

CHAPLAINCY EVERYWHERE



SESSION FIVE

What do Chaplains Do? Bringing it all Together

This session draws together many of the themes from the previous four sessions in order to provide a rich description of chaplaincy. We will hear chaplaincy stories from four different settings, which are based upon real-life examples, and draw out some practical tips. We will also consider the extra dimension that chaplains often bring to a place or situation.

Welcome

We have come a very long way since we first met together to explore the ministry of chaplaincy. The picture of chaplaincy that has been painted depicts a powerful ministry which is out there, where people are at. The potential for members of the local church to operate in their community as chaplains is immense. We hope that by the end of this session you too will be well on the way to thinking about how you might contribute to a chaplaincy team in your own area.

This session brings together everything we have thought about through stories that are based upon real-life examples of chaplaincy. You will see that the actions of chaplains are in many ways very ordinary, yet because what they do is both intentional and courageous, the ordinary becomes anything but! When you speak to chaplains, they probably don't realise how powerful the work they do is; yet observe them for any length of time and you will realise that what seems to be ordinary has the power to change the world as they collaborate with God in re-creative work. You too can become a part of this understated yet powerful work.

Opening Prayer



Take a few moments to focus upon God as creator, redeemer and sustainer. 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 here, you meet us in the humdrum of life.
In the everyday things you speak to us; through the ordinary you come to us.
In those familiar places, your Spirit is at work to renew and enliven us.**

**We thank you for chaplains who are intentional about the way they care.
We thank you for their courage to move out of their comfort zones.
We thank you for words and actions that heal, restore and encourage.**

**We thank you for your love, which flows towards us and through us.
We receive it with gladness and share it with grateful thanks.
Amen.**

Present, Pastoral, Prophetic



The ministry of chaplaincy can helpfully be explained as having the following three characteristics: being present, pastoral and prophetic. In a very real sense these three qualities follow one another as a chaplaincy ministry develops.

Chaplains first have to be present in a particular place. Such a presence is no ordinary presence but a negotiated presence. In other words, chaplains inhabit a place in an official capacity. This brings with it the responsibility to act in a way that honours and respects the organisation they work within while also representing Christ and the Church in a credible way. Chaplains also need to be genuinely 'present' with the people they serve – giving them their full attention, focus and care.

As chaplains get established as an authentic and reliable presence within an organisation, relationships begin to develop and opportunities for pastoral care arise. Noticing people, asking how someone is doing and listening carefully and with care to their responses can often lead to a real transformation for those who are heard. Often, chaplains offer critical pastoral care and even intervene in situations of life and death among those who are particularly vulnerable.

As a result of a chaplain's consistent presence and by offering genuine and consistent pastoral support, there often comes a special authority which allows chaplains, at specific times, to speak or act prophetically. The prophetic ministry in relation to chaplaincy may draw attention to what God is doing in a situation, or it might challenge an organisation perhaps by bringing an injustice to light, confronting an abuse of power or creating a solution in response to a problem.

Together, the ministry of being a consistent presence, the power of genuine pastoral care and the impact of a prophetic word or action at the right time, which is brought with grace, love and humility, forms a powerful and genuinely world-transforming ministry. This is the potency and potential of chaplaincy!

During the rest of this session, we will hear about what real chaplains get up to and consider what we can learn from their experience.

Chaplaincy Stories



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Sarah: chaplain to older people

I've been a chaplain to older people in a small market town in Dorset for the past two years. There's a significant and growing ageing population locally and the churches in the area joined together to provide a chaplain for 20 hours a week. I work alongside those who reside in five care homes and also regularly visit those who are unable to leave their homes.

When I visit people in their homes, I will often administer communion, which I'm able to do as a lay reader in the Anglican Church. The emphasis for my chaplaincy is about making the time to listen to those who might be lonely or feel limited by older age.

Relationships are at the heart of chaplaincy. It is often those little things like remembering people's names, important anniversaries, looming events and ongoing situations that make a difference to people's lives. A chaplain might be the only person to take an interest in someone on a regular basis.

At the end of each day, I make some simple journal entries. Usually a line with a date, persons visited and a few words. 'Fred seemed down today', 'Jim has an operation this week', 'Sheila is concerned about her daughter', 'Jenny is nervous about her doctor's appointment next week'. These notes act as little prompts and reminders for my ongoing conversations and prayer. Two years into the work and ten journals later, it is clear that taking simple notes is proving to be a very effective discipline. Remembering details matters!

In the short time that I've been working as a chaplain in the community I have been able to make two important contributions that might be thought of as prophetic outcomes.

The care homes in the town work independently from one another. I visit each one regularly and have quickly become a trusted person in each of the homes, not only by the residents but also among the staff. The activity managers at each of the homes were facing similar issues in relation to trips and creative ideas and had talked independently to me about them. I was able to introduce the activity managers to one another so that information and resources could be shared. This cooperation among staff at the homes has led to better care and also to greater cohesion in the community.

