

God on the Fly? The Professional Mandates of Airport Chaplains

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This article contributes to Bender et al's efforts to explore religion "on the edge" by analyzing how religion and spirituality are present in one set of public institutions—airports (2013). I ask how airport chaplains articulate the professional mandate or basis on which they do their work. Rather than making legal or economic arguments, common in the literature about professional mandates, airport chaplains emphasize the moral demand they perceive for their work. They speak of the need to be present, to see and be attentive to grief, and to serve as a last resort. As a case, airport chaplains raise questions about Andrew Abbott's (1988) approach to the professions by defining as "work" actions within airports that other professionals do not. Rather than being in competition with other professional groups for the right to do this "work," they are working to become a companion profession, one that comes alongside.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the San Francisco International Airport installed a "cleansing station" on the ground floor of a parking garage so Muslim cab drivers would have a place to wash, as required by Islamic law, before they pray (Matier and Ross 2013). All but three of the 20 largest airports in the United States have a chapel or meditation room inside the airport for travelers and staff (Cadge forthcoming). And numerous court cases—most notably about Hare Krishna's—have set guidelines about the distribution of religious literature in airports.

While social scientists do not typically think about airports as religious or spiritual sites, these and other examples suggest that spirituality and religion are—at least sometimes—present in airports, perhaps geographically and institutionally on

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the edge (Bender et al. 2013). This article builds on the third “edge”—“religion outside of congregations”—Bender et al. write about in their edited volume by the same name. “We argue,” they write, “for looking ‘beyond’ the congregation as a way to open up sociological approaches to the organization, scope, and development of religion in society” (8). This article expands the secular spaces that Bender et al. consider in their edited volume to include American airports with particular attention to airport chaplains, the religious professionals most consistently present. I ask how airport chaplains as religious professionals in explicitly secular institutions articulate their professional mandate or the basis on which they do their work and how they describe themselves enacting these mandates in the day to day.

Chaplains, today described as professionals that work with people around spiritual, religious, and broad existential questions in a range of sectors, present several challenges to current scholarly approaches to professional mandate and jurisdiction. Chaplains are required by law in the military, federal prisons, and the Veterans Administration (VA) as part of the first amendment guarantee of free exercise of religion (Sullivan 2014). While chaplains have long existed in many other American institutions including healthcare organizations, colleges and universities, and many workplaces, they are not legally mandated to be there. Despite this lack of legal mandate, more than half of the largest American airports have chaplains. Some are volunteers or are paid by local religious groups, while others are paid by airport chaplaincy groups incorporated as legal non-profits. They serve airport staff and travelers alike.

While the literature about professional mandates largely emphasizes the economic, legal, and rhetorical strategies professionals use to make their case or articulate the basis on which they do their work, airport chaplains emphasize the moral demand for their work. They base their work on the need to be present to others in the airport, be aware of and attentive to grief, and serve as a last resort for their own sakes rather than as a way to help the airlines or airports be more functional. Chaplains see “work” around these issues in ways that other professionals do not. Their perspective, in other words, raises questions not about who will do particular work as expected in current approaches to the professions, but in what counts as work and needs to be done. Rather than competing with other professionals in the airport, as Andrew Abbott’s approach to professional jurisdiction would suggest, airport chaplains seek to come alongside other professionals as a companion profession as they articulate the mandate for their work and do it in the day to day (1988). Such insights expand Bender et al.’s third edge by expanding the spaces where sociologists of religion see religion and spirituality and beginning to theorize how religious professionals that work in such spaces situate their work. In conversation with existing research about chaplains, these findings point to commonalities and differences in the mandates that undergird chaplains’ work and offer opportunities to further theorize across diverse institutional settings (Hicks 2010; Cadge 2012; Hansen 2012; Sullivan 2014; Miller and Ngunjiri 2015).

BACKGROUND

Sociologists have long explored the growth and decline of professions generally as well as in religious organizations. Functionalists, interactionists, and scholars with other theoretical approaches have made a range of arguments about the causes and consequences of broad changes with Andrew Abbott's approach to a system of professions currently dominating (Hughes 1958; Freidson 1984; Abbott 1988,). Occupational changes, in this view, are closely tied to competition between groups of professionals within given organizational fields in the context of technological and other shifts. Contests over professional jurisdiction are common with scholars differently emphasizing the cognitive, institutional, and political aspects of those conflicts (Hafferty and Light 1995; Timmermans 2005; Timmermans and Chawla 2009; Kellogg 2011).

