white, but there wasn't much culture from his side that I grew up with. And like his side of the family I'm not very close with anymore.** So that's not something as important that I need to bring into my life.

**But I haven't found much supports for that, on campus I know ALAS is a really it's really helpful place but just with my schedule past four years I was not able to make the meetings regularly. So that was pretty difficult. But, especially in my department there's one professor of color. And he happens to be Mexican American which is. Really amazing, but he came my sophomore year. No, and I had one class with him, and that was it. So there wasn't a lot of support from professors on. The cultural or like ethnic side of things.**

SK: How about the question about spiritual and a faith practices or traditions.

**P2: I was raised Catholic. Now, five years ago I sort of dropped out of that so I've been more on like a spiritual type of journey where I'm trying to listen to my body and what the world is telling me, and you know signs. You know if I if I see something and then I can connect it to something else, I know that that's me looking for it. But that just helps me push into the right direction. So that's as spiritual. As I get um. But whenever something bad goes wrong, or if I see something bad, I'll say like two prayers that I grew up with a Hail Mary and [unclear] And so, even though I'm not Catholic anymore, I can still like choose parts of it that are still in me and that's still like affected me in a positive way to help me through like difficult things.**

SK: Have you found during your time at SU that you've been able to remain connected to that spiritual side?

**P2: I think it's definitely grown. Just because of my anxiety throughout the years. It's where I see that I need to lean more on. To just try and like listen to myself and know that I know what's best for me and so that has really grown just because I mean my parents are in my life and they're very involved, but they're not over my shoulder saying like this is what you should do this is what you do. And there's nobody doing that you know even professors so it's definitely gotten stronger. Especially with my conversations with [redacted] she's very, very spiritual in a similar sense. But different. So, having those conversations with her is, it's helped it grow.**

SK: What has supported you as that spiritual side has grown and it sounds like friendships relationships with [redacted] who's in SUNA, obviously. Tell me about your involvement in the land acknowledgement creation and dedication ceremony.

**P2: The whole process we divided positions for who needs to research this, who needs to contact this person and talk with me about this, and this, and this, so I was in charge of the language of it. So, making sure that it all written really smoothly. Just because that is something that I'm very strong in and that's what I felt most comfortable taking on.**

**At some point, I felt that I was overstepping into another Indigenous culture and sometimes I felt like a way about that, I don't even know what type of way. But then remembering that there's not a lot of people who could be bringing this to people's attention and know if anyone's going to do this it's going to be this group of people so really reminding myself that there was a reason for me to be helping and pushing so hard.**

**And the dedication ceremony. I believe I spoke. And lighting the wood and that really helped like started it off. So Those were my main parts that I felt comfortable taking on.**

SK: How did you decide what that dedication would be like?

**P2: Lots of conversations. And talking about if there was a line that we could or couldn't cross. I know that some of us had a worry that we would be pushing too much and upsetting some people, but then realizing that we're doing this for a reason and not trying to hold back on language and history and our space. Trying to remind ourselves that constantly really helped guide us into the direction of our ceremony, and how everything was laid out and we tried to follow a similar layout of like our die-in. Because that seemed to be working really well. Having seen how well, that turned out, we wanted to bring something similar to this ceremony. Because we knew it would work for us.**

SK: So you were concerned about offending some people by being too strong, with your language. But you decided to speak from the heart.

**P2: And when we were creating the plaque there were a few words that we had chosen and I don't recall, who made the changes but somebody else had wanted to change one of the words where it was like "unsurrendered land," but it was like it wasn't you know, a place for surrendering. And it got changed, I think, after we were involved in it, which is fairly upsetting. But we did everything we could to keep our language what it needed to be in a respectful manner, but making sure that our point got across.**

SK: Yeah, there was a lot to sort through in terms of the shape of the site itself, the fire and the benches and the trees. How about those decisions?

**P2: So, [redacted] was at the forefront of that just because she knows more about environments and was more drawn to that road of where we want to go down, and so we kind of let her take charge of that and it was really amazing because she chose a perfect place where it's central enough on campus that people can see it. But it's just like disconnected enough where, if you need to be there for a spiritual reason or a religious reason, then you have that separation.**

**And then, also by the trees, just to really reiterate how important those trees those types of trees were to the Susquehannock people. You know, keeping them by the river and how it, you know supported them. That was really important. And then the benches and keeping it in a circle, we just wanted to show that it was like a never-ending thing. Like how a circle is not something that is going to stop you know what when all of us graduate it's something that's going to be here and we wanted that to be representative.**

SK: Getting back to stuff you've already talked about, but if there's anything else dad why, why is it important to you that SU has the site? And how did it impact your time here?

**P2: I think every place needs a land acknowledgement. When I was living in Australia before any Assembly at schools, they would always do an acknowledgement and that was the first experience that I saw where you know people can still give their things in their remembrance and dedication to those who came before them.**

**And it was you know, the people who were conducting the land acknowledgement they weren't like of the tribe or anything so. It really opened my eyes to see that you don't have to be a part of a group to care about others.**

**Having [the land acknowledgment] brought to SU I think is especially important, just because we are so predominantly white. It's sometimes concerning looking around my [education] classes and seeing how we're talking about brown and black students and I know that not many of my other classmates can relate to them, and knowing that they're going to be that kid's future. So just having something that's going to stay here and that's going to be put into place. That leaves me with a little bit more at ease when I graduate knowing that I was a part of something that has changed a campus and whether people acknowledge that or not.**

**That's on them, but knowing that it is there for future students who may be Native, maybe not Native to just enjoy the space, as it is, but still respecting it, I think that's something that I can say that I was a part of, and I could be very proud of it.**

SK: That's fascinating that you the way you saw that implemented when you're in Australia
opened up a vision for what's possible. Is that widely practiced in Australia or was it just like where you were.

**P2: It's very widely practiced whenever the Prime Minister would make a big speech or something he would always say it before he started. So it wasn't it wasn't just my state that did it or my schools that did it, it was all of Australia.**

SK: Wow, they're ahead of us. That's really interesting. Really cool. Another question: What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students so that's you? And what's needed for Native students at PWIs?

**P2: Honestly, I think more Native professors or Native stuff in general, that would be a great start. Not just to fulfill a diversity quota but just because there should be someone teaching biology, who knows a lot about the land and has grown up respecting your land and learning off of the land, I think that would be really important.**

**When [redacted] would tell us about her biology professors or science professors in general. They would talk about how we are not taking care of the world, neglecting the fact that there's a student in there, who is Native who was brought up, knowing that you have to respect the world, this is how you treat her, and this is how you go**

**about it and I think, having an Indigenous professor or just Indigenous stuff anywhere. . . Where you don't have to like make an appointment for them, because I know Ariana and GO Office is very, very busy. I think that would be really helpful.**

**But I think another thing would also be to allow smudging in some places. [redacted], she's done that, for us, several times and there's just something about it that it heals you, it cleanses you and it's unfortunate that when you need to clean and cleanse your room you can't because you don't want to get in trouble for campus safety and things like that, so I think dedicating a space or and somehow allowing it, I think that is very important.**

SK: So this last question is about chaplaincy and, again, thought about in the widest possible sense of support—and maybe your last question you're like what you were just saying about smudging maybe gets to it—but what do you wish the field of higher education chaplaincy knew about supporting Native students.

**P2: Oh, I think, maybe knowing how some Christian religions have affected Native students negatively. Growing up as a Catholic I didn't know where that came from, and then, when I had to do my own research, then I knew that the Spaniards had brought it over and it was pushed on to us, and that was sort of my way out of Catholicism just because I didn't know how much harm it had brought to us and I couldn't justifiably say that I was going to be in a religion, where people had done, you know certain things to my ancestors, so I think having that knowledge of how Christianity and other religions have negatively affected Indigenous students, not just in America but around the world, just because it is still happening. I think that is really important.**

**And then also having the basic knowledge of that each tribe because it's a lot. But basic knowledge of what is accepted in certain tribes and their religions and their faith. I know in some tribes they call you know the person who brought this world into existence, the Creator, and so I mean just using language, where it's so easily interchangeable and it can just be a smidge more inclusive. I think that is really important.**

Participant 3
Feb 11, 2022
Zoom

SK: Welcome, how are you.

**P3: I'm good.**

SK: Good, good did you see, I just sent you an email I don't think I sent you the consent form.

**P3: just got it, I was just looking at it before.**

SK: Do you want just take a couple like I'll just like go off screen and mute and you can read it. For the integrity of what I'm doing professionally I need to make sure that you've read that.
You know what if since we're recording this if you if you just say I've read it and I consent to the to the interview then we're good.

**P3: Then we're back yeah. I read it; I consent to the interview.**

SK: Thank you so much, and um yeah again, I just want to say how appreciative I am for your taking some time with me. So I'm obviously the university chaplain and spiritual care and spiritual life for all students is something I think about and I'm doing research on.

How we support students spiritually across the board at colleges and universities and I think about the word spirituality and in the broadest sense possible. It includes religion but it's bigger than religion. Spirituality is about all the ways we cultivate our inner life, our sense of connectedness to others, the formation of our values and in our how we seek to live those out in the world that is all what I how I think about spirituality.

And what it's really interesting that research shows that. The more students are encouraged to cultivate that in the better they do in college in all sorts of ways.

But there are also inequities built into our systems, in higher ED that some identities and communities find more support in cultivating their spiritual. It's those inequities that I'm at. How can we support all students and how can we address and eliminate those inequities.

So the land acknowledgement site and the work of SUNA struck me is so powerful in these sorts of ways, because it's just a really amazing and beautiful thing that was done, and so what I'm curious about is, What that means for you, whatever it is.

I'd like to know that story and how that can help inform how we think about spiritual care and the spiritual lives of students.

Cool so we can jump right in here, why did you create slash join tonight SUNA and why or how has it been important to you?

