



# Called to be... a chaplain?

# So you're exploring a call to chaplaincy?



Every time someone says to me I'm thinking about a call to be a chaplain, I am filled with joy. Chaplains are integral to the work of the Church. It is a ministry that sees people go beyond the walls of churches and into communities, joining in with the work of God in the world.

There has been a growing interest in chaplaincy over the past few years, with more and more people exploring their vocation and calling. There's something about chaplaincy that appeals to people's desire to serve others - and that's what chaplaincy is: a service to other people, letting go of personal agendas and responding to the needs of others in whatever context a chaplain may be.

Chaplaincy is very rewarding and fulfilling, but it is no easy calling. Chaplains often don't know what they will face each day and have to be ready to respond. At times, it can feel like isolated work as you try to navigate the situations and needs of people. But it also provides great opportunities to join in with God's work in the world. Chaplaincy makes a big difference to lives.

It is hoped this booklet will help you on your journey in discerning whether you are called to be a chaplain.

Every blessing as you seek God's calling in your life.

Gary Hopkins  
Ministry Development Officer

# Pray

No journey of discernment is possible without God. Every disciple of Jesus is part of the ministry of the whole people of God. Each of us is called and continually called to respond to be what God is calling us to be in each time and place.

Sometimes this is to a particular role in church life. It might be for a few hours or in a full-time role. It might be voluntary or paid. It might be in a specific denomination or with an ecumenical team. It might be a church role or a role with an organisation. Regardless of how we live out our calling, it is God who calls us.

This makes it particularly important to pray, listen and reflect, discerning where God might be leading. Take time with God to pray and read scripture.

## A Prayer

Loving God,  
I thank you for our journey together  
and your calling on my life as a disciple of Jesus.  
Help me to discern what it is I am called to be.  
Help me to understand what it is I am called to do.  
Speak to me in the silence  
as I expectantly wait to hear from you.  
I am open to your will whatever that may be.  
Take all I am and use it in the work of your reign.  
Amen.



# Sent by the Church

Just like any ministry, chaplains don't act on their own authority. A chaplain's calling is discerned as part of the community of the people of God - it is never a decision made alone.

Discernment in community with others is key to affirming whether God is genuinely calling you to ministry as a chaplain. This process is invaluable in ensuring you have the support necessary for discerning where God is leading you.

This ongoing support will be vital if you become a chaplain, and building strong relationships in the initial discernment phase will create deep relationships that can sustain you through challenges in ministry.

## Who can help me discern?

There are numerous people who can help you discern:

- Your church minister
- Others in the church community
- Other church leaders in your area
- Local chaplaincy organisations
- Places that provide chaplaincy training

Sometimes just opening a conversation with, 'I think I might be called to be a chaplain?' can provide endless help in discerning your calling. Asking the question doesn't mean you have to commit to becoming a chaplain - it's all about testing your calling and discerning whether this might be the right path for you.

# Being a chaplain...

- Chaplains are **pastors**: they need to be able to listen with care and attention, empathise, understand, maintain confidentiality, and seek to be available to those in need.
- Chaplains are **interpreters**: they try to identify, understand and share in issues affecting the culture of a particular context and what God is doing there and to help the people there to understand God. This means winning the right to be heard and sometimes being in the role of critical friend, mediator, reconciler, speaking truth to power.
- Chaplains are **ambassadors**: they represent the Church, and they also report back to the Church about the new insights they have gained.
- Chaplains are **pray-ers**: they pray for the places where they work and when it is appropriate they pray with the people who are there sometimes creating new forms of worship for their context.
- Chaplains are **midwives**: enabling the birth of awareness of God in the place where they serve.
- Chaplains are **connectors**: they connect their faith with their context by being chaplains to all and demonstrate gospel values such as compassion and concern for social justice.
- Chaplains are **guests** in the contexts they serve, but often work by acting as hosts crossing bridges to provide hospitality, welcome and interaction with others.

# Chaplaincy Characteristics

Rather than giving a simple definition in a couple of sentences it is much better to think about what is typical of chaplaincy and look at some examples of what chaplains say about themselves. Not every chaplaincy will show all of these characteristics, whilst many Christian ministries which do not think of themselves as chaplaincies will share some of these features.

## Ministry wherever people are

- “Nine out of ten people will not be in church on Sunday, but nine out of ten people will be at work on Monday and the chaplain needs to be where those people are.” (*Airport Chaplain*)

It may not be strictly true that 90% of us are in paid employment, but the point is clear that there is a great need for Christians to be seen and known outside of our church buildings, our worship and our church meetings.

Chaplaincy work takes Christian pastoral care beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, it is an invitation and an opportunity to go out into our wider communities. Chaplains seek to go out to people rather than wait for people to come to them.