Efforts to create or maintain professional jurisdiction in the contexts of occupational shifts often require actors to articulate the mandate or basis on which they do their work. Examples outside of the sociology of religion show different professional groups using legal, economic, rhetorical, and other strategies (Kronus 1976; McMurray 2010; Fayard, Stigliani and Bechky 2016). As medical and pharmaceutical work developed, for example, Kronus (1976) showed pharmacists trying to develop legal bases for their work that would lead to economic support. They also created professional associations through which to advocate together, sought licenses, and lobbied for legislation supportive of their profession. Begun and Linnicott focused on disputes between optometry and ophthalmology showing how licensing, legislative systems, and political maneuvers influenced their professional developments (1987). Examples from other cases show professionals seeking task dominance, geographically relocating, developing new credentials, maligning their competitors, and/or re-framing their work to create or maintain mandates (Nelsen and Barley 1997; Power 1997; Lawrence 2004; Alvesson and Robertson 2006; McMurray 2010;).

Within the sociology of religion, significant work in the 1970s and 1980s—connected to broader functionalist approaches to the professions—asked whether clergy were professionals and what that label implied (Gannon 1971; Bryman 1985). More recent studies focus on the factors that lead individuals to enter positions of religious leadership and what the relationship is between particular jobs and broader senses of their occupations (McDuff and Mueller 2000; Nortomma 2016). Other studies explore predictors of burnout among clergy, and how clergy negotiate their professional and personal lives (Mellow 2002; Hills, Francis and Rutledge 2004; Jacobson et al. 2013). Because most of these studies look at religious professionals in traditional congregational settings, few explore how religious leaders articulate their professional jurisdiction—it is assumed given their positions and the history of those positions.

Stepping outside of congregations, chaplains offer unique opportunities for thinking about professional mandates. By definition they are religious professionals working in secular institutions, positions that invite questions from scholars

and colleagues alike about what their roles include. Research about chaplains focuses on their training and tasks but has said little overall about how they articulate their professional mandates and situate themselves within different types of institutions. Some scholars have argued that chaplains' unique positions make a kind of marginality or organizational "in-between-ness" a defining and consistent characteristic of their work and roles (Paget and McCormack 2006; Cadge 2012; Hansen 2012; Sullivan 2014). In his classic *Hospital Ministry: The Role of the Chaplain Today*, Lawrence Holst devoted a whole chapter to how hospital chaplains work "between worlds." What he calls the "tension" or "enigma" of this organizational position shapes the work; "Each world, or structure, has its own domain and demands, its assumptions and mission" (Holst 1985: 12). Small bodies of literature point to the kinds of tasks chaplains do in prisons, health care organizations, the military, and other settings but without extended attention to the professional mandate or basis on which they do those tasks (Sundt and Cullen 1998; Sundt and Cullen 2002; Bergen 2004; Holifield 2007; Berlinger 2008; Hicks 2008; Otis 2009; Sullivan 2009; Loveland 2014; Beckford and Cairns 2015).

Recent empirical studies point, most consistently, to chaplains making arguments about presence when explaining the mandate or basis for their work. Winnifred Sullivan explains presence as a "minimalist, almost ephemeral form of spiritual care that is, at the same time, deeply rooted in religious histories and suffused with religious references for those who can read them" (Sullivan 2014: 174). Presence was a consistent trope among the health care chaplains I interviewed in large academic medical centers who spoke of it—alongside arguments about healing and hope—to describe the importance and relevance of their work (Cadge 2012).

Presence also figures prominently in the work of military chaplains—evident in memoirs with titles like *A Table in the Presence* by Lt. Carey H. Cash, a chaplain who served with the Marines (Cash 2004). Chaplains are required in the military, however, and this legal mandate may minimize the extent to which presence figures in the discourse of military chaplains (Bergen 2004; Otis 2009; Brinsfield 2010; Whitt 2014). Presence is also a deep part of the work chaplains do in universities, sports setting, and workplaces though additional studies are required to describe how chaplains use it to articulate their professional mandates (Dzikus, Hardin and Waller 2012; Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012; Miller, Ngunjiri and Lorusso 2016).

