

## A Reflection After a Semester at Tufts

As this semester came to a close, so did my first semester as the Interim Chaplain at Tufts. This has been a very active year studied with interesting people, programs, social action, individual inquiry, community building, and some controversy. I am very impressed with the way the Tufts community deals with religious and philosophical diversity and complex ethical issues. As a participant observer of our University's search for inclusion and diversity, for justice and harmony, as well as intellectual integrity and excellence, I think we are doing well. That is not to say that there is no room for improvement, or that life on campus has not felt tense at times. Trying to meet one another's needs, even to really understand the issues before us, is a challenge that will surely continue into the future.

Our Tufts motto is "Pax et Lux." Peace and light. I appreciate both the "light" and "peace" part of our commitment. Peace is a noble ultimate goal while shining light on issues may temporarily disrupt the status quo.

In this reflection, I want to acknowledge the legitimate existence of controversial issues on campus and their value in our formation, and share some of my perspectives on how to engage in dialogue.

Most of us on campus have strong opinions and firm investments in some discipline, issue, cause, group, and religious or philosophical position. There are many areas in which we can cooperate and other arenas in which we simply disagree. One of my responsibilities as a Chaplain, is to help all voices find expression so that everyone who wants to be heard, is heard. As we listen to one another, each of us must ultimately follow our conscience and what we perceive to be ethical and just, even as we respect that right in others. And, as a community, we need to seek justice together without self-righteousness, with compassion, with a desire to promote the common good, and with an ear for minority opinions.

In our search for spiritual, ethical, intellectual, places to stand, I think that means matter as well as ends. How we pursue what is important to us, matters. I believe that we have a responsibility to recognize one another's concerns and courageously protect one another's voice.

Let me give an example from my own perspective. "The Daily" carried an article on March 1, 2012 entitled "Is feminism dead? Students, teachers debate." I am a feminist, and since this is one of the things I feel strongly about, I was surprised that the question was even being asked. If feminism is about the elimination of sexism in women and men's lives, and a shift from a patriarchal structuring of society, shouldn't we all be for it?

For me, feminism/womanism is a spiritual as well as an ethical/social imperative. This viewpoint colors my perspectives on justice and peace. It leads me to be concerned about violent means to achieve even just ends. It obviously leads to my feeling close to others in the interfaith spectrum who support worldviews that include gender justice. Perhaps, in a strange way, because I connect democracy and feminism, it also leads me to support the rights of those who disagree with my position.

So, back to the question, “Is feminism dead?”. It does need to be asked. Not everyone sees feminism the same way or objects to patriarchal structure even if I think they should to be truly inclusive.

From this example, I come to some conclusions about living in community, learning from one another, disagreeing with one another, including everyone, and being open to change. This sometimes involves standing strong and at other times, compromising in the search for co-existence. Our context as well as our own development leads to personal change.

In the process of learning to live in community, we ought to be able to expect people’s behavior to be above board, and truths, as far as they are known, to be at the heart of discussion and debate. We all have a right to be treated with respect, and a responsibility to treat one another with respect, even while remaining true to our perspectives. We can expect one another to refrain from emotional, mental, or spiritual manipulation, bullying, or exaggeration.

I always hope for the opportunity to think outside of outworn positions and stalemates. And, when there is a power discrepancy or imbalance between people in dialogue, I expect that imbalance to be acknowledged.

We in the Tufts community can honor one another even as we speak passionately, each in our own voice. There are so many things on which we agree. We can pursue those together: a concern for our environment, commitment to human rights, pursuit of excellence in education, acceptance of responsibility for those without the basics for staying alive.

So, my conclusion about being on campus for three months now, is that I am very glad to be here and proud of our student body, administration, faculty, and staff for our individual moral and religious commitments and our common concern for intelligent, open, and heartfelt dialogue and action.

Sometimes the religious/ethical diversity on campus makes my head spin but I am grateful for it and for the education of this Chaplain that it provides. We are all on a learning curve of one kind or another or we wouldn’t be here.