



IMAGE: ©THINKSTOCK

6

UNIT SIX

CHAPLAINCY ESSENTIALS

CHAPLAINCY – PROPHECY AND PRESENCE

The **Methodist** Church 

©Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2015. Registered charity no. 1132208

Worship

Light a candle and focus quietly on the flame. You may also wish to play some reflective music. Reflect on the way that all our eyes are drawn towards the candle flame and the way that God loves us and wants to draw us closer. When you are ready, offer this short reflective prayer:

God of all beings,
help us to be aware of your presence,
to be open to encountering you
in the people that we meet
and the connections that we make.
Help us always to listen,
and never to think that we know
or have heard enough.

Amen.

Review of previous unit

Share in the group or with your mentor the pastoral and support resources you have listed since your last meeting.

What's in this unit?

Read

It is a feature of ministry that we find ourselves in situations where by turns we feel comfortable and uncomfortable. In church, of course, we are largely comfortable. It is our territory and we are in control. Everyone knows who we are and what we are about and there is respect. This is true for lay and ordained alike.

In chaplaincy we deliberately place ourselves in the region of potential discomfort. We are away from our home ground and emphatically we are not in control. We can find all kinds of things to fill our time and some activities are important. We can build up a large pastoral caseload and it is good to know that a range of people want to talk to us and value our counsel, but this is not all that chaplaincy is about.

This unit will explore what it means to be present or if you prefer, to offer a ministry of presence. We explore how or in what sense a chaplain is a representative person; a witness to an organisation or institution. What does the chaplain represent and to what is she witnessing? We call this activity prophecy. It has a long history for religious people and it can be problematic so we need to understand some of the nuances of this responsibility.

Starter exercise: From a conversation with someone you see often but do not know well: "Chaplain, I see you hanging around a lot, drinking coffee and chatting. Why are you here?" Write down three bullet points which convey your ministry of presence but do not include activities.



Chaplaincy case study:

A Methodist RAF chaplain was deployed on Operation Ellamy, supporting Libyan civilians under threat from Gaddafi's regime. He was invited by the Commanding Officer to attend a 'targeting meeting' at which future missions were discussed. It involved strategic level decision-making with life and death implications. The chaplain sat as an observer and listened but did not speak as several possible targets were highlighted, and discussed at length. In the end all three potential targets were not to be pursued. The CO commented: "Padre, I have been involved in several hundreds of these meetings; never before have we turned off all our targets. I wonder if it has anything to do with you being present."

Think about your own situation and compare it with this Case Study.

- Why might the presence of the padre have influenced the decision-making?
- What ethical issues or situations in your context might be influenced by the presence of a chaplain?
- The Armed Forces are very concerned to get their ethics right and encourage everyone to engage, however critically, in the thinking process. Is this something you can identify in other institutions, organisations or businesses?

1) Being a representative person

Read

A Prison Governor said to his senior chaplain:
"You are invaluable here. You keep the prison civilised"

For discussion

- What contribution to 'civilisation' can you make in your context?
- Who or what does the chaplain represent?

Read

Chaplains spend a lot of time hanging around but their coffee drinking is not indolent or aimless; chaplains need constantly to remind themselves that they offer presence with a purpose. In most chaplaincy circumstances, there is little expectation or opportunity to gather Christians together but as well as pastoral care and spiritual guidance, chaplains have a vital prophetic role; to be the critical friend to the institution or organisation

For discussion

- What does it mean to be a critical friend in your own context? Can you identify some of the issues that might challenge you?
- What are the hazards of prophetic chaplaincy?

Chaplaincy case study:

George was part-time university chaplain in a large team. In order to use his time efficiently, it was decided that he would take responsibility for the School of Biological Sciences and he focused his ministry there for half a day every week. After a couple of years he counselled a staff member who described a situation where she was clearly being bullied by her Head of Department. George made an appointment to see the HoD and very carefully broached the subject. The HoD listened for a few minutes and then asked George to leave his office. Later that day he received a departmental email announcing without explanation that the chaplain was banned from this department. It was some years before the HoD changed jobs and only then was George allowed once more to chaplain the department

For discussion

- Was the chaplain justified in the action he took?
- What might he have done differently?
- What could he have done after this interview and email, and what might the implications have been?

