

Laudatio honorary doctor George Fitchett, Dies Natalis, University of Humanistic Studies

Dear professor Fitchett, dear George,

‘The issue facing professional health care chaplains is not whether but how to become a research-informed profession.’

If I had to choose one quote from your extensive writings that characterizes the importance of your academic work for the field of chaplaincy, it would probably be this quote from your 2002 paper in the *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, titled: “Health Care Chaplaincy as a Research-Informed Profession: How We Get There.” (If I had to choose one sentence for a statue at the Dom square outside this building here, it would probably be the same sentence.)

This one sentence, I think, is characteristic for the enormous effort you have made in your career during the last thirty years to (a) strengthen the practice of chaplaincy, (b) to increase awareness of what chaplains contribute and (c) to promote interdisciplinary relationships. Three urgent and vital reasons for integrating research in chaplaincy, in order to find a solid foundation for a profession that is largely threatened in its existence in our contemporary culture.

One of your messages over the past 20 years is that all chaplains should become research literate at the least, which means “(1) Being able to describe the basic elements of good qualitative and quantitative research. (2) Being able to identify specific publications sources where quality research concerning ministry is found. (3) Reading several new research articles related to their ministry each year.” But a certain percentage of chaplains should also do research themselves, as part of their regular job description.

This university in the centre of The Netherlands, dedicated to the education of humanist chaplains, considers your ground breaking work as an inspiration for developing chaplaincy as a research based profession. Your acceptance to receive an honorary doctorate from this university that celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, therefore, is a present to our university, and will hopefully also have its positive impact on the development of chaplaincy in our country and worldwide.

Being trained as a certified chaplain and pastoral supervisor, you began writing about spiritual assessment as one of the pioneers in chaplaincy, in 1988, one year before this university was founded. After many papers, at a mature age you qualified in quantitative research (epidemiology) which was supported by a 5-year Career Development Award in 2002 from the NIH. You were the first chaplain to receive such an award. Your research has examined the relationship between religion and health in a variety of community and clinical populations. Your contributions to chaplaincy and spiritual care have been recognized with awards from the Association of Professional Chaplains (the 2006 Anton Boisen Professional Service Award) and the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (the 2014 Helen Flanders Dunbar Award). Your book on spiritual assessment, *Assessing Spiritual Needs* (2002), is widely used in academic and clinical training programs in the US and around the world. And you are also the editor, with Steve Nolan, of an influential book of chaplain case studies, *Spiritual Care in Practice: Case Studies in Healthcare Chaplaincy* (2015).

At this moment, as a Professor and Director of Research in the Department of Religion, Health, and Human Values, Rush University Medical Center, Chicago Illinois, you are one of the principal investigators and leaders of the Transforming Chaplaincy program, which aims to better equip healthcare chaplains to use research to guide, evaluate, and advocate for the daily spiritual care they provide patients, family members and colleagues.

Dear George, in academia you are known as an accessible, hardworking and modest man. As I informed myself on your long and fruitful career, I discovered that your very first scientific publication, 43 years ago in *Pastoral Psychology*, has an interesting title: "Sometimes it is better to receive." I hope you may confirm this today, as your important contribution to chaplaincy is awarded with this honorary doctorate of the University of Humanistic Studies.

Utrecht, 29 januari 2019

Prof dr Carlo Leget, University of Humanistic Studies