

CHAPLAINCY EVERYWHERE



SESSION SIX

Chaplaincy in Today's World: a Look at our Context

The world around us is forever changing; chaplaincy is a highly responsive ministry! This session will help you take a fresh look at your local community as you ask the question: where might God be calling us to engage? This is a mapping exercise that might lead you to some unexpected conclusions.

Welcome



The world around us is forever changing. New buildings are built and others are torn down; people are born and others die; one person starts a new job and another retires; one family joins a community and another leaves to make a new start in a different place. The world is in constant flux and we might at times wonder whether we can make a lasting change in an ever-changing world!

This session will get us thinking about where we might get involved in chaplaincy. You might discern that there is an opportunity for chaplaincy work in your town centre or at a local market, in a local factory or with another local employer. Perhaps a sports team or leisure centre would benefit from a chaplain, or there may be openings in a transport hub or a local college or school. The vision to see chaplaincy everywhere means wherever people gather. A team of chaplains being present to people can make a real difference in a community and in individual lives. Of course, you cannot reach out to everyone at once. This session will help you to focus on where you can begin to make a difference and to consider what you might actually do once you get there!

Opening Prayer



Take a few moments to focus upon God as maker, word and Spirit. You might find it helpful to light a candle or play some music. At an appropriate time, say together the words of the following prayer:

**God who is present with us now, you know our needs.
Draw us ever deeper into your love, life and story.
Empower us to be obedient to your call and to respond with courage.
Guide our thoughts and our conversations during this session.
Open our minds to the possibilities and shape our practice;
that we may be present to others, caring for their needs, transforming situations.
To bring something of lasting value to a world that is ever changing.
We worship you, the God who is with us, both in our thinking and in our doing.
Amen.**

Chaplaincy in a Diverse World



The world in which we live is diverse, and opportunities for chaplaincy work abound. Public life is conducted in an increasingly diverse public space with a great variety of languages, nationalities, ages, experiences, education, resources and much more. Yet, within our diversity there are also similarities, things that bind human beings together at the deepest level, even when our experiences of life differ.

Bible reading: Psalm 148



We see from Psalm 148 that plurality is a part of God's good creation. Creation is incredibly varied, bursting forth with life in countless forms: wondrous variations on a theme! This dynamic and abundant creation gives glory to God and displays the creator's style! Therefore, our difference is something to be celebrated, treasured and protected. The challenge for God's people then, and especially for chaplaincy as a ministry that swims in the sea of plurality, is to seek to understand and embrace difference, to celebrate variety and to let each voice be heard.



The Scriptures speak about Jesus Christ being the one who can reconcile differences, unite broken communities and through whom a true and lasting embrace can overcome exclusion. In a world in which people often push away those who are different, Christ's followers are called to be people who embrace otherness and celebrate difference. This vulnerability is our great strength! Chaplains might therefore be described as Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation.

Furthermore, the spaces that chaplaincy creates can become the spaces that draw communities together. Chaplaincy not only brings communities together through a deeper understanding of one another, but this action is also a prophetic vision of our future: where one day, everything will find its place in Christ. This is the cosmic unity that Paul and other New Testament writers speak of.

The idea of chaplaincy being a ministry of reconciliation and community cohesion is a powerful one that frames many of the practical conversations that follow.

The Ultimate Responsive Ministry



Chaplaincy has been called the ultimate responsive ministry. Chaplaincy responds to situations and needs. It is an incredibly malleable ministry: it fits in lots of different spaces. This is why chaplaincy can form a substantial part of a church's mission in a local community and also why chaplaincy really is a powerful framework within which to understand our own witness, wherever we may find ourselves.

Each and every community is different; no two places have precisely the same set of social factors. Therefore, as we seek to respond to our local community, we must bear in mind that, although we can learn from other chaplains and examples of chaplaincy, the chaplaincy work we will be involved in needs to respond to the local context. There is no 'one size fits all' model when it comes to chaplaincy! Its power is that it can respond to unique situations with thoughtfulness and wisdom.

Responding to whom?