# An invited guest and not the host

Churches usually like to play the host – we often think of mission as inviting people to come to us and be one of us. When we invite people to join us we may not realise just how difficult that can be. To come to our church can mean being asked to fit in with our ways of doing things – liking the same worship music that we like, being free to come to worship at the same time as we are.

However gracious, welcoming and open we are it can feel uncomfortable to come into a church as a visitor and a guest. The chaplain, however, is a guest invited into the school, the care home, the workplace, the shopping centre. Learning to be a gracious guest is a typical characteristic of chaplaincy.

- “Knock, knock  
I knock on the door and slide into the room.  
You look at me from your bed, wondering who I am.  
I look at you and smile, hoping to appear calm and friendly.  
I explain who I am.  
You look wary, but do not tell me to go away.  
I ask if I can sit down” (*Hospice chaplain*)
- “We are in other people’s territory following other people’s rules.” (*School Chaplain*)

# Vulnerable - not powerful

When we are the hosts, no matter how gracious we are, we still hold power and make the rules. As a guest the chaplain has to give up power and be vulnerable. Chaplaincy is not an easy ministry: it involves taking risks and giving trust. Jesus “emptied himself taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7).

Chaplains do seek to influence the organisations and places where they work but they do not have power to make things happen.

- “I enjoy the excitement of what chaplaincy can be... you have to be quite fluid and there is something reasonably unplanned and chaotic about the whole thing.”  
*(Agricultural Chaplain)*
- “Meeting their agenda before we seek to meet our own.”  
*(School Chaplain)*

# Commissioned by the Church and accredited by the host

Chaplains don't act on their own authority, they are sent and supported by the Church. There are many ways in which this can happen – some of them quite informal. Chaplains also need to be recognised by the host communities and organisations who receive them.

There are many ways in which Christians serve their local communities through acts of love and kindness. For most of these we do not need anyone's permission. Chaplains, however, typically need permission to enter – we have to negotiate access for chaplaincy to take place. Chaplaincy is a very public ministry. You can't just nominate yourself as chaplain to the local supermarket – it has to be agreed with the store management first!

- "I think Church affirms and helps me and then I take that back and take Church into the chaplaincy situation."  
*(Workplace Chaplain)*
- "Come and live alongside us for a bit so that you are part of what we do not an add on."  
*(Headteacher talking about school chaplains)*

# An intentional presence - rather than gathering

So much of Church life is about gathering people together – for worship, for prayer, for meetings or for service. It is quite unusual for chaplains to be able to gather people together for worship. Instead chaplains work by being a Christian presence, but this presence has to have a purpose. We must be clear about our intentions, about what we are here for.

- One RAF chaplain tells a story about attending a meeting at which targets for bombing were being discussed. The meeting decided not to bomb any of the suggested targets because of the risk to civilians. This was the first time in the campaign that one of these meetings had “turned off” all of its targets. Although the chaplain had not spoken during the meeting the commanding officer was left wondering how much difference the presence of the chaplain had actually made to the decision.
- "I want to be a blessing to the school." (*School Chaplain*)

Sometimes chaplains make a difference just by being there, but only when it is clear to everyone what the chaplain stands for.

# A method for Christian Mission - sharing in what God is doing in the world

Chaplaincy is one of many ways in which we do mission. Whenever we do mission we are joining in with what God is already doing in the world. Chaplains try to do this in places where it is not obvious to look for God.

Chaplaincy isn't a role or an office for a few specialist people, it is a method or way of doing mission. This means that chaplaincy is very adaptable and works well in a variety of different situations.

- "It's amazing to see the adaptability of chaplaincy. We can do chaplaincy in a place where people are screaming across at each other and shouting out the price of potatoes." (*Marketplace Chaplain*)

Because chaplains are guests they are careful about the way they do mission, beginning with service and looking for opportunities to take conversations and relationships deeper. Sports Chaplaincy UK describes the work of their chaplains as "pastorally proactive, spiritually reactive".

- "...the friendly face, the cup of coffee, the chat - all that lays the grounding for the deeper moments in life, which they will bring to you. You've no need to raise them - when things go wrong they'll know where to find help." (*Workplace Chaplain*)

# How do I get involved in chaplaincy?

Chaplaincy is a very broad ministry and continues to grow as God calls people to be chaplains in new and unique places. Because of this, there is no one route into chaplaincy. Everyone has a unique story of how they became a chaplain and what training they undertook to understand their role.

Much of it will depend on whether you're lay or ordained, whether you want a full-time role or wish to offer a few hours. It will also very much depend on what organisations are in your locality and what chaplaincy work is already developed.

As you begin to have conversations and begin to network, you will discover what chaplaincy work is already going on. It's a great place to start with these projects and teams. The best learning you can do is to talk to chaplains and find out how they got involved as you learn more about their chaplaincy work.

Some chaplaincy areas are more formal (e.g. prisons and forces chaplaincy) and there are key individuals which will be able to help you understand any processes and requirements.