Not only that, but one of the key areas that I'm trying to both understand and address is the growing number of people living with dementia and what can be done to help untangle what memories remain through sensitive visiting, and even remembering on their behalf. As a chaplain, I am becoming an advocate for those with dementia who, while they might struggle to remember the details of their past, are still capable of making new memories. Communicating this powerful yet fragile truth is part of my growing role as I represent people who are advancing in years. I have also teamed up with the chaplain at the local college and there is exciting work being done to bring the young and old together through the creative arts.

What would you do?



Spend a few minutes talking together about Sarah's experience.

- Talk about how you might go about remembering names and details. Come up with a plan that holds this valuable information in a discreet way. Do you already have a system that is similar to Sarah's?
- What strike you as being the important emphases in Sarah's chaplaincy work?

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- How might you approach and develop this kind of work?

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Phil: prison chaplain



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I'm a Methodist minister and have been a prison chaplain for the past 15 years. I currently serve for one day a week in a category B prison in the north of England. I am part of an ecumenical and multi-faith chaplaincy team which provides a statutory chaplaincy service to the inmates. A prison chaplain must see a new prisoner within 24 hours of admission, make daily visits to the medical wing of the prison and provide an act of worship for the inmates once a week.

My focus is upon being a loving and redeeming presence in a place where love and redemption are in short supply. I show respect and love in simple ways, like asking permission to enter a cell to visit prisoners: although I don't need to, I always make a point of asking because it gives the prisoner dignity. I listen without judgement to the inmates and take an interest in those who are largely forgotten, even written off. These conversations are signs of hope, a glimpse of the redeeming love of God expressed by a chaplain.

I'm not only there for the prisoners but for the staff too. Prison staff work in a very difficult environment and are also often overlooked. I spend time caring for the staff and I'm available to listen and pray. The chaplaincy team are a very important presence in the prison: a sign of hope and restoration in a hard place.

You can always spot a prison chaplain because they keep their keys on a chain! As chaplains go about a prison, unlocking and locking doors as they go, they need to keep focused not only on their keys but also on who else is around. One door left unlocked can cause a serious security problem and is a disciplinary offence.

Prison chaplaincy is an obvious example of chaplains needing to be vigilant and aware of their personal safety at all times. However, all chaplaincy happens in public spaces and an awareness of your surroundings is very important. Working in pairs gives volunteer chaplains the advantage of mutual support, safety and accountability.

One of the schemes which I've been part of establishing, along with the rest of the chaplaincy team, is a restorative justice programme. Restorative justice helps the perpetrators and victims of crime to meet with each other and seek understanding and reconciliation.

We've witnessed incredible scenes of restoration take place as victims have come to understand something of the life of the prisoner. Perpetrators of crime often start life as the victims of horrendous crimes themselves. Knowing this can release compassion where anger and hatred may have existed before.

Likewise, when the perpetrators of a crime understand something of the deep impact that being a victim of crime has had on a person then the scene is set for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place.

Restorative justice is a very powerful and effective programme which has been shown to cut re-offending rates and is one example of an extra dimension that chaplaincy can bring to a situation.

Conversation



- How else might chaplains be involved in peace-making in society?

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- What aspects of Phil's role as chaplain most stand out to you?

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Philippa: further education college chaplain



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I'm a chaplain to a further education college for one day a week. I'm bursting with energy and ideas and roam around the college wearing a bright green hoodie with college chaplain written in large letters on my back! In the fast-paced, energetic environment of an FE college, I snatch conversations in corridors with students and staff, and bound up to groups of students around the campus.

Although I have a chaplaincy room in the college, I'm rarely there apart from when I have an appointment with a student. In less than a year, I've become an indispensable part of college life, getting involved in all kinds of student activities. FE institutions are entrepreneurial and dynamic environments with an ever-shifting student and staff population. The wide variety of students and staff mean that the college is always evolving. I'm dynamic and entrepreneurial in my approach to chaplaincy. Building relationships and being available to respond to opportunities to make a difference are the hallmarks of my chaplaincy work.

Last year, a student was tragically killed in a car accident and I was involved in marking the event in the life of the college. As well as being available to students and staff as they processed their grief after losing a friend, I was also able to help plant a beautiful tree within the college grounds which was dedicated to the much-loved student. I also helped lead a thanksgiving service. As a college chaplain, I helped mark an important moment in the life of the college. Who knows what else this loved and trusted member of the college community will have to respond to in the years ahead?

Chaplains have to be proactive; you cannot wait for people to come to your office. You have to go out and interact with people. In a fast-moving FE college you have to get in people's faces! Early on, I decided to bake cakes and take them to a staff meeting and then hand out free cakes in the corridors to the students. Free cake isn't something that many people get at college! It meant that people stopped to talk with me and my team of chaplaincy volunteers.