**P3: So it was quite like a funny story actually because when I had I just moved into my dorm freshman year and obviously we had orientation week and everyone's always talking about you got to get involved in all these clubs, everybody does this. And so I was like okay well I don't really, I didn't see SUNA at the club activities fair that they had.**

**And I saw obviously I saw BSU, which is also part of my identity, so I saw some things that I was interested in and then I get back to my dorm and while I was moving in my RA, who was in the same year as [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted], she saw that I was moving in a lot of important things to me from Native heritage. And she said Oh, my friends are actually forming a Native club on campus and I was like Oh, really.**

**And my sister she went first I was still kind of kind of scared to get out there to join things. I was still you know feeling the waters of college and then after my sister went, she encouraged me to go as well. And I did and from then on it was just such an amazing space to talk to other people who get you, understand share and learn their traditions, from different tribes as well.**

SK: Cool and so you were there, part of the origin story.

**P3: I didn't make it, but I was definitely there to support and watch it grow yeah.**

SK: So it wasn't already like a year formed when you arrived?

**P3: I think that was the first year. I know [redacted] and [redacted] and [redacted] they were planning it for a while. That year was like the launch I guess you could say.**

SK: How do you describe your cultural identities and where have you found support? You've already mentioned BSU.

**P3: So I'm also Black, as well as Native American.**

**So I definitely found support in BSU. I remember going to the first meeting and everybody already had things to share, and it was really interesting to see other perspectives. As well as when I was first trying the university, I remember, they had a lot of talks with students who we're talking to us incoming students and they had one person of color she was Black. And you know she was saying, I feel safe, it's a great environment here.**

**And I turned around I said okay that's good to know cuz you know, one of the things you have to consider as a person of color especially here in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania.**

**I was like oh that's good to know, and then I finished my Spanish test, and I was talking to one of the orientation leaders, who led us to the department building where we were taking a Spanish test. And I mentioned that you know the girl said it was a safe space, so that, like reassured me and she said, "I have many students of color and I can tell you that's not the experience for everyone." So I was like oh wow so that was like the first truth that I got from somebody.**

**And it was like eye opening because she wasn't a person of color but she still like felt that needs to tell me, I really appreciated it. When I met her on campus like throughout the years I said, thank you for letting me know that. Because if I came here, it was like a shock to me, I would have known what I've done. But does give you a dose of reality that you could play.**

**Yeah so, I found support in that, where I knew that there are people who are willing to speak up. As well as like fight for your protection.**

**When she told me that it wasn't like the best place, it wasn't the safest place as it was presented to me, she still mentioned these group of students are working and trying for it to be better.**

**And I found that support with BSU. The Center for diversity and inclusion. That was a big one. I started working there and that that gave me even more support, especially when they hired Amy Davis.**

**She was right there in your corner for everything, I mean everything. would just go in her office to talk to her, she would go how's your day and I'll tell her something that happened it wasn't like you know, it's like mildly upsetting, nothing big on my brain, but she was like Oh, I will talk to this person higher up she's like because that's not okay, we can do something about this. Yeah, it's just things like that that really showed the support.**

SK: Do you have a particular tribal affiliation?

**P3: Yes, so I'm [redacted] and [redacted].**

SK: I was at a I was at a church service in Boston. They had a land acknowledgement statement in the course of the service and Mashantucket tribal name that they read off.

**P3: Wow that's amazing.**

SK: If you identify with spiritual in our faith practices or traditions, have you been able to remain connected to that at SU if so how and why?

**P3: So growing up, I was raised Baptist. I was still taught all of my traditions from a Native heritage, both sides, and that includes spirituality.**

**But it's interesting to say because you see a lot of you know, with Catholic boarding schools, you see that a lot within Native families.**

**It's kind of like Oh, you were raised this way, but this is your things and you're taught that. And that was the same for me. Coming here, I was more into practicing my spirituality and traditions, rather than practicing Baptist traditions.**

**And it was difficult to continue that if I'm honest. Because you know when I first came here and they were touring everything you know they show the Chapel and they said oh we have this for this, you know different services. And so I was like Okay, but we don't attend service to practice our spirituality so and burning [sage] is big thing and so I remember, I was like Oh well, you know we can't burn anything in here. Obviously, the smoke detector [in my dorm room].**

**Yeah, and if I go to a random place outside it doesn't do it. I was like well I don't really know how to do that, and so, for a while I was having these like terrible nightmares. They were they really awful I was feeling like a weight on my shoulder. I remember I told my sister because she could see it and feel it, to be honest.**

**I told her that and she was like Oh, you know it's gonna be okay, and then I remember it was a SUNA meeting actually. And we were talking during Halloween and retelling stories and stuff and I was like wow I'm going to tell the story. I just have this thing it's like this dark figure that's always there it's on my shoulders.**

**And then [redacted] said oh my gosh I've had the same thing, and she told me like her, other Native friends also have the same thing.**

**And so I was like yeah, I don't really know what's going on, I don't know if it's because I haven't been protecting myself, I haven't been you know cleansing myself from my mind to my roots. And she said I'm going to bless you, so she came into my room, I was living in West Hall. She said don't worry about it, she came into my room and I remember she put a plastic bag over the smoke detector and I was like Hello. And she burned cedar and to bless my space and she blessed me from head to toe.**

**I literally did not have that problem again. I didn't see the figure again. I didn't have it on my shoulder and then I got to thinking, I was like oh my gosh why didn't I think of that, but then I realized like I didn't think of it because it felt raw you know.**

**Like even what she did it I was like we're not supposed to be doing this, but like you shouldn't feel wrong for practicing what you believe in. And my mind opened and I probably shouldn't say this, but I continue that.**

SK: That's incredible I'm so glad you did. I mean that's an incredible story, and thank you for sharing that. I'm so moved by that.

**P3: Yea and I thank [redacted] every day, and it was just one of those things where it's like if I didn't meet another Native on campus who shared hey this is how I'm able to practice what I believe, and this is how I'm able to cope being here, you know what I mean, I don't know what would have happened. I probably would have been like I can't do this anymore.**

**I don't know like I at the time I couldn't piece what it was that was wrong, so I probably would have just kept hanging with it.**

**And then, would have been like oh I can't I think I should leave so I'm forever grateful like that I was lucky to have someone who an upperclassman one who has been here and has developed those tricks and things like that, and I think back to. Well, think back to now in the future of students coming after us. Currently there's one other Native student who's a freshman attending here.**

**But once we leave, it's really just him. And you know we try working with admissions to be like Oh, you know increase you know. I'll outreach to them, we made a video, we are, we sent emails to these students, we got responses.**

**Like of questions like hey it looks like a reasonable school, but how do you deal with if you're really far from home, things like that. We even offered if they come and visit will let them stay in our rooms. We're still pushing. I know [redacted] is currently working on getting Native scholarships. I think it's really important for the university. To start doing that, so it doesn't fall upon.**

SK: What was your involvement in the land acknowledgement? I mean I know some of this because I was there and it was you know.

**P3: I was like I'm a part of the exec board for SUNA. And one of the things that we talked about when [redacted] was President at the time, because [redacted] was abroad, and she talked about how they had always wanted to have a land acknowledgement.**

**And we talked about their past efforts, where it started off with talking to President Green to say, hey when you're at an event can you just mentioned we're on Susquehannock land and it started off with that well sometimes he would do it sometimes he wouldn't.**

**But then they express you know it'd be a great idea to actually have a land acknowledgement and we all agreed we're like that's 100% true.**

**And we got to work we researched about the Susquehannock people. We tried to dig up like some language, which unfortunately is no longer here.**

**And we worked with Amy once again, who was like our powerhouse to get to the people that we couldn't because you know we're just students so she talked to facilities to say hey what spots are open, that we could possibly have this on and luckily, they were right on board at the time, I cannot think of his name, but he was Chris [Bailey].**

**Yes, and he was like 100% on board. And we got the okay from President Green and then so that's when things started getting in motion, and so, while we were continuing our research, because we wanted to think what we wanted to write on the plaque. They were you know looking for a spot, to put it on going through all those different hoops. In the back and Amy—I love Amy—she said don't let them rest don't let it become on the side plate.**

**And you're like yeah, you're right because, obviously, we were students at the time, so we're dealing with schoolwork and also trying to do this. We would meet Sundays and then Tuesdays to really gather and be like Okay, what do you have for this, what do you have for this, what do we want to do.**

**Plus meeting agendas and other things like that. And Amy also helped keeping it on their primary agenda on the back end because she went oh, I reminded them, I talked to them, and I was like okay Thank you so much, and then we got to picking out what kind of space we wanted it to be. We decided on a fire pit because we wanted it to be a surrounding space, a gathering space.**

**If it's outside, we want to gather, even when it's a bit colder outside so a fire pit was perfect. [redacted] suggested that we incorporate a lot of Native plants in this area, which was great and she was able to do her research on that, I believe it also served as her capstone for environmental studies.**

**Exactly so that was a win, win for us because, like I said this was not extra but I guess when you consider that we are students, it was outside of the other things that we need to do so that was amazing that it served as both for her.**

**We got that settled and sent to Amy. She sent it to Chris and he sent us some options for fire pits and things like that and then it got time for the plaque, and so we started writing what we wanted to be on the plaque. I can't remember the exact words, but it was along the lines of. These people were here, we still are here and they're unwavering surrender, and that was something important that we wanted on there, like this acknowledges their unwavering surrender.**

**And I remember, and I just actually about this because we still don't have the plaque and they said that was in delay when we did the land, when we opened the land acknowledgment ceremony, we didn't have the plaque, because we said it was still in delay.**

**So I just recently talked to Amy. What I ended up finding out was that the people I'm not sure who was she can tell me who it was. They didn't like the wording. They felt it was too I don't know controversial or something so they didn't like the wording and they were going to change it and Amy, thank God, because we didn't even know about this at the time Amy stood her ground and said no, they wanted like this, it has to be like this.**

**And she was getting pushed back and she said, somebody else from a different department stood up and said it and needs to be like that and ended up staying like that, but now we're still waiting on it to be made, because that was part of the holdup. So, and then we did the dedication ceremony.**

**We wanted to invite the campus and you know you attended, as well as some other department heads or people around campus. President Green was there. We really want to express that yes, this is a space open to the campus, but it has a meaning. And when you come here, you should be reflecting. You shouldn't be just fun willy nilly. No, it has a purpose and wanted to highlight that because before we actually opened it some students had used it before we could bless the space before we could you know, be at it ourselves, and they left trash I remember.**

**I think it was [redacted] and someone else they tried to call campus safety and when they came the kids ran and then they said oh there's nothing we can do. They ran into Reed and they said there's nothing we can do about that sorry, and so you know we were left cleaning it up, but there were just no repercussions.**

**And so that was something we really wanted to highlight when opening it and it just it felt like a slap in the face. You know we're trying our best we're opening the space and just like any other space from a POC or Natives it just gets ruined and you're left with Oh, now we have to build it back up. And so you can you can really feel that when we were speaking at the event it was very emotional.**

**A lot of work put into it, a lot of stress and you know we really, really wanted to say what we needed to say because we had no [unlcear] at the time. I think it went really well. We have a lot of support and we felt that.**

SK: I thought it was such an such a powerful event all of it. I guess this points to my next question, why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site? How is your experience of SU or sense of connection and belonging different now?