I build on the work of sociologists of religion and the professions and studies of chaplains across sectors to explore questions of professional mandate among chaplains in a new context—airports. Chaplains are relatively new figures in airports which, as institutions, have few legal or policy obligations around religion (Cadge forthcoming). It was in the 1950s, when air travel for large segments of the population was new, that chaplains and chapels first appeared American airports. The first airport chapels were Catholic built to help bring mass to Catholic staff working long shifts in airports. Boston Archbishop Richard J. Cushing built Our Lady of the Airways in

the early 1950s as the country's first airport chapel. Catholic chapels followed in cities with large Catholic populations—New York, Chicago, and Newark—in subsequent years. Priests were assigned as chaplains at some of these airports while at others they visited from local parishes to offer mass regularly ([Cadge forthcoming](#)).

Catholic priests working at airports in the United States and around the world began to organize in the 1960s and formed an association that, among other things, began to consider questions of professional mandate. Ten Catholic airport priests met in Brussels in 1967 and have continued meeting evolving into what is today a multi-faith group called the International Association of Civil Aviation Chaplains.¹ The work of Catholics airport chaplains was strengthened by the “Pontificia Commissio de Spirituali Migratorum atque Itinerantium Cura” established by Pope Paul VI in 1970 to study and provide pastoral care to people on the move which includes air travelers.² The civil aviation branch of the resulting Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People has actively developed materials, trained chaplains, and provided various types of support since that time.³ In the United States, Catholic chaplains created the National Conference of Catholic Airport Chaplains that also meets regularly and publishes materials including a Catholic Handbook for airport chaplaincy (2011).

Airport chaplains and chapels diversified after 1970 beginning at Idelwild, now John F. Kennedy International Airport in the 1960s, with the addition of chapels and chaplains for Protestants and Jews. It was difficult in many cities, apart from the structure, financial support, and staffing provided by the Catholic Church, for airport chaplains to be financially feasible. In Atlanta, for example, the first airport chapel was created in the early 1970s, but it was not until the 1980s that there was a chaplain regularly present. Various staffing models emerged in different airports ranging from single chaplains who raised most of their salaries themselves, to airport chaplaincies that incorporated as 501c3 organizations and were supported by a Board that paid one or two chaplains, to Catholic priest-chaplains who remain staffed and paid by the Catholic Church ([Cadge forthcoming](#)). Today airport chaplains are supported in multiple ways and none are paid directly by the airport.

Airport chaplains today spend most of their time interacting casually with travelers and staff. Rather than making legal or economic arguments for their work, common in the literature about professional mandates, airport chaplains emphasize the moral demand they perceive for their work. They speak of the importance of being present, seeing and being attentive to grief, and serving as a last resort. In so doing, they define as “work” actions within airports that other professionals do not. As a case, they raise questions about sociological approaches to the professions premised on competition between professional groups over

¹See also <http://www.iacac.info/index.php/iacac/about-iacac/72-history-of-iacacafter>

²See also http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/index.htm

³See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/s_index_civilaviation/rc_pc_migrants_sectioncivilaviation.htm

jurisdiction or turf. Airport chaplains today are side-stepping this competition working, instead, to become a companion profession, one that comes alongside other professions without competing with them.

RESEARCH METHODS

To learn about airport chaplains, I focus on the 20 largest American airports. I measure the size of airports by enplanements at primary airports in 2011 when the project began. By focusing on enplanements rather than the number of flights or weight of cargo that passes through the airport, I aimed to gather data about the airports through which the largest number of air travelers passed in 2011.⁴ I began by gathering available data about the chapels and chaplain at each of these airports from the web, local newspapers, and professional associations. Sixteen of these 20 airports had chapel spaces. Eleven had chaplains. I interviewed the director or head chaplain at these airports by telephone following a semi-structured interview guide (included as Appendix A). One of the chaplains I interviewed served two airports. Another did not have a chaplain but I was able to interview the person who led efforts to create the airport chapel. At airports that did not have chapels or chaplains according to publicly available sources, I called the public relations office to be sure I was not overlooking anything. Several airports had chaplains—either paid or volunteer—in addition to the director or head chaplain. Because I had limited time and was interested in questions of professional jurisdiction and vision for the chaplaincy in each airport I did not interview these others, leaving for future (ideally ethnographic) researchers questions of variation within individual airports. In addition to the interviews, I casually visited six of these airport chapels when traveling for other purposes.

