

Tribute to Professor Elaine Wainwright

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Given my relative newness here, I feel a bit diffident about offering a tribute to Elaine on her retirement; I was relieved to discover that there would be plenty of opportunity for those of you who've been here longer than me would also be taking the opportunity to speak.

So I will just speak about the things that have struck me about Elaine's leadership of Theology in the five years I've been here, and then will hand over to those of you who've known the discipline, the department, the School and even the Consortium in far more depth and for a lot longer than I have.

When people offer encomiums to academics, they often dwell on their record of publication, the impact of those publications and so on. And, of course, you only need to hear back from the conferences in our area, or to field applications from PhD students wanting to work with Elaine that she's had plenty of impact in that regard. But I want to dwell on a feature of Elaine's leadership that's accorded far less value in an academic setting – mistakenly in my view – and that's Elaine's kindness, or, if you like, her *manaakitanga* towards everyone involved in Theology, whether staff or students.

When I first arrived from the fairly austere School of Divinity, History and Philosophy in Aberdeen, one of the things that struck me was the way in which our less than prepossessing digs over in the Fisher building had been turned into a place of hospitality, where students often came for a place to sit and talk or to browse the net, and where guests could be welcomed.

But more striking than that, in my mind, has been the consistent care that Elaine has shown for the people around her - both staff and students. Often, when I've lost my patience with problematic students, and have ready to throw the university calendar at them, Elaine has called out the better angel of my nature, and reminded me that students are always to be treated as people rather than as problems or names on a list.

In all sorts of other ways, too many to mention, Elaine has shown tremendous consideration and patience towards me, and no doubt other members of staff. Even though, I would rather not have my birthday remembered each year, Elaine remembers it each year and finds some way of marking it. And that is just a rather trivial example of the consideration she has shown to me as a staff member. More importantly, the consideration that Elaine has shown towards all of us has set the tone for what has been a remarkably harmonious and friendly department. I know from talking to colleagues elsewhere in the world that this is not something one can take for granted.

And lest it be imagined that we of Theology spend our time in a perpetual group hug, I would also like to also pay tribute to Elaine's tremendous efficiency as an administrator. In my five years here, she's launched us through a review of the Theology degree, our incorporation into the Faculty of Arts, the reorganisation of the Theology curriculum, and finally the negotiations for the incorporation of Theology and Religious Studies into the BA programme. Many of these transitions have required the diplomatic skills of a Madeleine Albright or a Metternich - not to mention the patience of Job. Having watched these changes at first hand, I have often thought that a lesser individual – here I'm thinking mainly of myself – would not have survived them without, at the very least, standing in a dark room behind closed doors and swearing at length. However, if Elaine has ever done this, I have not been within earshot.

Anyway, as I said, I want to leave plenty of room and time for others who have been here for longer to make their own contributions. So I'll end by saying thanks to Elaine for her leadership here and all of her many kindnesses. You've set us up well in terms of the ethos I hope we can carry into the future, even if that future is still not entirely clear. I'm glad that you'll be around for a bit into the next year. I hope that you'll keep in contact with us and be an advocate for us in the wider Australasian and global academic community.

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