**P3: Trying to think how to work this because I do notice like a change like when I see it. I'm always like wow We really did that. It's monumental you know. We made**

**a mark. Literally on this campus for Native students. And that will always make me feel proud and then. You know I think like a kind of mentioned before, well, what happens when there are no more Native students.**

**Can we trust the university they keep up the meaning of that space, you know, and so it doesn't just turn into one of those spaces, where people think oh it's just a fire pit to hang out, you know. Potential students around campus or new students around campus they just ignore it and that's why so many people still think oh it's just a fire pit they don't really know. And, once again, we have no plaque so…**

SK: it's important right, because otherwise, when there aren't people who know the story.

**P3: That also doesn't give me the greatest hope that you know it will continue, people will continue to share the importance of the space. And there won't be any more reflecting because well, that's the point of a land acknowledgement, is to acknowledge the people here before you. So I do feel a little sad, in that sense.**

**And I know Amy is amazing, but she's just one person. And so I don't know, maybe that's more that we can do this semester, to try to implement something to happen once we all graduate. And like a don't forget this face don't forget what it's here for.**

SK: I'm really gonna circle back with Amy, too, I mean she and I have talked about this you know a few times. I had a really great conversation with her about this whole process already. I'm going to push on the plaque also, in whatever way I can because that's really, really important.

So this next question you know again you've kind of circled around this but. What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students at SU and, what is needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?

**P3: So it's as for spiritual well-being looking like for Native students, it's quite a broad question you know just because there are so many different tribes, with so many different traditions and things like that, but as far as what I've come across on my own. Just a space to feel you are connected with because that's 100% like the most important thing you want to feel that you have a connection to where you are.**

**And you know this has problems because you know it's a residence hall wherever you're living at the time, which will be a residence hall, but just a space, maybe outside, and that was also kind of the idea between the land acknowledgement to have that also being a space where people can or Native students can go to practice their spirituality.**

**So they feel a connection and they feel free to do that, but that also comes with campus safety being educated on why they're burning, they're not burning weed,**

**know they're not burning anything they're not supposed to which has also been a problem in the past. Like hey, this is what it is just be mindful, you know.**

SK: So you don't have to explain or justify yourself for doing what's important to you.

**P3: What is needed for Native students to thrive is support.**

**Every day is very different for Native students and like [redacted] talked about this a lot where it's like you're coming as a student but you're coming as a lot more. People were here before you but everyone's walking mindlessly, no one's acknowledging, so you're like wow How can people just like absolutely forget everything, that these people were important into this land.**

**And so it hurts and so you're constantly having those battles, it's a constant fight so support would be amazing, and you know we get that in little areas, but that can only do so much and then when happens when they're gone. And then definitely encouraging more Native students would be amazing. Just because obviously you could you feel so alone when it's just you or it's just a few of you.**

SK: So the last one is more is about chaplaincy. And again, thinking about that in a multi faith sense of. The spiritual care for all students. What do you wish the field of higher education chaplaincy knew about supporting Native students?

**P3: This is hard to answer, just because you've done a great job and I'm being like 100% truthful like with the things that you hold. I remember that one event that we even went to where you showed off the many different spiritualities and religions. That was big for me at least like I was like oh wow you feel acknowledged.**

**I know your work with the Multi religion spaces. I know this one in North Hall. It was a big deal. We still weren't allowed to like burn or anything in there, in a space where you're like oh I don't have to explain, because everyone knows, this is a multi-religion or spiritual space.**

SK: What I hear you saying is when we acknowledge multiple and spiritual practice and perspectives, it creates space for everyone, creates space for Native students, even if it's not specific to Native students if you're acknowledging. If you're acknowledging the breadth of experiences and perspectives.

**P3: 100% like you said it perfectly. And that's how I felt with. All the things that you've managed to implement. Like meeting people of other religions at those events or even in those spaces. We were invited to um it was a Jewish house for Shabbat dinners.**

**And then you know you feel like oh yeah come to my thing like we can we can work something out, we can definitely coordinate and do things like that, and so it helps feel it helps you feel welcomed it helps you feel you belong there's a space.**

SK: Circling back about your [redacted] and [redacted] tribal heritage, Do you in your family, do you connect with tribal gatherings in any ways?

**P3: Yes so, I know [redacted] people on our reservation. We actually hold one of the biggest pow wows I haven't gone to one, unfortunately, but that's a plan of mine. As far as on my [redacted] side, it's a bit different just because, my grandma was able to get land, and so they don't live on the reservation so it's really close, of course, with our family and those type of gatherings and their family. And then you know we go to like the big events but it's wasn't really ingrained so much as on the other side.**

**But I think for me like doing things like Native Council like Native student Council were bunch of Ivy league or just students in college come and meet, and you know they hold lectures, as well as just like little events and activities. It was a big thing for me.**

SK: So have you've attended those gatherings?

**P3: Yeah, I attended the one where was it in Rhode island, it was at Brown. I couldn't go to the ones before my sister did but just hearing about her experiences and then experiencing it myself, it's such an important thing um it's it was amazing.**

SK: That's that sounds that sounds really cool. I cannot thank you enough for being willing to spend this little time and conversation. I just so appreciate it.

Participant 4
April 20, 2022
Susquehannock Tribute Circle

SK: I've just got about eight guiding questions, but you're in the driver's seat in terms of what you want to share and not share, all of that. And so I'll just start by asking, Why did you create or why did you join SUNA? And why has it been important to you and your time at SU?

**P4: So coming here, I was looking for other Native students like me. And I remember I attended a the Umoja ceremony. And I see [redacted], and [redacted] presenting, and I was like, wow, I need to connect with them as there are other Native students. So I talked to them. And they said, Yeah, we're actually starting SUNA as very soon. And I was like, Wow, that sounds amazing. So we connected. I was on the exec board freshman year. And we all got together and started SUNA.**

SK: That's awesome.

**P4: Yeah, so I was really looking for that community. And I found it. And I'm so grateful that I found it. And we were able to create spaces like this [tribute circle].**

SK: ıncredible. And what did it mean to have SUNA as a as a community for you?

**P4: It meant everything coming from home in Maryland. And coming here to a new space. I felt a little disconnected from my culture as it was a PWI. So finding other Native students really helped me. It helped ground me.**

SK: Could you describe, however way you would like to, your cultural identities, and how or where you found support for them at SU?

**P4: Yeah, so I identify as Two-Spirited in the Native community. I can identify I am an embody both masculine spirit and feminine spirit, so two spirited. And I found this community here, like I said, through SUNA, and were able to speak about different topics such as Native spirituality, being two spirit and what that means.**

SK: Do you have a tribal affiliation you'd like to share?

**P4: Oh, yeah. I'm [redacted] from my mom's side and [redacted] from my dad's side. Very different tribes. So yes, and I grew up on mostly [redacted] knowledge and traditions from South Carolina, as I didn't know much from my dad's side, but I recently reconnected what three years ago, I went back to the res. I haven't been in like years.**

SK: South Carolina?

**P4: No Connecticut [redacted] people. So being back there, it was so beautiful. Me and my sister, we actually held a return ceremony because, again, we haven't been back there since we were babies.**

SK: Wow. Wow. And do you have relatives who lived there?

**P4: Yep. I have my aunts and uncles; however, they moved down to Florida, and I didn't know that until I went down there.**

SK: Okay. I used to live in Connecticut. Where's that reservation?

**P4: It's really close to Rhode Island.**

SK: Okay, so close. Eastern. Yeah. Cool. Another question: If you identify with spiritual or faith practices or traditions, have you been able to be connected to those at SU? If so, how, if not why?

**P4: I'm definitely I am a very spiritual person. I practice daily. So, how I found that connection and be able to express that connection and gratitude here. Simply had those spaces like the tribute circle, I'm able to really just sit by myself and really connect as well as the river. I'm always at the Susquehanna River. I do believe it's a very spiritual place as the Susquehanna people reside there, before us. So I find myself sitting there a lot. If I'm stressed out with school, I find myself going to the river crying it out. I believe that she holds a lot of spiritual spaces here.**

SK: Have you in terms of the institution of SU, have you felt spiritually supported or not? Or how, where have you found support sort of within the institution?

**P4: Yeah, definitely. Within the institution, I've had support from the CDI, other organizations and stuff specifically, just going to events and learning about other cultures and spiritualities such as BSU, International Club and stuff. So having an outlet for those.**

SK: Have you been involved in, in other clubs and organizations, in addition to SUNA?

**P4: Yeah, so I attend ALAS, I attend BSU sometimes, but I'm mostly involved in SUNA.**

SK: So let's talk about this space itself. What was your involvement with the creation of this land acknowledgement site? And I know you were involved in the dedication, because I was there. I'm interested in what those experiences meant for you.