⁴Size is based on the number of passengers as reported by the Federal Aviation Administration's annual ranking of enplanements at primary airports, available through their website (FAA.gov). The ranking of passenger boarding comes from data collected through the FAA's database Air Carrier Activity Information System (ACAIS) in 2011, the most recent data available when this research began. We compared the 2010 and 2011 ranks and, with some slight variation in order, all 20 airports consecutively ranked highest in annual enplanements. By measuring the busiest airports through enplanements, rather than number of flights or weight of cargo transported, we aimed to find how many travelers pass through our domestic airports each year and could potentially use chapel spaces. Airports included were Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International, Chicago O'Hare International, Los Angeles International, Dallas/Fort Worth International, Denver International, John F. Kennedy International, San Francisco International, McCarran International (Las Vegas), Phoenix Harbor International, George Bush Intercontinental (Houston), Charlotte Douglas International, Miami International, Orlando International, Newark Liberty International, Seattle-Tacoma International, Minneapolis-St. Paul International, Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County, Philadelphia International, Boston Logan International Airport, LaGuardia Airport (New York). Our findings differ somewhat from those reported by the Pew Forum: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/06/most-of-the-busiest-u-s-airports-have-dedicated-chapels/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=ecb8897c3b-Religion_Weekly_July_9_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-ecb8897c3b-399963465

Interviews with chaplains lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and focused on the institutional history of chaplaincy at the airport as well as the background of the individual chaplain and his or her daily work. Each interview was digitally recorded, and transcribed. Chaplains shared much of what became the data for this article in response to questions about their daily work and what they see themselves most bringing to the airport. I analyzed the interview and publicly available data inductively using Atlas-TI. I began with a set of general codes and further specified them through memo writing and re-coding as I conducted the analysis. I used Atlas-TI primarily to organize the data I gathered through interviews, newspapers, and other available sources rather than a tool that guided the analysis. Chaplains were given the option, through the informed consent process, to be described by name and location or for me to use a pseudonym and not mention location. Chaplains described by name and city here are so named with their permission.

All but one of the chaplains I interviewed were men with an average age in the late 60s. All were Christian with the majority Catholic—five priests and one deacon—or Protestant (three), Pentecostal (one) or non-denominational (one). Their training varied from traditional ordination to little formal religious education. Some had taken Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), frequently the educational preparation for chaplaincy, but none were required to do so for their airport positions.⁵ Two had been in the Air Force. Most worked in areas of religious life for more than 20 years and had been in chaplaincy for almost all of that time. Their tenures at their airports ranged from 3 to 40 years with an average of 17 years. Most belonged to the International Association of Civil Aviation Chaplains and some also belonged to the National Conference of Catholic Airport Chaplains.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In talking about the basis for their work, airport chaplains across cities emphasized the moral demand for their work. They spoke of the need to be present, to see and be attentive to grief, and to serve as a last resort. All were clear, in thinking about their work and the basis for it, that they serve both travelers and staff. In the words of one chaplain, “I deal with two types of people: I deal with the traveler and here we have 38 million that come through each year. And I deal with the workers...who may be having family problems, or kids get sick so I go see them in the hospital...” They described themselves doing so in airports which are crowded and chaotic. “People are a little discombobulated when they come to an airport

⁵Directors of airport chaplaincy vary in terms of the importance they place on training and the kind of training they require. One was clear that he is trying to raise the training bar for airport chaplains by requiring them to take some CPE while others simply do the training they think the position requires at the airport.

because it is a strange place,” one chaplain explained. “It’s not a home for anyone and it’s really not the place you want to be.... And you walk in and your papers are scrutinized and your luggage is rifled through and your body is patted down, so it’s rather an invasive kind of scary thing for a lot of people.” While some regularly served ritual roles at the airport—either by leading religious services or participating in ceremonies related to adoption from overseas, events connected to the Make a Wish Foundation, and other city-specific special gatherings—almost none spoke of ritual when describing the basis on which they do their work. In describing the basis for their work they refer to three common themes.

Presence

Like among chaplains in other sectors, airport chaplains consistently spoke about being present and seeing presence as the basis of what they do. “We call it the ministry of presence,” said the chaplain at JFK, “...what I actually do, I walk through the terminals.” Another chaplain, a former Air Force chaplain, used similar language, “One of the great traditions of the air force ministry, and its certainly typical of all the military ministries is the concept of presence. Just to be there.” Presence as a frame is taught through Clinical Pastoral Education some airport chaplains took as part of their training for the military (Cadge 2012; Sullivan 2014). Presence mostly seems to describe listening, supporting, and paying attention. “I think the sense of presence is the most important thing,” one explained, “...to be present in the community....and also be active listeners inside the community.” In the words of another, “It’s the realization that God is present wherever there is creation and that presence is a source of comfort and strength and hope and vision.” It is from the importance of being present with others as listeners and witnesses that airport chaplains see the other elements of their jobs developing.

