

Wendy Cadge and Shelly Rambo (eds.). *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022.

Reviewed by Ibrahim J. Long*

As Muslim chaplaincy continues to evolve, educators and practitioners increasingly require resources that effectively articulate and define the chaplaincy role within our faith community and across diverse institutional settings. *Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in the Twenty-First Century* (2022) meets this need as a valuable “resource for those exploring and preparing to be chaplains” (p. 4). This book provides a comprehensive introduction to the profession for practitioners of all faiths—or none—and can be supplemented with faith-specific resources to support the education and training of both current and aspiring Muslim chaplains.

Included within this text are the contributions of twenty-four authors, including Cadge and Rambo, who bring expertise and diverse perspectives on spiritual care. As an introductory text, it is highly practical and particularly relevant for individuals serving, or aiming to serve, in critical chaplaincy sectors such as corrections, the military, healthcare, and higher education. While designed as a “teaching tool [for use] in theological schools and clinical settings” (p. 4), it also offers valuable insights for experienced chaplaincy professionals and educators seeking to deepen their understanding of the field.

The book is divided into four sections, each comprised of two to four chapters. The first section overviews chaplaincy and its history within US institutions; the other three focus on specific categories of professional competency. Chapters flow easily from one to the next and are supplemented with discussion questions and recommended readings for easy adoption and use within the profession’s training and educational programs. Spiritual care practices are explained clearly and without the usual Christian imagery and biblical references, which makes this book broadly accessible for chaplains of varying faiths as well as non-chaplaincy professionals. The contributors speak without being faith-specific, thereby centering the primary skills and activities that any chaplain may need within diverse institutional settings.

Chaplaincy students may appreciate that the key terms, when they are first used, are easily identifiable through bold text and defined in the glossary. However, the definitions are not always satisfying. Educators and keen learners would benefit from surveying the index to locate alternative descriptions or definitions of key terms provided by individual contributors. In some cases, a contributor’s description may turn out to be

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more useful. For instance, a non-anxious presence is defined as a “common expectation of chaplains that involves the ability to remain calm and attentive to others experiencing emotional flooding” (p. 274). While this is an accurate summary of this essential skill, first-time learners may find it difficult to visualize how to enact it in practice. Elsewhere in the book, this term is more practically described as “using [one’s] voice and posture to communicate a sense of calm [while] being present with careseekers yet detached from their chaotic emotions” (p. 74).

Professional Competencies

One of the book’s unique features is the editors’ categorization of spiritual care skills into three primary areas: meaning-making, interpersonal competencies, and organizational competencies. Spiritual care educators will find these areas helpful when developing and evaluating chaplaincy training and educational programs. The editors even include a competency checklist as an appendix (pp. 269–271) with prompting questions, such as: “How does the program help students do the internal/psychological work that will enable them to be more effective caregivers?” (p. 270). Examples of how programs may address these concerns are also provided.

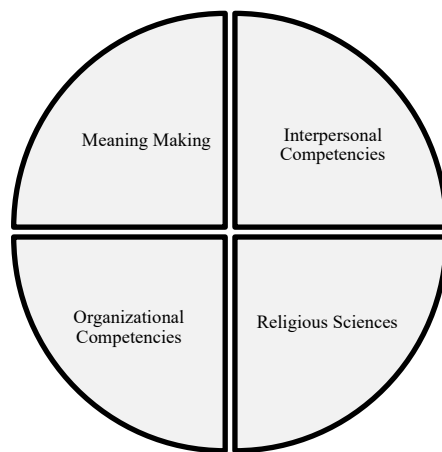


Figure 1: Four competency areas for Islamic chaplaincy

In Muslim chaplaincy programs, these three areas of competency should be expanded to include a fourth: those Islamic religious sciences (*‘ulūm al-dīn*) that are most relevant to professional spiritual care. Designating the religious sciences as a separate category would help educators and learners clearly distinguish between the role of traditional Islamic religious sciences (such as *fiqh*, *kalām*, and *ḥadīth*) and other essential skills needed for effective Muslim chaplaincy—while acknowledging their significant overlap. As Muslim chaplaincy programs continue to

emerge and evolve, discussions about curriculum focus are actively shaping the teaching and practice of Islamic spiritual care. This has resulted in inconsistent standards and unequal emphasis on critical skills across different programs. Focusing on these four professional competency categories (see **Figure 1**) can help establish consistent professional standards by ensuring learners gain essential knowledge and skills in each area. While the approach to these competencies may differ between programs, every learner will have gained a comprehensive foundation for Islamic spiritual care.

Supplementing with Muslim Perspectives

Unfortunately, the book only includes one Muslim contributor: Imam Dr. Bilal Ansari. Given the increasing number of graduates from Islamic chaplaincy programs across North America, I would have liked to see more Muslim contributors. That being said, two Muslim chaplains are featured in short vignettes titled “Voices from the Field” (pp. 10–11, 79), and the index indicates several references to Islam and Muslims (see p. 317). However, in most instances, they are minor and make no significant contribution to an author’s overall point. An encounter between a Muslim and non-Muslim chaplain is described (pp. 70–73) and then commented upon throughout the rest of the chapter (see Chapter 3). However, the applicability of this case for Muslim chaplains is limited. For Muslim educators, I suggest supplementing this text with stories from *Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America* (Templeton Press, 2022) and inviting professional Muslim chaplains into the classroom to share their professional insights and case examples.