**P4: Yeah. So I was heavily involved, you know, me and other SUNA execs had, we've always wanted to have a space on campus where people can come to and learn if they don't know the space they reside on. So we wanted to create a space for gathering. And we said, okay, so what in our Native culture symbolizes this, this**

**gathering of community, and it's a tribute circle, it's the first fire back when our ancestors, we utilized fire to symbolize a community, we would have like these fires and have the space to gather. So that's exactly what we wanted to bring to SU. Along with the land acknowledgement. We wanted some a space to recognize this land acknowledgement and the land that we reside on from the Susquehannock people. So that's where the plaque comes into place.**

SK: How do you imagine or hope that this space will be used in the years to come?

**P4: I hope people can really come here to, to breathe, and to learn to recognize and reflect. Honestly, that's why we create, if people don't know, you know, the space that they reside, or even just curious of what this space holds, that they come up, read the plaque, sit with it. That's all to gather, we want the community to be open and utilize the space.**

SK: Tell me about the dedication ceremony itself and the choices you made in putting that together and what that meant for you.

**P4: So the dedication, process and stuff, it was very spiritual. And we wanted to create an event where people can hear us, understand us, and take it from there. So we wanted to give this piece of information, the tribute circle, to all the attendees and stuff and really make it their own, but also recognize, again, the land that we reside on. So that's what that whole event embodied.**

SK: Yeah, I remember it being so powerful and moving. And one of the things that I found really, really beautiful about it was at the end, after the speeches and other things, and those of you SUNA members were around the fire for some time, and, when you burned the sage, and you invited people to come forward, right? And to receive the sage, the medicine. And I just I found that expression of generosity to be so powerful. Yeah, yeah, it really was, it was really, really moving. To use language out of the Christian tradition, you were ministering to everyone who was there in a really beautiful way. So I really appreciated it. It was very cool.

**P4: I really like sharing the knowledge and healing. Again, that space helped so much healing. So I really wanted to share the medicine with everybody and to create this connection again. It was so powerful you can feel that everybody was connected in on these same energy levels. In Native spirituality and culture we smudge and we utilize medicine such as sage to lift that energy, to cast out any negative energy so that we can really feel it.**

SK: Your own spiritual practices…did you come here with those or is it something you've kind of discovered in the course of your college journey?

**P4: That's a good question. I actually came here with it and also learned more about it. I've always been spiritual since a little girl and had these outlets to express this spiritual connection with the land, Creator, my ancestors and everything. So I've**

**always had it, it's always been within me. I may say that I've had the opportunity to express it more here on campus. As a college student within my four years I've definitely expressed a lot more. Because before it was a lot of learning and experience. So now within my four years, being 22 years old, I've had time to reflect expressing.**

SK: Do your practices reflect one more than the other of your tribal affiliation? Or is it sort of your own mix?

**P4: As well, I think it it's more so the [redacted] side as that's what I've been raised on. However, in terms of spirituality, I've always felt connected with my [redacted] family members, as my dad was [redacted]. He passed when I was eight years old, I remember just when I was little, I had these very vivid dreams. In Native culture and spirituality, we believe that those are like visions, and connections to the higher being. So having these dreams as a little girl, they already consisted of dad's side. And I was very confused, because it's like, I don't have anyone to talk to about it. But I receiving these messages through dreams. So I've always felt connected in that way to the [redacted] and then going back to the res, and having this return ceremony, really elevated it.**

SK: We, we've kind of covered this, but why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site? Is there more to be said about that? We've kind of been circling around this question most of the time, but is there more to be said about that?

**P4: It's so important for SU just to educate others to know where they reside and where they're at. And the people that were here before them. So just simply to give respect. And that's all we asked for—for the land, respect and reconciliation of the land that we utilize.**

SK: Yeah. Yeah, it to me, it makes a huge difference that as an institution. Institutions are these big, lumbering things that exist through time. And to have this here means that the institution has made a commitment. You know, it's like, here it is, it's like in space, right? Yeah, it's gonna be up to people in the subsequent years and decades to continue to make it vital, but it's here, it's here.

Another question: What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students in SU, and what's needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?

**P4: So spiritual well-being looks like inclusion, which we have strongly. Inclusion, and I'd say inclusion for the most part, just having spaces like this, and like the CDI, to have Native students who join in and express that their spirituality and stuff is needed, is included.**

SK: And so relatedly, what's needed for Native students to thrive in predominantly white institutions?

**P4: Inclusion is always needed. And spaces like this, like I said, because Native students, we really hold our traditions and ceremonies close to us. And so we need spaces to be able things such as smudging. So having spaces to do so it's very important. Yeah.**

SK: Can you say a little bit about the meaning of the construction of the circle, the fire. Is there a specific meaning that you can share about what this looks like?

**P4: So the circle really, we wanted to have it where people can gather. The whole aspect of it is gathering. And if you look at it sort of looks like a medicine wheel embodying east, west, north south.**

SK: Is that what these indicate, north south east west?

**P4: Yep. Yep, exactly what it is. And then we wanted to plant trees to sort of connect it all together. So we have the medicine wheel, the circle and then the fire. The first fire is very important as we lit it for the welcoming ceremony. And Native culture, the first fire, we really use as fire as an element to have that sense of gathering and connection to the higher being. And fire is very important as we smudged as well. And we threw herbs in there to really lift our prayers, and then release some energies to the Creator. So that's the whole meaning of the fire and gathering, as well.**

SK: Is there a meaning to the particular kinds of trees that were chosen?

**P4: Yeah, these are Native trees. I forget the meaning of them. But these are Native trees. I believe we were supposed to plant some what they called Yum yum trees. I think they're called. And they're actually Native to here.**

SK: You said that you were going to but they didn't yet?

**P4: I believe they did. I'm not sure. That's one of those. They planted some around the science building as well. I know they're Native to the Susquehanna valley.**

SK: Okay. Okay, cool. So I'm, of course, a chaplain, so religious and spiritual life is my work. I'm a Christian by background and by ordination. But my work is multifaith. And my work is seeking to support every student, no matter what their religious or spiritual identification is. So my last question, What do you wish my field, the field of spiritual support for students, what do you wish chaplains knew about supporting Native students? What does the chaplain need to know? What does higher education chaplaincy need to know, to better support Native students?

**P4: I believe that you should know, we come from a hard and difficult backgrounds. And so leaving these hard and difficult backgrounds to come to an institution is hard in itself. Right. So I think chaplains need to know this information, you know, coming from and that there is a need to for Native students to express their**

**spirituality and connection. So just knowing this piece of information that, you know, we're leaving to come to a different sense of community is very hard. In fact, other I find that Native students, they end up leaving or returning back to the res just because that strong sense of community and family, maybe were not able to find it here. So just knowing that information can really help.**

SK: I appreciate that. One of the things I'm thinking about is like how can we build a sense of spiritual community and care where we have, like multiple chaplains? Affiliate chaplains for different communities on campus? So it's a faculty or staff person who has a stipend, but a paid role that works specifically with Native students to support their spiritual life.

**P4: Yeah, yeah, I think that's great.**

SK: That's, that's one of the things that I'm thinking about. Maybe it'll be a proposal probably coming out of the work I'm doing. So. Yeah. Well, that's kind of the end of the questions I had. Is there anything else that I didn't ask about that? You would want to say?

**P4: I think you were asking all the right questions. I had something to add. I am working, me and SUNA are working on a healing ceremony to open up to the campus and maybe once we have this healing ceremony, and you know you come out, maybe have these healing ceremonies when we're not here in the future, you know, for students.**

SK: Yeah, that sounds that sounds amazing. So is this going to be at this spring?

**P4: Yeah, we're trying to aim for the first weekend in [unclear]. Everyone's invited. So consisting of Native spirituality, smudging, talking and breathing exercises.**

SK: That's fantastic. What an awesome use of this. Yeah. Well, I will be very eager to be present for that. I'll be on the lookout for announcements, so cool. Well, can't thank you enough.

Participant 5
Zoom
April 20, 2022

SK: I just want to pop these questions into the chat, which I think you've seen before. And this can go wherever you want it to go and whatever you want to share. So if we could just start with the first one: Why you created SUNA and why was it important for you in your time in SU?

**P5: We created SUNA, because I wanted a place for myself, as well as my friend to feel like we had a place at SU, like we belonged. And that we could share a part of ourselves, a big part of ourselves with other students and faculty. I felt like we had a lot to teach as well, as you know, learn alongside and it was also a connection to home, as well as my people and my culture. And I wanted to keep I wanted to keep that part alive.**

SK: And did you do you feel like it, it was successful in those things?

**P5: Yeah, I do I think at the time I didn't quite feel that way because it was a lot of academic stress that prevented seeing. How accepted we were by the community. Though I think at times you know it didn't feel that way back then.**

SK: So my next question is if you could describe your cultural identities and how or where you found support for those SU,

**P5: Okay, so I identify as a [redacted] woman and I really found a lot of support for the identity with other affinity groups such ALAS and BSU as well as Hillel actually found a lot of bonding with them as well.**

**There was a lot of feeling of being othered because of our different experiences growing up, as well as being in a very white space, and that was just trying for me at the time. I had never like truly experienced that until I got to SU. So when we were with these affinity groups and different religious groups, I found a lot of support. I think I also forgot to mention The Center for Diversity and Inclusion. You know feeling support and feeling seen.**

SK: It sounds like there was some good kind of coalitions among the different groups that shared a sense of being minoritized.

**P5: I definitely think it was you know I shared experience of being minorities at SU that brought us understood like we could understand one another, a little bit differently compared to other peers. As far as like the coalition like a partnership that you alluded to. We did have a sense like I'll scratch you're back you scratch mine. We supported one another. That's how SUNA operated.**

SK: My next question is, if you identify with spiritual or faith practices or traditions, were you able to remain connected to those at SU and, if so, how, if not, why.