To be present, chaplains tried in several ways to connect with travelers and airport staff. At two or three airports chaplains had access to the airport’s internal communication center that put out alerts and provided information that helped them decide where to spend their time. At the majority, however, chaplains walked around and were thoughtful/strategic about where and how they do so. A Catholic deacon in Charlotte told me he “loiters with intent,” interacting mostly with staff except baggage handlers who work at a distance from the main areas of the airport. Some chaplains wear a clerical collar or other formal religious garb to help people recognize them. Others—like in Phoenix—wear lanyards around their necks that say chaplain and badges that help them move easily through security. Regardless of appearance, they have to figure out who to spend time with and how to negotiate these interactions as they go.

Most of this negotiation takes place intuitively as airport chaplains decide where to walk, who looks in need, and how to build relationships—some lasting and some transient—as they try to be presences in airports. While sometimes there are obvious signs, like someone crying, that draw them to particular individuals more of it seems to be reading facial and body gestures and simply paying attention to what is happening as they walk through the terminals. It is this

quality of attention and care that they see as at the center of their professional mandate. A chaplain in Orlando looks for people who seem to be in distress or are alone, especially older people. The Catholic priest at JFK says he walks through the terminals to “look for trouble.” He identifies specific individuals saying, “You just see people that are completely lost, whose eyes are everywhere and who don’t know what to do. And you simply approach them and ask is there anything we can help you with?” Some ask him where the bathrooms are while others share “fears of flying, people who are going to a funeral...or just simply people lost – lets call it emotionally lost in life.” The chaplain badge, he says, can open up conversation with all of these people. A chaplain in Atlanta calls these “good Samaritan moments” reflecting, “you’ll be walking along and there’ll be a woman crying her eyes out and nobody will see her. I mean, they just walk right by ‘em and just on their way cause they’ve gotta catch a flight and can’t take the time and...you know, you just stop and say, what’s going on? And they say something like, I just went through a divorce and now I’m having to get on the plane....Nobody talks to them.”

While most of these interactions are in passing, a few turn in to long-term relationships. One chaplain explained, “I had a psychiatrist that used to come and visit me (laughter). I used to tell him – oh, you are in trouble! (laughter) And then there was this one woman who would always periodically throughout the year would go to visit her family...she was a regular.” While this chaplain could be more present with people he got to know over time, he aimed to cultivate presence in each of his interactions throughout the day.

Time and not enough staff were the biggest challenge chaplains noted in their efforts to be present. “The only limitation we have are people,” one explained, “in the sense that I don’t have enough teams because of the distance of the airport say to work with the baggage handlers.” At this airport chaplains tend to stay on the concourses where there are more people rather than explicitly seeking out staff at a distance. At other airports chaplains specifically sought out different employee groups; “My chaplains go all over the entire airport. I have one guy that assigned to the jet rig, the baggage claim. I have a chaplain that goes around the administrative office, the fire department, police department because not everybody is included inside the terminal.”

As they loiter and are present, many chaplains work to become a familiar face, especially with airport staff. A Catholic priest in Chicago, for example, who wears traditional clerical garb, spends most of his time in the terminals. “After awhile people who see me, they’ll say, Father, I’ve seen you around. I want to talk to you....Even though I have to get out to physically wander around it is such great feeling to be able to be present to people in whatever need they have and to let them know that they have easy access to a main of the cloth and to God – I can point them in the right direction and that is what I do every day.” Similarly stressing personal relationships and being present through relationships, a chaplain in Dallas says their concept there is to “walk and minister – not sit in your office and wait for it to come to you.”

By paying attention and working to become a friendly face, chaplains see themselves seeing people who would otherwise fall through the cracks. In specifically mentioning staff and flight crews, a chaplain in Newark spoke about their crazy hours and the difficulty some have connecting with local congregations. In one example, the member of an airline crew wanted to join a congregation but could not attend the required classes due to her work schedule. This chaplain figured out how to teach her what she needed to know when she passed through the airport explaining, “your little square doesn’t fit into our squares. And that happens to a lot of our people. So that’s why it’s important to have a chaplaincy present.” It is by being present and working to build relationships that chaplains see the need for their work and the opportunity to do it.