The first conversation that you must therefore have together is about who you are responding to. Who lives in your community? What happens in your community? When do those things happen? Where do they happen? What specific needs are there? What social factors do you need to bear in mind? What are the rhythms of the town? When is market day? When are the quiet times where shop staff might be available to talk? What is special about where you live? Are there canals? Sporting venues with racing days or matches? A showground with regular community events? What are the key civic events? Who are the large employers?

In essence, you need to make some lists, or even stick some pins on a map in a way which begins to answer the question: what makes your community tick? Spend some time talking together about your community and make some notes.

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Responding to God's action



We live in a world where God is involved, much more than we can see or know. God is at work in people's lives, whether they realise it or not. The great strength of the worldwide church is that it is localised and therefore able to respond to local needs with cultural sensitivity. This means that the local church is well placed to make a lasting difference.

The local church finds itself caught up in the much bigger story of God's mission as we respond to Jesus' specific call to go into all the world and make disciples. The local church is therefore called to perceive what God is already doing in its community and respond to the invitation.

In this way, chaplaincy responds to local needs based upon God's ongoing action in a specific place. Chaplaincy might be described as the ministry of being sensitive to the work of God in the world and having the courage to go to those places and join in. These two qualities form a powerful response to a world in need.

What is God doing already?



- Have a conversation together and answer the following question: **Where do you see God at work in your community?** Before you do, take some time to be still and have a time of prayer, inviting God to guide you.

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A fresh perspective



Very often, we fail to see the opportunities that are right before us. This is often due to our overfamiliarity with the places we live. Often, we need to look again at the things that are familiar to us and try to see things from a fresh perspective. We need to do this important work because many of these familiar places present significant opportunities for chaplaincy. Your local supermarket that employs one thousand staff members; the row of shops down your road; the council offices that employ hundreds of workers; the local police station; the primary school in the housing estate; the magistrates' court in session day after day. These familiar places are often invisible to local people because they are part of the fabric of the community. Yet in each place, there are people who would benefit from the presence of chaplains.

Look again



- Spend some time together noticing your community. What opportunities do you see for chaplaincy in your village, town or city? Who are you geographically well-placed to serve?

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Working together

Bible reading: John 17: 20-26



Unity is our future; everything coming together in Christ is our destiny as God’s people. As we are unified and begin to find our place in God’s kingdom, we glorify God. The themes of unity and glorifying God through growing into the image of Christ are central to Christian life. They are also the goals of God’s mission.



Some of the very best expressions of chaplaincy can be seen as churches work together and even with other faith groups. Ecumenical collaboration and multi-faith teams can lead to community-transforming work. In prisons and hospitals this kind of collaboration is the only way of working. Ecumenical and multi-faith chaplaincy teams work together around the world as they respond together to the needs around them, as they lay aside differences and focus on their common beliefs and care for those in need of support at different times.

As Christians, the belief that Christ can hold diversity together in unity as God’s Holy Spirit works to heal and restore creation guides our involvement in our local community. Looking for opportunities to work with other churches and community groups, as well as those who practice other faiths, can strengthen rather than compromise chaplaincy work. The powerful witness of Christ’s followers working in unity with others is not only a prophetic act, but a healing one too as we work to knock down the walls that too often divide communities.

Working towards unity



Talk together about what opportunities there are to work with others. Identify any current chaplaincy work that is going on. Is there the scope to strengthen and support that work? What benefits are there in working with other faith groups in the community to respond to local needs?

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Being



We have begun to identify where God might be drawing us to engage. However, there is still more work to do to realise that vision. But before we get into the details of exactly **what**, we need to think about **how** we are going to 'be' in that space!

Different chaplaincy situations suit different approaches. In some situations, chaplains need to be gentle and quiet in the way they journey with others. In other situations, chaplains have to be larger than life and full of energy! It takes all sorts of people to serve in the community through the ministry of chaplaincy. One of the benefits of working as a team means that different people have different strengths and the whole team can offer a holistic chaplaincy ministry to a specific place!

How will you 'be'?