**P5: I identify in a unique way. I think it's unique in most circumstances just being [redacted] that has its own religious and spiritual beliefs. And how we view prayer and spirituality and then there is a different aspect as well that is separate from being [redacted], and that is called Native American Church or NAC, and this is like the Pan Native American type of spiritual belief and practice.**

**And the way that's done is very different from being [redacted] traditional I mean. In that sense it's you know kind of pan Indian or a pan Native American. I just love the Native languages in that manner of prayer.**

**It's also a fuse with a sense of Christianity and how that's practiced, the way that that's viewed is that there's an altar there are very specific structures of practice and what I mean by that is like there's like a specific order of prayer that you have to follow. And then the third is identified as being a teacher at a Catholic school. And all of those, it's unique not just you know to SU and SUNA, but it's unique even here at home. It's not something that you hear a lot of here on my reservation, the [redacted] reservation.**

**It was easy to stay connected to my Catholic side because it's a larger religion like your spirituality. Sure, and have a you know that the parish at Selinsgrove, you know it didn't feel exactly homey to me at the time, however, I did attend mass it did bring me comfort, it felt, you know like a different connection to home, and to my family because we grew up going to mass every Sunday as well as celebrating Catholic holidays and then, when it came to my Native American Church side, that is unique in its own way too.**

**I would say I was connected, but not as deeply as I would be if I had stayed home or stay chosen to go at home and that's just because the type of prayer and practice is done in a specific place, in a specific time, in a specific area. However, I was able to stay connected to it by you know calling home, talking to my grandfather, who is very active in Native American church. And also listening to songs. I mean there are songs on Spotify that are Native American Church centered.**

**I didn't get to share that part too much. I would say I talked more about my Navajo faith and belief system than I did my Native American Church. And that was because the Native American Church was not as much practiced by the other SUNA Members. The SUNA Board, which was you know other girls, they didn't they weren't too familiar with it, they hadn't experienced it. And that was just the driving factor behind that.**

**And then, as far as staying connected to my [redacted] traditional side, it was a little bit easier, however, it was still hard at times because I mean. You know there's no one sense of being Navajo.**

**There's a lot of diversity within our people, our culture as well.**

**As [redacted] woman on campus, it was different there was a variety just even between you know the three of us.**

**Sure, and so, when it came to like I don't know like specific old like stories or teachings or the way we prayed or practice spirituality, it was different. And that difference didn't really divide us. It's just it was taken more of us like a learning opportunity, an understanding how our culture really brought us together and a lot of ways though SUNA and at SU.**

SK: Many, many, many layers for you, for sure. I appreciate you sharing that very much.

Let's talk about your involvement with the creation of the Susquehannock land acknowledgement site. I know that you were involved in the dedication ceremony. I was there, and there were you on the big screen.

And, and so that whole thing, the story of that creation of the site and what that means and meant for you.

**P5: From my memory like we had talked about getting a space my freshman year so that was 2017-18. And then, when we became an actual SU organization and when we actually founded SUNA in 2018. That was when I would say this really started taking more of a shape.**

**It was in the backs of our heads like I don't know if we can actually do it, there's a lot of things we want to do with this club and in its founding that first year of 2018 and 2019. It was more or less just trying to get SUNA to a stable place and it wasn't until our senior year when the pandemic had happened that we were crunched for time and our last year's 2020-2021. Those semesters were when we were really, really focused on getting this like off the ground, having it happen and have it done with before our graduation time. So I remember, I was not on campus that year and neither was [redacted] but [redacted] and other SUNA members were.**

**So I know that [redacted] took a very active role in you know communication, as well as, like coordinating and talking to the people on campus. However, in our SUNA execs and the board meetings that we had. We were very intentional and when I say we I'm talking about for myself and the execs that was myself, [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted]. You know it's everybody as well as the diversity and inclusion office.**

**We're asking ourselves what type of space do we want to leave here, what is the legacy of SUNA that we want to leave here when we're finished and how do we want the space to either help. Or you know other Native students that come after us, as**

**well as any other minority students that may have felt othered in that time. We wanted to make sure that this space that we created would be an area of healing, rejuvenation and a very comfortable space for students to enjoy and partake in. Because while we were there a sense of you know belonging you know that was that was a big barrier like I mentioned earlier. We wanted that to be a place of belonging for other students.**

**So my involvement with the site was I guess you could say more or less than the actual like shaping of it, I wanted it modeled after very important but also relatable aspects of [redacted] culture, so that was the physical shape of it being in a circle there's a lot of secular elements within [redacted] culture.**

**As well as other Native American cultures and that's something I had knowledge of based on being involved in Native American Church, pan Indianism and Native Americans knowledge. I we were asking you know members as well as who were on exec like what are some things that you guys want to incorporate it into the space. Or what are some overlapping things in our culture that we can share with other students and that came down to you know basic elements and the biggest one was fire.**

**A central gathering place around the fire that was brought up so we said Okay, we could make a fire pit or know something along those lines, and then we branched out from that single idea of fire pit and what it is we do with fire, you know the sense of comfort that comes from being around a campfire even.**

**And for myself as a [redacted] being around a fireplace and interacting with the fire. You know, we use flame and fire as a way to not just purify but also, we use it as a way to communicate to our ancestors, and the way we do that is through the burning of a specific herb which is cedar or juniper. And that is how we pray and you know that's also how we give offerings to our deities and it's also a way of recentering ourselves. And making things you know almost like sanctify something you know, making something holy again.**

**That's what we incorporated and, as far as choosing a space we knew well, first of all, our first choice for a space was I believe we wanted like our own like hall or room and then, once we were bringing in discussing like these aspects, okay well construction of that's too expensive, first of all. We wanted something more attainable so it became an outdoor space. Because the endorsements you were thinking of was like a like either a residential like hall or level of a floor at first.**

SK: How about the benches, you know I noticed the benches they appear to create a four directions sort of shape as well spaces between them.

**P5: We believe as [redacted] that each direction has a specific association or a connotation to it, and that these directions are specific points. In our thinking and**

**our life cycle, the season cycle, so it's just a way that we could visually show that to everybody and remind others of that.**

**The way that we've structured that also went back to both. How our culture's view the four Cardinal directions and how we wanted to kind of also give students that I sense of direction like no way they were on campus. If people were very cognizant of our position within life, our position within you know the world our position in relation to nature, our position with them, you know one another, we figured that could also be you know exemplified within the land acknowledgment.**

SK: That's such a powerful, all-encompassing idea of the four directions orienting us in life and all kinds of ways. I really love that.

So this is kind of includes everything we've been talking about but, Why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site?

**P5: As well as funny specifically um, it was important that I see you understand its history and what it is, but they were either lacking or things that they had not considered sit. I strongly feel that in order to know where the school wants to go, or if anybody if they want to know where they're going what their future looks like, there has to be some retrospective aspects.**

**As far as progress and the land acknowledgement, I feel, that it's a physical space where you could do that you know and do that work yourself and it's a physical space for the school to you know not ignore.**

**It could be a drawing point for some students that that is a physical space. I wanted a physical space, because I did not want the land acknowledgement to be like abused, ignored or overlooked. Because land acknowledgments can look different depending on the institution. Sure, for local universities here with in Arizona that I know. The land acknowledgement is all verbal, it sometimes doesn't even take on a physical space. I think they are just incorporated and maybe like welcome ceremonies or graduation ceremonies.**

**Or it could be just something printed on their website so it's written that way. And again it's overlooked and it's almost like checkmark aspects and I didn't want that. For SU, I wanted it to be something that outlasted what we say, or what we write down. I wanted it to be a place that you could immerse yourself in.**

SK: Well you know just today; I was there with [redacted]. And yesterday I had a conversation with [redacted] and this time of year it's especially it's beautiful and lovely. It's not just an idea. It's physical and I think that matters.

What does spiritual well-being look like for Native students? And what's needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?

**P5: So spiritual well-being and what that looks like for you to students at SU.**

**The way I view like Native American spiritual needs, and what that looks like is that a Native student has access and space to practice their traditions and so, if they are allowed to you know wear their traditional attire.**

**And not be looked at so like crazily or you know, having them compliment and feeling pride in how they look... And I feel like that's one aspect, the second part would be allowing the students to share so share either inviting people to pray with them and they traditionally do. I would be great an opportunity for a Native student to you know speak in that language through the former prayer to share that with others, so that they can be aware of it.**

**And then also to have the space, as well as the freedom because we did run to several situations where if we had like traditional medicines herbs or like prayer [tools?] out in our dorms, that was something that was either told we can we could not have those, because they usually involve a sense of [burning?] something.**

**Or it was regarded in a way that they thought it was suspicious, or that it was too dangerous, and you know it was it was touched in a way that way was, in a way, desecrated I would say. That was not my experience but it was experience of other students. This is something I kind of noticed when I went abroad into New Zealand. You could just say that is something you know spiritual or traditional and I'd asked that you'd not touch it, but I can show you what it is. So just knowing not to either touch that or interfere with that would be something that would be nice if that was common knowledge at SU.**

**People should know that students are able to practice their spirituality and to look after their own spiritual well-being. That would be greatly appreciated. And second question, what is needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institution. You know just actively more Native students and giving them the resources be it financial or you know, like the spiritual, I think that we've started a basis for that you know. The spiritual resources for them as well as I would say respecting that they are different and not expecting them to compromise themselves. Not separate ourselves from our spirituality. It's who we are, where we're alive. It's a living thing, we cannot separate the two and to have that need met. I'm not sure how that would look like, but it would be great.**

SK: So one of the things that I found really powerful about what you were saying there was not only at the kind of the toward the beginning of what you that when you reflect on these questions. Not only was it about having space and resources, but having an opportunity to share.

And being part of the larger community as part of one who was both giving and receiving, I think that was reminding me of the dedication ceremony. One of the powerful

things for me about that ceremony was toward the end when the people who are present were invited to come forward and receive the medicine.

And, and in the form of the of the sage burning, I think it was sage.