You will have to do your work to connect with what's going on. This is where the Internet can be a great help - just search and see what you find.

The next few pages give information to help you begin exploring chaplaincy and networking with others.

# The Methodist Church

The **Chaplaincy** section of the Methodist Church website provides a range of resources, links and opportunities for connecting with others. All these are offered to anyone involved in chaplaincy, regardless of their denomination or whether they're full-time, part-time, ordained, lay, paid, volunteers etc. It's also a great place to connect to others if you are exploring a call to be a chaplain.

The **Exploring Chaplaincy** section is particularly helpful if you wish to find out more about chaplaincy and the different sectors chaplaincy is involved in.

The **Chaplaincy Blog** features articles and stories about chaplaincy and the **Signpost for Chaplaincy** links to events and resources.

If you're looking for opportunities to connect with chaplains, you'd be very welcome at our regular **Connecting Chaplains** events. Many of these are coffee/tea chats with no agenda - chaplains love to meet new people interested in chaplaincy and share their stories.

Don't forget to check out the following pages too: **Chaplaincy Resources and Links** and **Chaplaincy Reading**.

On the website, you can also sign up for our **Chaplaincy Newsletters** and find **Chaplaincy Contacts**.

# Agricultural and Rural Chaplaincy

Agricultural and rural chaplaincy seeks to support and engage with those involved in farming, rural businesses, tourism and rural life. It requires an understanding of the structures of the agricultural industry and an appreciation of the particular pressures and challenges farmers face.

The chaplain also needs to empathise with the values and ethos of life in rural communities, identifying and engaging with the range of prevailing issues. There is a bridging role to be developed between the churches and rural businesses and organisations, for mutual benefit and to inform and enable the churches' mission.

An obvious point of contact is the local livestock market, where a long-term and consistent presence is required on the part of the chaplain to build up pastoral relationships and trust.

Some useful organisations

- **The Agricultural Chaplains Association**
- **The Arthur Rank Centre**

Local chaplaincy organisations

- **Borderlands Rural Chaplaincy**
- **Cheshire Agricultural Chaplaincy**
- **Cumbria Methodist District Agricultural Chaplaincy**
- **Rural Chaplain Service (Derbyshire)**
- **Yorkshire Churches Rural Business Support**

# Community and Pioneer Chaplaincy

Community chaplaincies focus on particular communities of people who are connected by an experience, background, identity or particular space (eg people who live or are from a particular area, ex-offenders, homeless people, housing estates, young people).

Pioneer chaplaincies are projects which explore and develop chaplaincy in new places and in new ways.

Community chaplaincy projects are often setup by local churches that recognise a need in their community. The Methodist course, **Chaplaincy Everywhere**, is a course which helps local churches develop such a project. The course helps a group of people discern whether God might be calling them to setup a community chaplaincy project.

It's worth asking around and searching the Internet to see if there's such a project near you. You may need to ask other church denominations - many projects are ecumenical.

Some useful links

- **Methodist Website: Community/Pioneer Chaplaincy**
- **Methodist Website: Chaplaincy Everywhere**
- **Methodist Website: Called to pioneer?**

Local chaplaincy organisations

- **Bolton Town Centre Chaplaincy**

# Forces Chaplaincy

Military Chaplaincy is a special calling and invites a special combination of commitment and gifts. It is open to presbyters, and deacons in the case of the RAF, who hold a British Passport and fulfil a variety of criteria listed below.

In the Methodist Church, applications and general oversight are the responsibility of the Methodist Forces Board.

Applicants for Forces Chaplaincy are carefully selected and follow a rigorous testing process. Before final acceptance by any of the three services, a medical examination, a security check and an enhanced Safeguarding (DBS) check is always made by the service.

You should

- contact the Secretary of the Methodist Forces Board
- meet the age requirements for your chosen service
- be in good health
- have at least 3 years post-ordination pastoral experience
- at an appropriate time, have discussed this possibility with your Superintendent/Chair of District
- be sure that you and your family understand fully the implications of military life
- arrange a visit (acquaint) with the chaplaincy service for one or more of the Armed Forces.

Further details can be found on the [\*\*Forces Chaplaincy\*\*](#) page

## Further Education Chaplaincy

Chaplaincy in a further education college might involve supporting individual students and staff in a crisis, chatting in the coffee bars and corridors, running a multi-faith event to help students understand religious diversity, being a link between the colleges and churches, or working with a small group of Christian students and staff – there is no standard model.

Working with FE colleges is an exciting opportunity to engage with people outside the life of church and meet with the “missing generations”. Many colleges are very diverse communities with learners and staff of all faiths and none and chaplains find this environment to be enriching as well as challenging.