Surprising people with kindness, expressed through free cake and other thoughtful gifts, is a powerful witness that can make people think. The college population now associate me and the local church with free, not to mention delicious, cake. That's not a bad association!

Colleges aren't generally known to be places with free space or time. It isn't unknown for broom cupboards to become office spaces. There is a similar lack of space in the college timetable.

In response, I decided to give the college the gift of space for a week. The space was sacred space in the form of an interactive prayer room. Colourful and creative, the interactive space captured the imagination of students, parents and teachers as I hosted the prayer space. It was a place where students could hang out and be still, process pain, consider important decisions and remember members of their family and loved ones around the world.

The week of prayer was so successful that it has become a yearly feature in the college calendar and has even been played a part in college open days! The gift of sacred space in an environment which often feels squeezed has made a real difference in the college and has inspired others in the area to do similar things.

Conversation



- “Chaplains have to be proactive.” How do you feel about this statement?

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Town chaplaincy team

I'm a member of the local Methodist church and spent 20 years working in retail on the shop floor. I know about the highs and lows of working in retail and, during my retirement, wanted to do something meaningful in my local town in The Midlands. In partnership with the local Churches Together group and with the town centre management I started a chaplaincy team. Three years later there are now twelve chaplains in my team from across the churches who volunteer a few hours a week to be present in the town. Having started in the shopping precinct, the chaplaincy team now covers the town hall and civic offices, a local supermarket and a high street bank.

With other local church leaders, I've approached the local magistrates' court and we're gathering a team of 20 additional volunteers who will commit themselves to offering a chaplaincy service at the magistrates' court during court sessions. A few of the chaplains have also begun to get to know some of the residents from the local boating community as they regularly walk the canal pathways.

The chaplaincy team is growing and is well respected in the town. In the past year, the local churches have also launched a Street Pastors initiative which serves the thriving night-time economy. Together, the churches are seeing many local Christians involved in the community both day and night, and seeing lives changed through them being a caring and consistent presence in the town.

As a chaplaincy team, we decided early on that we needed a uniform so that we could be easily identified. We opted for gilets in the colder months and T-shirts and caps during the summer months. A local artist designed a logo and some literature to hand out to the local shops so that they know what the town chaplains are there for. We have simple cards that we can give to anyone we talk to so that they can get in touch if they ever need to talk further. We also have a website and a growing presence on Facebook and Twitter.

The chaplains' brand is becoming well known in the town and the chaplains are often mentioned in the press and invited to town-wide events. All of these elements have helped to build a positive presence in the community and those who wear the uniform are recognised as being part of a trusted group of local Christians.

The town centre also has an undercover shopping centre with about 100 shops and a number of empty units. The management recently offered me the use of shop space to develop a community hub. The local churches are putting plans together to host an interactive church service in the shopping centre once a month. During the week we are going to host a community art space, interactive prayer stations and a debt counselling service.

In the spirit of chaplaincy, instead of waiting for people to come to our churches, the local churches are taking a church experience to the hundreds of shoppers who fill the shopping centre on a Sunday morning as well as creating an important community space throughout the week!



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Conversation



- How important is a social media presence for chaplaincy?

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How has your thinking changed?



At the beginning of the first session, we took a snapshot of our thoughts about chaplaincy. We responded to the questions: When you hear the word 'chaplain' what comes to mind? Who are chaplains? What do chaplains do?

Spend some time now answering the following questions:

- How has your thinking changed over the past five sessions?

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- How might you apply some of the perspectives from chaplaincy (present, pastoral, prophetic) to your context? How might this help you as you witness to the risen Christ?

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Conclusions



Hopefully the stories in this session have not only inspired you but also helped you think about what might be possible in your own community. In this session we have seen that:

- Chaplaincy is present, pastoral and prophetic.
- Chaplaincy is a ministry of careful listening as demonstrated by Sarah.
- Simple record keeping can help you to remember the details.
- Chaplains can act as vital networkers in a community – providing social glue!
- Chaplains operate in public spaces and need to be vigilant.
- Chaplains are often called to be peacemakers.
- Chaplaincy is often about snatching conversation on the move.
- Chaplains can help to mark important occasions in the life of a community.
- Chaplains have to go to where people are and engage with them there.
- Branding is really important!
- Chaplaincy teams can become a powerful presence in a town.
- One thing often leads to another: like magistrates' courts, canals and community hubs.
- Never underestimate cake!

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)

**May you know the love of our creator.
May you experience the life of our redeemer.
May you be filled with the presence and power of our sustainer.
As you take your next step, may God's wisdom guide you in the way you should go;
to bless a world in need.
For the glory of God, for evermore.
Amen.**