It was such a gesture of generosity and hospitality; it was really a beautiful moment I thought.

**P5: And I do wish we were able to do that more often at SU. Either intimate gatherings like that or even larger events, because it doesn't even have to be the burning of herbs. For Native American church, the way we believe, it's just even sharing water to drink. It's really just helping somebody. We also did that, with the ceremony from what I remember.**

SK: So my last question is: what, what do you wish chaplains knew or what would be important for chaplains to know about supporting Native students.

**P5: In, like my own, like religious experience growing up in the Catholic Church, one thing I really found helpful when it was connecting with new priests or deacons, was that they actually take time to learn our language, a little bit. Because that was a big thing for myself growing up within the Catholic Church was that we did have priests who made an effort to learn the language.**

**So for Native students, if a chaplain were to even just pick up maybe a greeting or anything small like that, I think that would just be a good starting point. If you can find some information on language of the students of Native students. As long as it's a hello or goodbye in the language, I think that would be very helpful. And the second thing that I wish chaplains would know as far as supporting Native American students is that it's Okay, if a Native student is hesitant about approaching a Christian or Catholic minister. The hesitancy there is, you know, understandable and that it shouldn't be taken to personally just due the historical reasons and experiences.**

**And I would also, the last thing would just be to be patient with Native students, if they are not totally comfortable you know approaching the spiritual side of the institution. But be being willing to advocate and say these students may not have you know approached us through the specific chain of command or anything. And then also like kind of what I'm saying is.**

**I don't know if the school had seen a group of Native students and they were gathered in a circle and they were holding hands, maybe they had their own little fire burning. In the quiet and that's how they were praying, not to assume that they were actively going out of their way to [unclear] or that they were doing some type of occult ritual or anything like that.**

**Sure course this might not be approaching their institution chaplain at the top. I'm pretty sure this was not meant to harm anybody. Yes, those are the three things I think chaplains can do.**

Participant 6
April 19, 2022
Susquehannock tribute circle

SK: I'll just start with these questions and then and then they can go where they go. Why are you a part of SUNA? And how has it been important to you in your time at SU?

**P6: This question is answered was sort of a funny story. When I first came to the school, I didn't think that there were going to be other Natives. So I was actually walking like up towards Deg and I didn't know who [redacted] and [redacted] were yet but I looked at them. And they kind of pause they like walk past me. I was like, Oh my God, are they Native? So I ended up I was friends with [redacted] who was a part of our lives. And since I was a I came in as a Spanish minor. I connected with [redacted], but all the minority kids, I guess you're all friends. So I ended up meeting [redacted] a little bit more intimately. And I made her fry bread. And then she invited me to SUNA and I joined, what an introduction. Yeah, it was a it was like fated, I think. But I definitely I loved it. It was it's a family it in there, all my sisters, all my relations. As a reconnecting Native, I didn't really have as much like support with this identity at home. Because a lot of my family that I know, like, we're still trying to figure things out ourselves, about our own identity. But being here has just given me so much more of an opportunity to feel comfortable claiming that part of myself. Because I get to be around other reconnecting Natives are in the club too. So we're always talking about, you know, how we feel comfortable here. Because sometimes outside reconnecting Natives aren't treated the best. Which is understandable, because a lot of reconnecting Natives, not a lot, but some will take advantage of that identity for personal gain. But here, it's like no one was being judgmental. And everyone who like grew up on the res or just knew more about their identity, were supportive of the rest of us figuring that out. And I definitely made a lot of progress with what I can bring to my own family in the past four years. And yeah, I've always just felt very supported and loved. And it's just given me like a great opportunity to explore this part of myself and to reconnect and to also fight for my community. In a way where there wasn't so much of, I don't know, like dangerous repercussions, like in high school, my high school had a Native mascot, which obviously I was very against whether I was connected or not was one thing. I knew it was wrong. Sure. I knew that it was offensive to me on a personal level. So I definitely went against that and a lot of terrible things happened. My senior year of high school was very stressful for that. So when I came here, it was like, oh, like the people in SUNA. They want to see me succeed, and they want me to be a part of their family. And now I am. So that's why I stayed and I love them. And I like just can't wait to have these lifelong friendships and relations with them.**

SK: So that's, that's awesome. So it sounds like the Native community here you find to be very inclusive one like, from wherever people are coming from in their journey. It was a space big enough for everyone. And then yet, you said that you know that you didn't have

a lot of support within your family. But you made frybread so you weren't like without traditions, right?

**P6: I'm not out of the loop, but I definitely see myself as the person who has to bring those traditions back. I've just accepted it as my role. I have been reaching out to other family members, they will give me a lot of information. But I definitely wouldn't have had the confidence to even do that if I hadn't had the support of SUNA and being like, well, no matter how much you know if you're Native right, so it's your responsibility to learn more for your family and learn more for yourself. But this isn't an identity that anyone can take away from you, especially since you fight so hard and put yourself in these situations that you know, are potentially dangerous, like, but you're gonna fight for your community no matter what and like that's what's important.**

SK: Right, right. Right. Wow. Wow. So however you want to articulate, however and you're comfortable sharing, the cultural identities that you bring to life here and to SUNA.

**P6: Well, the official term is Afro Indigenous. My child, one of my tribes is [redacted], there's more, I don't know, they kind of just came up in the last couple years, I won't be claiming them until I know more about them, because it just wouldn't be appropriate. But here, I feel like my [redacted] identity has definitely been pushed to the forefront over my African American identity only because there was like seven Native students, including myself when I came here. So of course, I'm like involved with BSU to the extent that I can be, but I definitely feel like my Native identity has always been when people are like, oh, yeah, if you want to ask a Native student, here goes Taylor's email, and I get emails from people I literally have never heard of on campus. And I'm just like, have to meet these people. And I know a lot of us were like, oh, [redacted] friends. I think it's hilarious because she is the leader, you know, even off campus, we always go to her for advice. But definitely, I feel like sometimes like within the club and within the minority clubs, I suppose my identity hasn't felt like a bad thing. I think that sometimes it could get a little exploitative, especially since people expect me to have answers that I don't know. I don't know if it's just like the wise stage stereotype going on. But like I literally, just because I know how to make frybread. And I can introduce myself in [redacted], it doesn't mean that I know everything. And the stuff that I have learned doesn't mean that I can share anything either. So I think like just I'm just a little bit more conscious about you know, as you're reconnecting Native, like, there's barriers that you have to set up about what you can talk about, because then your whole identity of reconnecting is only going to be, I can only be Native if I keep putting myself in positions to overshare and I can only be Native, if I keep exhausting myself to prove it, which is not true. My Native identity is how am I with my family? What our relations, what are our traditions? What can we learn about ourselves and our history? It's not how can you do X, Y, and Z for the school? And then oh, you're Native, and it's great. And then President Green signs this wonderful thing? And boom, you know, so?**

SK: Yeah, so it sounds like you're describing the tensions between your own just a personal life, journey, flourishing, whatever, however you want to live your life and kind of the pressures to perform that identity in certain ways in the context of the institution.

**P6: For sure. Yeah.**

SK: And those can be an in tension, in huge ways, I can only imagine. How have you found? How long have you found support at SU?

**P6: The CDI has definitely been a big support because they support all the diversity clubs. And I obviously, like just within SUNA, and even with ALAS. SUNA and ALAS probably partner the most, just because like our friend groups are very circular. So yeah, I think it's that support has been like, immeasurable, and we just try to go to each other's things. And when it comes to like, building the land acknowledgement, we had so much support about certain barriers that happened during that process. And people were willing to just like fight for these changes to happen, like fight for the land acknowledgement to happen. I'm thinking about this one situation, because a while ago honestly, the pandemic messed up my train of thought. But it was definitely during the process. Something happened with the land acknowledgment where people were using it in a way that wasn't proper. Yeah, it was, it was very distressing. Sometimes. Like, I think I just got to the point where I can sit here and like, not really think about it. But I did have a friend in one of my classes who is not in a diversity club or anything. I think she was with the Music Department actually. And she emailed campus safety on my behalf and was like, Look, my friend is the part of SUNA. And she said that this happened. And I think it's very disrespectful. And if we're at SU and we're supposed to be doing this and this, then you need to take this more seriously. So even outside of the diversity clubs, there are so many people who are willing to help and there's so many people who are supportive. So I don't think we have a necessarily toxic campus environment. I think that sometimes there's a small group of people that are very loud about their discrimination every once in a while, especially during the election period. But it's not a reflection of the whole campus because I found so many people who like are, you know, privileged white people who have been like, well, I support this.**

SK: How about the administration? Did you find the senior administration? How did you find them?

**P6: I think a handful of administration has been really great. Yeah, yourself included. When it comes to like some of my professors have, I would share things with them. They would promote it in a class, definitely in the Spanish department, when I changed to Spanish major. Like Professor Severyn, for example, has always been very supportive of SUNA and has always been very supportive of my personal research when it comes to just like Indigenous issues outside of campus. Obviously, Amy from the CDI has always been very supportive. I think, you know, there is support in the administration, they're not quite as loud as the students, I think, because it's like a professional thing. But you know, I definitely do notice it. Yeah.**

SK: Good. Good. Glad to hear that. If you identify with spiritual or faith, faith practices, or traditions, have you been able to remain connected with them at SU and how have you done that?

**P6: I think my spirituality has always been like, with my family, I guess. Not all of them because some of us are Muslim. Some of us are Christians, some of us do our own thing. I'm in the do your own thing category. I feel like the land acknowledgment has been helpful because I just feel more connected to the land and it sounds cheesy, but I feel more connected to like the land and like my ancestors here. Because this is what this was built for. So I could I can say like that before, it was very hard to like, put myself in a space where I could get into that headspace of connection. I think that [redacted] for one we always talked about our separate traditions and like how they connect. So I think it's been like okay, but definitely with the land acknowledgement, my connection has improved. And I haven't felt like I hadn't felt discriminated against for them. I know that before I came to this campus, there were issues about like, smudging practices. Yeah, but I haven't had that personal experience, but I also won't discount the experiences.**

SK: I remember at the dedication I think it was you talked about times when people have had sage burning mistaken for smoking weed and stuff like that. Which is pretty ignorant and disrespectful, on the part of people who are supposed to be enforcing rules, when that's not even the breaking of any?

