



City centre chaplaincy

The texts set out below are offered as an opportunity for reflection on the everyday life of the city in the context of chaplaincy.

The city that is to come

"For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

(Hebrews 13:14) (NRSV)

- The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city.
- The city, traditionally walled and gated, is intended to be a place of security.
- The city is a place of justice – unresolved disputes were taken to the city for resolution.
- The city is a meeting place and a place of trade.
- The city is a place of learning.
- The city can be defined through its architecture, its people, its activities and its relationships.

The chaplain engages with all these aspects of what it means to be a city.

The ministry of the chaplain

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7) (NRSV)

- The church is present in the city:
 - *through its diasporas* – 'ordinary' Christians engaged in 'ordinary' city life
 - *in the life of its eclectic churches* – Christians gathering for regular worship; civic and 'special' services which draw people together before God
 - *through its buildings* – which hold precious space, ideally without agenda, for God and all people.
- The chaplain has a place in:
 - *supporting the diasporas* where they are
 - *reflecting, in the church*, the celebrations and concerns of the city
 - *reflecting, in the city*, the love and concerns of the church
 - *creating a dialogue* across divides experienced in the city.
- The chaplain seeks to engage with:
 - *the development agenda* of the city. What kind of city do we seek to create? Who owns the city?
 - *the safety and security* of everyone in the city: the more invisible people are, the more they need the voice of the church to speak for and with them.
 - *issues of justice*: Fairtrade, poverty action, asylum, employee rights, human rights.
 - *the meeting places of people*: engaging with the public bodies as they shape the city agenda; engaging with private firms as they generate wealth, provide employment and, hopefully, engage with the community; offering hospitality, to enable those who less naturally meet to be drawn together and to hear each other's voices.
 - *the learning processes* of the city, through impartial reflection offered without judgement.
 - *offering a unique perspective* which can be gained from being present in the boardrooms, the council chambers, the staff room, the shop floor, the union office and alongside the cleaner.

“Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah 58:12) (NRSV)

- *The chaplain offers the ministry of reconciliation.* Their work will frequently involve listening to *the individual* troubled by conflict or breakdown in relationships. Sometimes, indeed often, to listen is enough; sometimes it is appropriate to support the individual in taking action; often it is appropriate to refer the individual to someone with particular expertise who can help them further. The importance of this ‘bridging’ role, enabling the individual to take a step which they might struggle to take on their own, should never be underestimated.
- There may be opportunities to engage in more formal leadership initiatives aimed at *corporate reconciliation*, within or between organisations. The chaplain often has an overview which enables them to help organisations, departments or teams in conflict to see when they are pursuing common or related aims and to help bring them together.
- This ministry of reconciliation can be enhanced by the chaplain providing the opportunity for quality conversations that offer an understanding of change (coming to terms with grief), of how to overcome differences (offering forgiveness) and of the meaning and purpose of life (vocation, as the unique call of each individual to be and become the person God means them to be).

“As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.’”

(Luke 19: 41-42) (NRSV)

- *The chaplain engages in praying for the city*, both publically and privately. Such prayer is for the nature, direction and shaping of the city and for the concerns raised by its people. Walk the city with nothing on your mind, see who is thriving and who is struggling, give thanks for those who care, be alongside those who suffer and seek the things that make for peace.

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.’ (Revelation 21:3-4) (NRSV)

- The chaplain never takes God anywhere. Their privileged task is to affirm God’s presence, care, involvement and, occasionally, to name God for those who are unused to acknowledging the divine presence.

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