Death and Grief

In addition to basing their work on the need to be present to people, chaplains see death and grief in the airport and view attending to it as central to their professional mandate. Several chaplains mentioned the number of people traveling who are recently bereaved. “I would say about 20% of travelers,” one chaplain estimated explaining, “I don’t mean that their mother died or that their sister is dead....they might be going to see their mother for the last time....” Other chaplains emphasized funerals. “Funerals are a big reason why people travel through the airport.” He then told a story about connecting with a family in route to a funeral and offering a blessing at the gate just before they got on their flight. It is in these situations, one chaplain mentioned, when they can be present; “just be able to sit down and talk with somebody for a little while, no matter what their faith is, they can come and talk to somebody who is a religious leader and be able to get some words of comfort or, again, have somebody to know, as they leave, that somebody’s going to pray for them.” Seeing people traveling for reasons related to death and grief and being able to be present to and with them is a second piece of the mandate airport chaplains see for their work.

As they do more generally, chaplains identify people who are grieving by just watching and paying particular attention to people who are crying. As one chaplain explained, “you’ll say what’s going on. And they’ll say well my father just died...they just called me and I tried to get home before he died and I didn’t make it.” These are “ministries of the moment” the chaplain reflected, “it really is ten minutes and then you’ll never see them again.” Like in other situations this chaplain tries in these moments to connect with the traveler and help her/him along the way.

Chaplains also play roles around death when dead bodies move through airports and people who work at airports die. One chaplain spoke of supporting family members when the body of a loved one who died in a military incident was returned. “When this happens on a commercial flight [i.e. a body is transported], the passengers are told when the flight lands that they are to remain on board. They are asked to stay seated on the plane until there is an honor guard. The family is brought into the tarmac.” This chaplain explains that he often stops the protocol—getting in trouble in the process—because the family wants

to touch the coffin and he supports them through this. Similarly, in Charlotte, the chaplains work with United Service Organizations to support families. "We'll invite the immediate family members as the casket will come down and we'll do a maximum of a two minute prayer...then we escort the family back pass the safe areas...then the airport organization takes over and escorts the hearse off and we escort the family back." A chaplain in Dallas described his role in these situations as to "honor God" or to be a silent presence and "support the entire system."

Chaplains are also frequently the individuals who notify loved ones when someone dies in flight. A few times a month in Atlanta, for example, a passenger becomes seriously ill or dies in flight—typically on an international flight. The chaplain explains that s/he, "intercepts the family members here in Atlanta and try to help them understand that the passenger is being taken to the hospital." At another airport the chaplain works closely with the state police as the person who is officially responsible for informing the next of kin if an individual dies in flight.

Airport chaplains also regularly support staff around the deaths of co-workers. The chaplain at one airport regularly says funeral masses for staff. Another spoke about supporting staff when a few colleagues died in an accident at the airport and when another colleague committed suicide. "We maintained a presence... for a couple of days and talked with the people that knew them personally." And another mentioned that just the day before one of the customs workers died following an illness and he supported co-workers.

Chaplains also act around death related to airline disasters. One airport had been the scene of a crash and a hostage situation with the chaplain explaining, "in all three critical incidents the chaplaincy played a direct role in supplying pastors to help care for victims and families." These are one of the only situations in which chaplains mentioned being formally a part of the airport via comprehensive emergency plans. In the words of one chaplain, "I'm on the first responder list and every time there is an incident that happens I'm on the alert to come." Most chaplains spoke of at least one airline accident, sometimes involving a small airplane, that led them to be called and then to offer or coordinate grief counseling and support. Some have to notify airport officials if they plan to be more than an hour away from the airport so someone else can cover their role as an on call member of the critical incident team.

Last Resort

In addition to needing to be present and seeing and responding to death and grief in the airport in ways others do not, chaplains spoke of their professional mandate in terms of being a last resort, a safety net in the airport when there are no more options. Chaplains see themselves as a last resort for people when they have nowhere else to turn. Some describe doing this as they walk the terminals. "You become a lifeline for those that are looking for it." Others do this more informally as they become known around the airport. "The police bring situations," a chaplain in Atlanta explained, "there might be an individual who they really don't want to put in jail and if they

can just get a little bit of help, we might be able to get them home to their mom or their brother or their friend or something....And there's no one here at the airport....nobody else really has those types of resources so they will bring them to us." The budget of chaplaincy programs varies dramatically, but most have at least a little discretionary money raised from supporters that help them help people in need. Chaplains might help with a bus ticket home, make some calls to family members or otherwise try to connect with and care for these people. People in need are travelers and staff, this chaplain explained, as well as occasional employees who need money for food or help with emergency travel due to illness.

