

Newbury town chaplains launched



A group of Christians in Newbury are ready to provide a 'caring, listening ear' to shopkeepers and shoppers alike amidst the busyness of the town centre. On 17 November a team of six chaplains gathered on the streets of the town to launch 'town chaplains', which will provide pastoral care to retail workers and shoppers.

The scheme is an inter-church project, being led by the Newbury Methodist Church minister Rev Maree Farrimond. The group of volunteers have been trained by [IBEX](#), which is a registered charity that seeks to relate Christian faith to economy and the workplace in a conscious, systematic and strategic way. Similar town chaplain initiatives have already been successfully implemented in Basingstoke, Luton, Winchester, Weston-Super-Mare and elsewhere.

The chaplains aim to build relationships with people they see in town regularly, to give them someone to talk to. Rev Farrimond said: "We want to make Newbury a happy place, a place where you can have an holistic shopping experience. The project will mainly be focused on people working in the retail sector, but if anyone else wanted to speak to the chaplains, they are welcome to. We don't want to get in people's faces, but we want to be there to greet them and to be there for them to talk to if they need it."

Rev Farrimond said that she realised that shoppers were already overcome with people holding clipboards, but anticipated that the chaplains would receive a positive reaction because they will not approach people unless approached first.

The team wear blue 'Chaplain' gilets to make themselves easily identifiable, and will initially be in the town one day a week, although they hope to increase their presence as more volunteers sign up. The chaplains' first day 'on duty' was 24 November and Rev Farrimond was one of those who went on the patrol to re-introduce themselves to shopkeepers and shoppers alike. She commented: "We were very well received everywhere. Some had seen us in the local paper and radio, and were very appreciative of the support we were offering them in recognising their value as people, when so many are in a constant rush."

Kennet Shopping Centre manager, Mag Williams, welcomes the initiative: "I think it is a good community project. I think it will bring the caring aspect back into the community," she said. "Once the chaplains get to know people in town, then those people may perhaps get the confidence to confide in them, which can only be a good thing for the social well-being of the town."

The chaplains believe they will be able to partner well with the Street Pastors initiative, which is set to launch in the area in February.