Spend some time talking together about how you might behave within chaplaincy in different places. If you have identified several different contexts for chaplaincy, talk about how you might approach each place differently. Compare and contrast the needs. Ask questions such as, what kind of space is it? Is it public space, private space, a school? Who is there and when? Who are you there for: staff, clients, children, factory workers etc? Who are the main recipients of chaplaincy? What will you do? What will be your focus? What hours are going to work best? How will you organise yourself? Do you need a rota? Will you be on call for emergencies? What exactly are you offering?

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Making an approach



So you have it all worked out on paper! Now it is time to take the bold step and make an approach to the place you feel you are being called to and negotiate a chaplaincy presence. Of course, you might already have an invitation, or someone might have already broached the subject. Nevertheless, the following conversation is vital, because it will help you think in very clear terms about why you are pursuing this ministry.

Imagine this: you want to set up a meeting with the local shopping centre manager to talk about starting a chaplaincy ministry to the staff in the centre. You have the phone number to the office and the centre manager's PA picks up the phone. What do you say?

Once you have had that conversation and got a date in the diary for a meeting, what happens once you are sitting across the table from the centre manager? What language do you use? What are you offering? How is a chaplaincy team going to benefit their organisation – after all, the shopping centre is a business, there to make money for shareholders and pension funds. How do you 'sell' your service? What value does chaplaincy bring?

No one said this was going to be straightforward, nor are these easy questions to answer. That is precisely why you need to think about it. The clearer your reasons the better. However, don't be overwhelmed! Remember, God is at work before us and can open doors to unlikely places! Be encouraged, because there is a great openness to chaplaincy in the way it has been described in this course.

Rehearsing your lines



Role play how this conversation might go.

Use this exercise as an opportunity to talk about what kinds of things worked and what might be the best way of expressing what you wish to do. This will help you prepare for your first conversations in developing a chaplaincy project.

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Note. A lot of chaplaincies are set up because of existing relationships or from prior experience. A shopping centre manager who had a chaplaincy team at their previous workplace is more likely to be open to the idea. A school governor who is a member of your local church is a great relationship to draw on when approaching your local school.

- Do you know anyone who could be a link person?

Conclusions



Hopefully the questions posed in this session have helped you to think about what might be possible in your own community. To recap, we have seen that:

- Diversity is God's gift! Chaplaincy celebrates and protects diversity.
- Chaplains can be ambassadors of reconciliation and peace, creating spaces for unity.
- Chaplaincy therefore has a part to play in community cohesion.
- Unity in diversity was God's idea before it became a government policy!
- Chaplaincy responds to context and fits into different spaces in different ways.
- A chaplaincy team must recognise and identify what makes their local community tick.
- God is at work in the world and chaplaincy is a collaborative ministry which responds with sensitivity and courage to God's ongoing action.
- Overfamiliarity can blind us to chaplaincy opportunities. Chaplains need to look again at familiar places and identify the local needs.
- Chaplaincy teams are stronger for partnership. Look for, and act on, opportunities to work with others.
- It is wise to give some thought to how you will approach different situations. How might chaplaincy in a FE college differ from a care home? Or a supermarket chain?
- Rehearsing your lines is important. Have an answer to the question, 'why do we need a chaplain?' Make a list of the benefits that chaplaincy will bring to an organisation or public space.

Taking this conversation further



We are now really beginning to get into the details of who is going to do what, where and when. These are very important questions to ask and to keep on asking as local needs change over time.

In the next session, we will look at the essentials that should be put in place in order to establish a chaplaincy presence that will not only last, but also thrive over the years. We will continue the conversation about how to establish a professional chaplaincy ministry and look at some of the paperwork that will provide a helpful framework for the work you go on to develop together.

Prayers and Dismissal



**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.
Amen.**

(From the Methodist Worship Book, NRSV)

**Go, with a fresh perspective; with eyes that see the familiar with new clarity.
Go, with an openness and sensitivity to God's invitation to join in his work.
Go, with courage, knowing that God remains with you always:
equipping you with all you need through the power of the Holy Spirit.
So go, and live for God's eternal glory.
Amen.**