**P6: Yeah, there is someone I'm friends with them now. They were her before I arrived on campus. But I did talk to the person that the happen to. And she had to transfer because it had gotten so bad. Yeah.**

SK: Wow. Wow. That is sad. I didn't know that. So you found you found places and spaces and means like this, to remain connected and to practice your traditions? Yeah, that's good. I'm really glad to hear that. So let's talk about the creation of this space itself. And how were you involved. What was your role? I know you were involved in the dedication ceremony, but just kind of talk about all of that and how that came to be and how it was dedicated and everything.

**P6: All of us are involved in every single aspect down to like, when we finally get the plaque. Those words are made by us. The research was done by us. The design was done by us everything. And a lot of us took so many meetings just to try to figure out how can we get the money for this? Amy was very on top of it. I love Amy she needs like flowers and I'll have to buy her some beaded earrings or something. She deserves it. So yeah, so everything even down to the tree placement. I had a 20-minute argument about where to put the trees. Like I remember that. It was a very intense process, putting it together. But when it came to the ceremony, it was still kind of stressful, but I feel like once everything was set, and we had all come together, it was nice. When it came to the dedication, there wasn't a lot of stress. You know what, we're just going to speak. And we're going to dedicate the space**

**and we're going to let our voices carry. And it was very important to us, it was very impactful for us. I mean, people were still talking about my speech to this day, I literally wrote it while walking here.**

SK: You had some real fire.

**P6: Yes, I wish I had the energy. But it's just very important for us to be able to, like, bless the land, most of all, like it is a dedication to the Susquehannock people, above all, because this is their land, and you don't want to take away from that. But it's also a means to say Indigenous people are here, Indigenous students are going to be on this campus. And they deserve a space. And also, we need to protect the land, there is a lot of layers. I remember so much like the birds were just overhead. And I had never just felt that much like, spirit. And on this campus before. Outside of campus, sure. But like here, it was just so interesting. And it just made me think like, I wish we could bless what we have every day. So you feel like this every day. And I'm sure at some point, it was like that. Fortunately, I was born in the wrong timeline. I don't know. But it was amazing. And even after when everyone left, and [redacted] and I were cleaning up, we could just see there was lightning, and then the rain was happening and like the fire was still going. And I don't know, like, it just made me feel the most connected to my Indigenous ancestors than I've ever felt before. Wow. So it was very powerful and impactful for me for sure. Wow.**

SK: You know, one of the things that in addition to your speech, and every one's speeches, which were so moving and powerful, was when you invited people to come forward, and would that be called smudging when you're burning the sage and you're inviting people to receive the
medicine over them. That act of generosity was really powerful. That expression of generosity to everyone who was there was really moving.

**P6: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was [redacted], for sure. I know, we always talk about how to share with the campus about, just like the connection that we feel because even in my speech, I was like, you know, reconnecting to the Earth is not just something for Indigenous people to do. We have been doing it and things are still happening, like the IPCC report, which in 2022, the first time they said that colonization is the reason for climate change, which is true, I'm glad it took it till 2022 but kind of wish it was 200 years earlier, when we first are talking about it, but we always just want to like invite people to reevaluate the ways in which their mindsets are like contributing to the erasure of Indigenous people. And, you know, we can sit there and make as much fiery speeches as we want. But it's, it's not until people can like actually sit with their own spirit, and evaluate, like what they need to do on a personal level. Like, that's when changes start happening when we do ceremony together. And we're all together. And we're like looking at each other. And we're seeing like, we have a responsibility to each other, that's when the most effect happens.**

SK: We've kind of been covering all of this with everything you've been saying. But, you know, why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site? Is there anything more that you'd want to say about that question that we haven't talked about already?

**P6: I think what I can say is that like a land acknowledgement is the absolute bare minimum to for a campus to have a for any space really to have to honor Indigenous people. I mean, this is like not in the private property sense. But this is our land. This is the land that our ancestors have cultivated, that we're cultivating. And that we're trying to help. And so, you know, the campus, there could be some other policies where people can help the land. There could be some things that we can change institutionally that will help mitigate the effects of climate change. There could be more conversations about how to help the local Indigenous community. It's not about sending money all the way over to Colombia. I mean, there's a huge issue with the displacement of their Indigenous population. But it's also about like the Natives here that are close, like how can we help them how can we support them and not in no like, paternalistic sense, but in like, what are they asking for us to do? And as a campus that like trying to be more diverse, like the greater Selinsgrove Community, the Snyder County community, like it hasn't felt very safe for students of color. So I think we should also be thinking like, well, we're this campus where this like, random, I don't know, a Sour Patch Kids and a bowl of Skittles, like, let's just say it's like, how can we start, affecting the community around us so that not just Indigenous students, but all other students of color, and all people of color in the community can feel safe. And there's like so many, so many things. There were talks like a couple years ago that I was a part of about changing, certain ways that we use energy or like how we get rid of chairs, like there's so many things like honoring the land is honoring Indigenous people. And honoring a person's personhood, like their humanity is honoring Indigenous people, because that is what we believe in. We want to see who the other person is, and we want to connect with them. And we also want to connect with the land. Because that's how that's how we can all take care of each other. Like, at the end of the day, like that's what's the most important.**

SK: Yeah, I love that. That's some that's some deep spiritual theology right there. Yeah, I like that a lot. What does well-being look like for Native students at SU, and what's what is needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions?

**P6: I think it's kind of hard, because it's like a person-by-person basis, like, the next incoming Indigenous students might need something completely different than what I've needed that then what [redacted], who was here, like way before I came, might have needed right. Protecting the land acknowledgement, and making sure that people are honoring the space, whether there's Indigenous people on campus or not, is important because it was made by Indigenous students for the greater community, but also, with the intent of like, it's, it has to be like Indigenous run here. Like it can't be like Western eyes, you can't be colonizing this space. So that's like the first thing. I guess the second thing is, we can't have any more issues with students**

**merging and getting in trouble for smudging, I would definitely just, it hasn't happened since that situation, but it doesn't mean that it will never happen again. So I think just looking out for that. I feel like connecting the incoming Native students would be good. I did talk to Amy. And I was like, it's not about forcing them to, like perform their culture. It's just about like, if they're identifying as Indigenous, when they're coming in maybe sending an email and being like, hey, we noticed you guys all said that you were Indigenous, we know that other students in the past have had a hard time like finding other Indigenous students. So we just want to let you guys know that in this email, here's, here's everyone, and we encourage you to connect with each other. But it's not like we're not like forcing you to make this crazy thing, again, or do all this extra stuff. They need to be able to have a more normal experience or also being able to honor who they are. Because it's nobody's job to decolonize anyone like you have to decolonize yourself, you know.**

SK: Yeah, that makes sense. Just help students make the connections. And they and then they can run with it. Yeah, that makes sense. So this connects with some of the specific aspects of my work, or chaplaincy in higher education. What do you wish the field of higher education chaplaincy knew about supporting Native students?

**P6: The chaplaincy part, I'm thinking about like, just understanding the history between like the church and Indigenous people. And I just I think honoring like, the destruction of our original traditions because of like the forced Christianity, the forced colonization, stuff like that. I feel like just like understanding those things. Making statements can feel kind of empty sometimes. But I think just being like, we understand the ways in which the church has done this, and especially when it comes to the Indigenous children that were in the Indian residential schools. There's like 10,000 of them that have been found now. So I think I think it's anything just honoring that. There's like a Carlisle Indian residential school. That's like near my house that I just had to grow up just knowing about. I live very close to that. It's, it's crazy. So just definitely honoring that past and, like making aware of like, this is the time now for the church to actually be like Jesus and actually do the reparations and actually, you know, go on and like be good for the community.**

SK: Yeah, should actually be like Jesus, that's a great way to put it. You know, I think about chaplaincy as much as possible and very multifaith faith terms. You know, I'm Christian ordained in the Lutheran church, and try to see my work as supporting multifaith expressions. What would a chaplaincy…what would like chaplain for Native students look like? Do you think or what would that be of value? And so not in a Christian frame but a Native frame? To support Native students in their spiritual life. Would that be of value do you think?

**P6: I think would be a value, I think. Someone who knows about ceremony. So I think someone who has like a solid grasp like an elder, like not an older an actual elder, but someone who really knows what's going on, that can help hold ceremonies**

**would be great. Yeah, so I think you know, and obviously, they'd have to be Native. That's non-negotiable. But it'd be good.**

SK: Yeah. Yeah, because one of the things that I'm trying to start to build here is where we would have multiple kinds of advisors and mentors to different communities on campus, that would be spiritual mentors and spiritual chaplains to different communities. And so I'm always thinking about what would that look like.

**P6: Yeah, for sure, then I would definitely know that the land acknowledgement is being used properly, and it makes me happy, right? Even if it doesn't happen till I'm 30.**

SK: I will I will keep you posted on that one. Tell me about the push and pull around the plaque.

**P6: The bottom line is that the colonizers are throwing a hissy fit once again. Because it said unsurrendered territory, which is true. And the uncertain new part suggests genocide, which did happen, so I'm not really sure why we're fighting and tussling about the wording when it's the truth. But now it's fixed. Now people are like, we're gonna keep unsurrendered because that's what happened. And the plaque is being made as far as I know, now. It's late but I'm, I'm kind of happy that this happened. Because I think it's a lesson for a lot of people that is like, you can have all the support in the world for the land acknowledgement, right. But then it's like that one word. One word, that one phrase that is like, not painting like settlers in a good light or whatever will get in the way of a project because they just don't want to admit that this happened. But I know it's getting made now so I feel a lot better about it. We're realizing that a lot of people still aren't on board with what it actually means to support the Indigenous community, and there's more work to be done.**

Participant 7
June 8, 2022
Zoom

SK: Thank you so much for taking some time to chat with me. As I said, your name was coming up so much and I'm glad that we have a chance to connect a little bit.

