

### Case Study: Employee Ben

Ben is a Uniting Church minister who has been unable to find a full time placement. He decides to build on his pastoral skills into something which a Uniting church agency might use.

After doing a TAFE course in counselling Ben accepts an opportunity to work as an entry level worker in a group house setting. Ben expects to find that the Uniting church culture he is familiar with is part of the UnitingCare agency. Ben likes its vision of a compassionate respectful and just community in which all people participate and flourish, but there are some issues which arise over his first twelve months.

#### *Spirituality*

Ben is asked about his religious views by a client. Ben takes the opportunity to talk about his Christian faith. In a later case conference his manager asks Ben whether this he is proselytising. After the conversation Ben realises that his manager expects Ben to turn this topic back to the client as a reflective question rather than an opportunity to provide an answer. Ben is rather surprised to find that the topic of spirituality is contentious within a Uniting Church agency.

#### *Opportunities Lost*

Ben has a sense that there is more to be done for his clients. So Ben raises this with his manager who understands the opportunities but turns Ben's suggestions down. Ben is frustrated that the manager isn't able to move the service in a new direction. It appears that the service is tightly constrained by its funding. Congregations don't have this sort of constraint and Ben finds it rather limiting.

#### *Reporting*

Ben feels like too much of his time goes on writing reports. This week is his fortnightly meeting where case studies and reporting frameworks are on the agenda. Ben finds himself having to describe his interactions with clients and having to qualify and quantify his interactions with clients. After highly autonomous in ministry he is now surrounded by staff each who have an opinion about his work. Ben finds this difficult as sometimes he holds views which are challenged by his colleagues. He wonders whether respect is a two way street. It feels like they are respecting the client but not each other. This is confronting and Ben wonders if it is him or the organisation.

#### *Discordant issues*

The agency takes a stand on an issue which Ben doesn't agree with. It's an issue which Ben has considered in his theological study so he makes a time to meet with organisational leadership. Ben finds that the leadership listens but he is unable to change its decision. Later Ben finds himself having to explain to others a position he internally disagrees with. He wonders at what point does disagreement become internal betrayal? He wonders if his faith has become a game of internal brinkmanship where at some point one just leaves. Or is it possible to internally negotiate with my own values about things that matter?

#### *Christmas Card*

Ben heard that last year there were complaints that the corporate Christmas card was too Christian. This year Ben feels it lacks any traditional sign of Christianity so he decides to write to the organisations minister. In part this is the response which Ben receives...

The Uniting Church is a very eclectic mob. Some agencies have decided to hold firmly to a Christian identity. While others have moved away from such an approach. Clearly we are one of the latter.



Our predecessors included non Uniting Church people on our board as a way of demonstrating that we value the gifts of those who are sympathetic but not on “our team”, so to speak. This means we have moved from being “a Christian Agency” to an agency “shaped by a Christian/ Protestant values and heritage”. Our card is an expression of accessibility, inclusiveness and care at Christmas, and I’m very comfortable with its look and feel.