

**Title:** Chaplaincy and multi-faith activities

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Peter Hastie asks Peter Barnes the following question: *There seems to be a lot of confusion today about the meaning of Christian love. If we shouldn't be fighting over the colour of church pews or school uniforms, are there issues where we may have strong disagreement?*

Yes, it's not wrong to express disagreement — sometimes strong disagreement — when the truth of the gospel is under attack. Non-Christians don't understand this and think that love requires us to pretend these issues don't exist.

For instance, the authorities at the University of Western Sydney where I am a chaplain think that all religions are essentially the same. They want us all to join in united worship. Only recently they organised a joint religious service where the chaplains were supposed to speak beside a cross, an icon and an indigenous message stick. The Catholics got all excited about this because the Muslims spoke first (they had one minute) and they spoke about good behaviour. The whole thing was a farce. I didn't participate. But the extraordinary thing was that the Muslims, who don't believe that Jesus was crucified, stood in front of a cross and tried to say something meaningful. The whole thing was absolute nonsense.

A chaplain's meeting reported that "the Catholics and the Uniting people are holding a multi-faith service every month and all the religions are there". Of course, the university thinks this is wonderful; it's the way to bring peace and harmony to the campus. Unfortunately, the opposite is true: it's the way to evacuate the truth of all meaning. If there is no truth, then there is no foundation to fellowship. The way we enter into true fellowship according to 1 John is by believing the truth about Jesus. Naturally Christians will always treat people well and with proper courtesy whether we agree with them or not. However Christian love cannot exist where Christian doctrine is denied or disregarded.

In fact, it's quite the reverse. Love and truth go together in 1 John.