Two biblical thoughts:

1. Read Jeremiah 38. The prophet Jeremiah was a critical friend to King Zedekiah and his Court and ended up in a well (v. 6) and sat in the mud.
2. Jesus offers three images of salt (Matthew 5:13) light (Matthew 5:14) and yeast (Matthew 13:33)

For discussion

- Are you ready to sit in the mud?
- How do these images of Jesus help us to understand the way we may minister as chaplains?

2) Chaplain to the institution or organisation?



Read

A number of institutions see chaplaincy as an essential part of their organisational life. These include prisons, the armed forces, healthcare (hospitals, hospices etc), educational institutions (universities, colleges, schools). The first two in this list have a statutory obligation to provide chaplaincy but the others have come to see chaplaincy as a vital service that characterises its whole life. There are of course many chaplaincy activities that do not fit into this model so easily. This is particularly true of some of the more recent developments in chaplaincy, eg: town centre chaplaincy.

For discussion

- Make a list of the chaplaincy activities that you know about or are involved in. In what sense can the chaplain offer a benchmark service that influences the whole institution or organisation?
- What specifically can chaplaincy offer that is a value added characteristic in these contexts.
- Refer again to the second session: "Knowing Where You Are". How does understanding the organisational culture help a chaplain to make an impact on the organisation as well as individuals within it?

3) For further reflection

Methodists have historically emphasised a commitment to both 'personal holiness' and 'social holiness'. What does this mean in a chaplaincy context? How would it influence your approach to chaplaincy? Why is personal holiness just as important as social holiness?

Look again at the three bullet points you wrote down in response to the question:

"Chaplain, I see you hanging around a lot, drinking coffee and chatting. Why are you here?"

Do you want to revise what you say to convey your ministry of presence through your chaplaincy?

4) Putting it into practice

Choose two activities from this list:

- Find the 'Mission Statement' or equivalent for the organisation that you are attached to and see what it says about social and ethical responsibility.
- If you were involved in a redrafting of the 'Mission Statement', what would you want to include that is not already there?
- In your local paper, look for stories that have a social justice slant and ask, "What does justice look like here?"
- Write a review of one of the short films on the "Doing Virtuous Business website" (<http://media.wfyi.org/DoingVirtuousBusiness/index.asp>).
- Talk with chaplaincy colleagues about the ethical content of your work and identify two things you can do which could change the impact of your ministry
- Do an internet search for the words "Triple Bottom Line". This is the idea that all organisations should account for their social, environmental and financial impact (also called the three Ps: People, Planet and Profit). Make some notes for a conversation you might have with a manager/leader about measuring their organisation against the triple bottom line.

A Prayer for a chaplaincy conversation

Dear God,

when our hands do not touch,

when our hearts do not care,

when our minds do not think,

when our feet lose direction,

when our consciences do not act,

forgive us our disconnections,

so that our whole beings may be made whole in the whole being of Christ.

Amen.

Additional Resources:

Jones et al, (2014), *Sacred Presence and Ethical Challenge*, London, Methodist Publishing
www.methodist.org.uk/mission/chaplaincy/sacred-presence-and-ethical-challenge
especially the Introduction and Essay 6.

Jones et al, (2010), *Epworth Review – December 2010*, London, Methodist Publishing
www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/theology/the-epworth-review/epworth-review-december-2010

There are a number of organisations concerned with making business more ethical and more spiritual, and business ethics is often included in business studies qualifications. An example can be found at Doing Virtuous Business <http://media.wfyi.org/DoingVirtuousBusiness/index.asp>. The website includes a series of short films on expressing different virtues in business, including one on chaplaincy in the workplace.