At a few airports, the chaplaincy is formally situated in the airport as the place people are sent when they are out of options. In these cases the office receives funds from state or local organizations expressly for this purpose. In Phoenix, for example, the chaplaincy partners with a social worker and receives funding for this specific kind of work. As the chaplain described in a newspaper article, "When they're out of options, when they don't have a place to send a person, they're sending them to us." On one recent morning, the two dealt with a homeless veteran, a family of four stranded without cash and a young man who walked into the office claiming hunger and poverty...." (Ruelas 2007).

Religious and More Secular Frames

As they articulate their mandates and do their daily work, chaplains speak in both religious and more secular terms. Some use explicitly religious language. One priest described himself as a "man of the cloth" who helps people get closer to God. And another priest, "The most important role I have as chaplain of the airport is to be present, to be Christ to these people, whether it is a worker, a traveler, anyone...." A Protestant chaplain in Dallas similarly sees himself as "the instrument of God" in the lives of the people with whom he interacts; "if anything, chaplaincy is an instrument to meet and help the needs of people." In the words of another, "I can just be an instrument for God to use as he/she sees fit." A few chaplains explicitly tie this work to that of Jesus, "I'm Jesus in the marketplace everyday...when I look at the ministry of Jesus, he was literally in the market walking through the crowds every day. He wasn't in the synagogue waiting for people to come to him...."

While some chaplains see themselves representing God and offering a connection and oasis of calm—a visible reminder that God is there—few speak with travelers and staff in these terms. Aware of their organizational "in-between-ness," most speak in more humanitarian terms. While describing themselves as reminders of God or like Jesus to me, they emphasized that proselytizing is not allowed. While they can and do speak with people about God and their religious traditions, especially when people bring it up, more of their work is to be a humanitarian who helps people in a myriad of ways, especially when there is no one else left to do so.

CONCLUSIONS

While sociologists have not traditionally thought of airports as religious or spiritual locations, this case study responds to Bender et al.'s call to consider religion outside of congregations in places sociologists have not traditionally looked (2013). In addition to airport chapels and occasional legal conflicts, airport chaplains are the most consistent religious or spiritual presence in airports raising questions for sociologists, travelers, and staff alike about the basis on which they do their work.

The eleven airport chaplains described here were quite consistent in seeing the basis for their work or professional mandate in the need they perceived to be present in the airport, to see and be attentive to grief, and to serve as a last resort. While some spoke with me about their work using explicitly religious language, they were clear that proselytizing was not permitted in the airport. Some of these frames likely result from their training in Clinical Pastoral Education while others, especially around being a last resort may be unique to the transient nature of airports as organizations. The seemingly heterogeneous cultures of airports, in other words, seem to be facilitating common professional mandates among airport chaplains.

Such findings, especially about presence, reinforce arguments Sullivan, Hansen, Cadge and others have made about presence as the basis for chaplains' work in other sectors (Hicks 2010; Cadge 2012; Hansen 2012; Sullivan 2014). The legal mandate for chaplains' work in the military, federal prisons, and the Veteran's Administration, but not in other sectors raises further questions about whether arguments about presence are made or used different in these sectors that future researchers might explore.

The fact that airport chaplains also root part of their professional mandate in issues of death and grief also reinforces arguments I made about death being central to the work of health care chaplains and one of the only common topics around which all chaplains work in the academic medical centers she studied (2012). Military chaplains also do significant work around death and anecdotal reports from chaplains in universities, workplaces, and ports suggest the same. Such findings suggest hypotheses about death as a, perhaps the, common issue around which all chaplains work regardless of setting and raise questions at the micro level about how they do what some sociologists have called this "dirty work" (Hughes 1962).

