

Chaplains

Ethical Perspective

- Human beings are the manifestation of God's presence in the world.
- A task of God's people is to make it possible for "outcasts" to be part of the community.
- The state should not interfere with the work of the faith community
- *"Chaplains are the sacred portable presence of the divine in environments where God seems absent."* (The Rev. Petro Sabune - Chaplain, Sing Sing)

Background

An invisible church exists within the walls of NY institutions. It serves those often estranged from family and friends as well as local congregations. These persons have needs greater than most and are out of sight and out of mind of the general public. The chaplain may be the only one providing hope for those who may not experience it in any other aspect of their life.

The Problem

- As full-time chaplains are retiring from OMRDD and OMH facilities, they are not being replaced.
- The rationale for this is that clients are in community-based centers and therefore the community should be serving the clients. In reality this does not happen.

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- Staff at group homes are overburdened. Communities have no processes to see that the spiritual needs of these persons are cared for. Someone with stature is needed to make it happen.
- Congregations need training for acceptance of the retarded and mentally ill into their faith communities without prejudice.

What Will Help

- A directive to the Commissioners of OMRDD and OMH
 - affirming the importance of chaplains in the spiritual lives of clients
 - calling for Commissioners to work with serving agencies, family advocates, chaplains, and faith communities to adapt the traditional public view of a chaplain to the spiritual needs of clients in the 21st Century.
- Build the number of full-time chaplains so they can fulfil the liaison, advocacy, and pastoral aspects of the position.
- Chaplains should be afforded the dignity and privileges of professional staff.
- If the client or family wish, chaplains should be part of client treatment teams.

(2/4/08)

Member Denominations in New York

American Baptist Churches, Empire Baptist Missionary Convention, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, Religious Society of Friends, United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church.

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