So um I'll just start from the top, and of course these questions are just guiding questions and really. Why did you create SUNA and why was in important to you in your time at SU?

**P7: Well, I helped create SUNA, because there was there wasn't a space for Native students to go. It was very clear that everyone else has some kind of space or club and I'll say, well, we don't even have a club so like where do we begin. It obviously was easy to be with my Native you know sisters and [redacted] and [redacted] and that that like being with each other, made it a lot**
**easier, as a group to you know organize and create it so that was just something that's really like the best part of SU.**

**Just like being a part of creating something that impacts a lot of students there and they continue to learn about Native issues. I just see the impact that I had there and it really makes me feel good inside because. When you're a part of something bigger than yourself that is like founded it makes you feel hopeful for the future to for Native students to go there.**

SK: Yeah, it's something that endures beyond your own time on the campus and will continue to be a gift for those in the future for sure.

Describe if you would your cultural identities and how or if you found support for those identities that SU.

**P7: I don't know I think that's an interesting question because it's all intertwined. I guess just expressing just talking about issues that aren't you know. Just being with my people, just talking and joking having like a sense of community.**

SK: In terms of your own tribal identity, do you identify as [redacted]?

**P7: Yeah yeah. [redacted], [redacted], [redacted]. And then [redacted]. Sure yeah and then I'm [redacted] [redacted].**

SK: Any one of those that is more paramount for you in terms your own family experience? Was one emphasized more?

**P7: Yeah, definitely because they're all spread out. It's either in the north or in the southwest but I'm definitely like a Southwest gal. You know it's home so and it's where my heart creation story is all that is so...**

**True yeah so, I definitely grew up with more of my [redacted] side I. I'm trying to learn more like my [redacted] side. But like besides technology luckily, you know you're able to learn, but I would want to have that interaction with the elders you know commuting to up North.**

SK: If you identify with spiritual or faith practices or traditions were you able to remain connected to those at SU? How and why?

**P7: I was able to remain connected there. I created my own space. I'm more of a spiritual prayer person so as long as I have the space cultivated, I blessed it. It's good if I needed to go on a walk. I went on like that nature walk that I was also working on my senior like capstone too. So I would walk there, and like go by the water because water is just very healing. I found that I was, I found I found myself able to.**

**Do you remember summer [redacted]? She was there, like our freshman year. She was smudging in her room like burning I think it was sage and someone in the hall complained and said, like it smelt weird or they made like some kind of remark about it and. I don't really think the RAs did anything so, and you know if they knew the importance behind sage and the sacredness obviously.**

SK: Did you do smudging? Did you find spaces to do that? How does that work for you?

**P7: For me, I just opened my window and I wouldn't have any complaints and then it's much in my room yeah.**

SK: I'm glad to hear that you were able to find ways of doing that.

So tell me about your involvement in the creation of a Susquehannock Tribute Circle.

I know that you are deeply involved, but I would like to hear what that was like for you and about that whole process.

**P7: It was so long it felt like forever because abroad happen and then Covid happened, it was just seemed like it was like one thing after another, you know. But it still came together beautifully. Whenever I was abroad [redacted] was here and [redacted] and I were, and then we came back, and then we all got together, everyone else you know, like [redacted] and [redacted] and [redacted] and [redacted] were all there. So it all just came together beautifully, especially the faculty to and the community support. It was just a beautiful creation of ideas with a lot of thought put into it.**

**You know the circle, with the design itself, the material where it is how many blocks are there because, four is a sacred number. It was very, very well thought and put together for the people. The research behind the Susquehannocks was another thing**

**because there's not a lot of information. And my involvement in that ceremony. We just organized how we wanted to sound. It wasn't going to be like a traditional one. We're going to start off with prayer, we going to bless everyone and then dedicate the space. It's so amazing to know it's still there, it will always be there, so whenever I go back, I'll go and visit of course.**

SK: Tell me about the decisions made about the different aspects of the design, like you know you chose firepit. And why that particular you know place on campus. And the trees, am I right that the trees are Native species? Yeah, we chose the Native species to the land itself. Nothing invasive.

As for the fire he chose that because fire is one of the main elements of life and it brings people together, it brings life so it creates life, sustains us. For the for the stone itself, it was very hard, because there was like different stones to pick. We chose the more natural stone. The benches appear to be in the form a circle, but there are spaces between the benches that it looks like they're oriented toward the four Cardinal directions, is that significant?

**P7: Yeah, yeah that's extremely significant because there's no four directions or central direction so.**

**Like and then the way we entered, I don't know if you remember, at the ceremony we started at the eastern part and we started there. Like for [redacted] culture, when you walk in a hogan you walk up clockwise because that's the sacred cycle. So that's why it was a circle.**

SK: I love that space; I think it's such a gift to the campus that will just continue. it's awesome for sure.

Why is it important to you that SU has a land acknowledgement site?

**P7: Because SU has the name of the people that lived there and so that's the glue that kind of just says, Hey Susquehannock people were here. It's in the name. It's in the river, but these are the people that were here before.**

**This is the space to acknowledge that but also you know, help people develop a mindset of not only looking for spaces that acknowledged Native people, but just to find out who lived here, whose land are we on?**

SK: It encourages the campus to have a deep sense of history.

How do we support every student, no matter how they identify religiously or spiritually, how do we as an institution, me as a chaplain, support students and provide them with the resources and sense of belonging and connection that you need?

So that's kind of a lead into this next question, What does spiritual well-being looked like for Native students at SU and what's needed for Native students to thrive at predominantly white institutions.

**P7: Oh wow, big question okay. So I can't speak for every Native student's spiritual well-being. I think it looks very intense like you're it's like your spirit you're constantly feeling just, not attacked, but just like you just don't belong sometimes. So it's a weight, we all carry you just.**

**As soon as we're born people know it's very intense. I mean I can speak for myself, I had to take a year off to just honestly find myself again like that intense like, for four years. We just need more support on a communal level to thrive and really work towards the issues that can actually liberate us all, but until we actually get together and do that it's gonna be hard.**

SK: What did you need to reclaim your spirit, a little bit?

**P7: I felt like I so many things were expected of me, and I was just such like a token at times, that I just like my identity was just like picked and prodded and, like, I was just like who am I?**

**I just needed like a year of just reconnecting with myself coming back home, which is also like crazy cuz you know how it was just a lot, it was just a lot yeah and it but what I meant by that was just yeah basically what I said I just felt like. I was just exhausted from talking, even just saying that I'm like introducing myself and saying, where I'm from and blah blah blah, and I was just like, no, no, I don't need it.**

SK: Let me ask you this. If Susquehanna had been the kind of place where there had been a Susquehannock tribute circle already in place. And there had been that kind of cultural awareness and support built in, would you have had a different experience at SU.

Instead of having to like having had to carry the burden of making those things happen, would it have been a different experience?

**P7: No, I think it was all worth it. As heavy as it feels. It was worth it; I wouldn't take it back. And, and now that those things are in place future ideas can be used, like a pow wow. We were thinking about bringing a pow wow to campus or like.**

**You know, having it on the lawn like by Smith, where the reunion thing is. That's something that we've thought of that we wanted to do, or like go to gatherings. I don't know like I hope future you know the future clubs, now they can do that.**

SK: Are that things that would have made your experience as Native students better?

**P7: Just more involvement like there were some really good like events. I know Dena bought this really like nice documentary and it was about you know the mascot name. And I remember like having a political science class with this, like other students that thought that the name wasn't racist. I was like No, it is, and I came in and you know explained my opinion.**

**And then later Dena got the DVD and we had an event and honestly, it was just SUNA who showed up. I wish there was more passion to learn. I don't know I think there's just some valuable information that a lot of students missed out on but obviously that's your choice. Also campus safety. When we dedicated the space and there weren't any signs posted about the site and what it's for.**

**I think we also we wanted on when we had the Die-in at Deg fountain. We requested what to campus safety officers be there, but I don't think they were there. You know just little things like say you're gonna be there and like protect us.**

SK: My last question here is about the field of higher education captaincy which is my field. You know when higher education chaplaincy started in the United States, hundreds of years ago, it was all about Christian students and that was the whole frame. That's really how higher education started in the US. In over time, and especially in the last few decades the United States has gotten much more religiously diverse and higher education has gotten much more religiously diverse.

We are reconceiving our work in very multifaith terms as part of advancing diversity and inclusion on our campuses. And so my question here is, What do you think higher ed chaplaincy needs to know about supporting Native students?

**P7: I don't know I wish they knew that. Being a Native student is just on campus in higher education is very intense and it's a unique like it's something that just. I guess we just want respect.**

**Just no prodding or like you know just any like underlying purposes to ask a Native student to talk on a panel, or you know just for image. Just to know that we're just there for ourselves, for our people, just trying to do something and go down this path.**

**Our great grandparents couldn't even go because of boarding schools. My grandma is actually a boarding school survivor and I know that I graduated she's like keep going, keep going get your masters, get your doctors. Do this because I wanted to go to school, but I couldn't. Honestly, for me, it's just a space and then if anything comes up and make sure that it gets taken care of, it's not swept under the rug like everything else.**

SK: The dedication ceremony was one of the most powerful things I've been a part of, I mean I was just attending, of course. You've used the language of being prodded a

couple of times, like how exhausting that was. By that do you mean like kind of being asked to perform your identity or kind of like explain yourself? Is that what you mean?

**P7: Yeah perform, explain, just be known as the Native girl. Being prodded is just explaining because why do we have to explain when these things should already be done. And just decolonizing higher education, because, like you said it started with schools like white Christianity and all that and there's a long history with that boarding schools. And it's crazy too because we're not as us not far from Carlisle. That's where they were sending them all out from the East basically.**