More broadly, airport chaplains help sociologists of religion see the importance of thinking about professional mandate in settings outside of congregations where religious professionals have not traditionally been present and considering how they situate themselves in those organizations. They also raise questions for future researchers about how religious professionals in such situations negotiate related ethical conflicts. A few examples from these interviews suggest that they may be more likely to identify with the airport or airlines than staff and passengers in such cases. In one case, a chaplain described being trained by an airline to be part of disaster relief operations in ways that focus on the victims and their families and try to minimize collateral damage, like lawsuits. Chaplains at another

airport provided days of support to passengers stranded due to weather conditions. “That was very memorable to all of us,” one remembered, “because we spent the whole week basically living with them and feeding them everyday.” While chaplains could have advocated for hotel rooms or other care for these people, they were called to represent the airport in serving them there and that is what they did. Most chaplains also seem to align themselves with airlines as employers by giving staff a place to vent but not advocating for broader structural changes. To the extent that these findings are replicated in additional studies they suggest that chaplains are likely to identify with the institutions within which they work—rather than the people they serve—in ways that shape their roles (Seales 2012).

Finally, this case raises questions about the competition between professional groups that undergirds much current thinking in the sociology of the professions. While numerous examples support Abbott’s argument about professional groups competing for jurisdictional as occupations rise and fall, the chaplains described here present an alternative example. Rather than making legal or economic arguments common in the literature about professional mandates, airports emphasize the moral demand for their work—identifying as “work” things that other professionals in their organizations do not. Much of the work airport chaplains do is a kind of invisible religious labor, an organizational extra that if they do not do will not be done. Rather than competing with others to do this work, therefore, airport chaplains are working to become a companion profession that comes alongside others without competing with them. This may be unique to religious or caring professions that can offer “extra” work not regulated by the government or required by the institutional host. Future studies that explore these questions among chaplains, optional in other sectors or other groups that provide “extra” kinds of work, can be used to extend or refute these findings.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide, “God on the Fly: The Work of Airport Chaplains”

Thank you for participating in this study. I’m hoping to learn a bit about your work, how you came to this work, and how you see religion and spirituality in your daily work. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Background

1. To start, can you tell me a bit about chaplaincy at this airport?
 - a. When did it start?
 - b. How did it start?
 - c. Is there a mission statement—what are the goals of the chaplaincy?
 - d. Who is involved?
 - e. How is the work divided?
 - f. Are chaplains paid or volunteers?

2. Can you also tell me a bit about the chapel or meditation space here?
 - a. What is its history?
 - b. Why was it opened?
 - c. Who was involved in designing and putting it together?
 - d. Who do you see using it?
 - e. How often do you spend time there?
 - f. Why is it important for airports to have these spaces?
3. And how about you, how did you come to work as a chaplain in the airport?
 - a. Education
 - b. Previous positions
 - c. Formal certification or licensure
 - d. Which organizations were involved in training? In endorsing?
 - e. Did you feel called to this work in some sense?
 - f. What has kept you doing this work over time?
 - g. Who is your boss?
 - h. Where is God for you in this?
4. Can you tell me about a usual day?
 - a. Walk through a day
 - b. Are there other things you do in a usual week? Month? Ask about attending formal ceremonies, giving prayers, etc.
 - c. Are there times or situations in the airport in which you are always called?
 - d. Tell me about the people you work with—their demographics including religious demographics
 - e. Who do you work most closely with in the airport?
 - f. Are there people here that you don't work with much at all?
 - g. Do you have an office?
 - h. When you are not in your office, what are the usual places you go?
 - i. Do you have a formal relationship with a local congregation?
 - j. To what extent do you work as an educator? What are you educating about?
5. What do you bring to the airport as a chaplain?
 - a. Why do airports need chaplains?
 - b. What do you most bring to the airport?
6. What is the best part of this work for you?
 - a. Can you tell me about an especially memorable situation?
 - b. How about a situation in which you felt like you really made a difference
7. What is the most difficult part of this work for you?
 - a. What makes it challenging?
 - b. How often and in what ways do you deal with death or end of life situations?
 - c. How often and in what ways do you deal with conflicts?

8. Can you give me a sense of how religion and spirituality are present in the airport apart from your office?
 - a. Do you think spirituality or religion informs the work of your non-chaplain colleagues? How?
 - b. How often do you talk with non-chaplain colleagues about spirituality and religion? Can you give me an example?
 - c. What do you mostly talk with your non-chaplain colleagues about?
9. How do you work with people who are religiously different from you?
 - a. Can you give me an example of a situation that went well?
 - b. Does the airport have a formal policy about religious diversity?
10. What questions am I not asking that I should be to better understand your work?

Demographics:

- Gender
- Religion
- Formal certifications
- Age range
- Time in chaplaincy/religious work
- Time at the airport
- What professional organizations do you belong to?

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