Check to see if there are local chaplaincy projects involved in further education colleges in your area. If there aren't any, you might consider developing a project using the Methodist course, **Chaplaincy Everywhere**, which helps local church groups discern whether God is calling them to setup a local chaplaincy project.

Local organisations

- **West Midlands Churches' FE Council**

# Healthcare Chaplaincy

Healthcare chaplaincy is offered as part of the care provision in hospitals, care centres and hospices. Healthcare chaplains can be both lay and ordained. Some are employed by hospitals and other healthcare providers; others are part of volunteer teams. They are always affirmed as chaplains by the Church and recognised as a chaplain by the healthcare organisation. Healthcare chaplains work to meet the spiritual and religious needs of people of all faiths and philosophies.

A healthcare chaplain will see a variety of situations in a day, from being with relatives at the bedside of an elderly relative who is dying, to taking part in a Multi Disciplinary Team meeting, baptizing an infant in the neonatal unit to offering advice to staff on care of a Jewish patient. The role can also involve organising and leading worship both in the chapel, or designated quiet space, on Sunday mornings, at festival times (e.g. Christmas) as well as bedside communions. Most chaplains work in teams with other Christian denominations and members of faith groups other than Christian.

It's worth looking at websites of local healthcare organisations or making contact to see what chaplaincy teams are already in place. Whilst most people are volunteer chaplains in healthcare places, some paid healthcare chaplaincy jobs are advertised through recruitment websites.

Some useful organisations

- **Free Churches Group (Healthcare)**
- **Association of Hospice and Palliative Care Chaplains**
- **College of Healthcare Chaplains**

# Higher Education Chaplaincy

About half of all young adults will study in higher education and for many this is a formative and life changing experience. In some universities many students live on or around the campus and there may be a Chaplaincy Centre on or near the campus. In other institutions there will be several campuses scattered around a city and no real focus for the work with large numbers of students travelling in each day. Most chaplaincies are linked in some way to a university department offering support services for students and this often includes providing multi-faith facilities and prayer rooms.

University chaplaincy is very rarely about ministering to a congregation of students, where these do exist they are only a small part of the chaplain's work and often there is no settled group of students connected to the chaplaincy. Higher Education chaplains seek to minister and witness to the whole institution - students and staff, to build links between the university and faith communities, and to uncover the presence of God in the complicated world of the secular university. The university is a place where all ideas are open to challenge and change - this is a vibrant, diverse, international environment which can be very demanding.

You can usually find information about chaplaincy services at higher education institutions on their website. There's also a list of **Methodist Higher Education Chaplains** on the Methodist website.

Some useful organisations and links

- **Churches Higher Education Liaison Group**
- **Church of England - FE/HE**

# Later Life Chaplaincy

Later Life Chaplaincy provides people in the later years of life with support, care and nurture, particularly their spiritual needs, regardless of whether they have a faith or none. While Methodism has a proud history of supporting those in later life through its work with MHA, they are not the only place where chaplains to people in later life can be found. Chaplains can be found in care homes, retirement communities or wherever older people gather and there is need for support.

A good place to start is with MHA, but it's not the only place. You might contact your local care homes to see if there are any chaplaincy projects in existence.

If there aren't any, you might consider developing a project using the Methodist course, **Chaplaincy Everywhere**, which helps local church groups discern whether God is calling them to setup a local chaplaincy project.

Not all projects to people in later life are based in care homes. There's one project which sees a caravan travelling into local communities to support the needs of people in later life.

Some useful organisations and links

- **MHA Chaplaincy and Spirituality**
- **Anna Chaplaincy**
- **Methodist Website: Chaplaincy Everywhere**

# Prisons Chaplaincy

Prison chaplaincy is an incredible privilege for those who serve in prisons. They often spend time with people who feel they have no hope, finding opportunities to share God's love. Prison chaplains can be lay or ordained, but have to be in a recognised ministry and endorsed by a Faith Advisor. The **Free Churches Group** oversees this for Free Church denominations.

"Working in Prison Chaplaincy can be both an immensely rewarding and frustrating experience. It combines traditional church ministry as many would understand: leading worship; running bible studies; preaching and teaching; offering pastoral care, along with a radical cross-cultural opportunity. Apart from the diverse cultural mix of people in prisons, there is the culture of prison itself to work with. Chaplaincy is never dull!" *(The Revd Bob Wilson, Free Churches Faith Advisor for Prison Chaplaincy)*

Your starting point for exploring a call to be a prison chaplain is with the **Free Churches Group** who will be able to put you in touch with a prison chaplain to find out more, or talk to you about the process of becoming a prison chaplain.

Some useful organisations and links

- **Free Churches Group (Prisons)**
- **Become a Prison Chaplain: eligibility to work as a prison chaplain**

# Schools Chaplaincy

Schools chaplaincy is incredibly varied. School chaplains work in a range of schools from those that belong to faith groups, to schools that have little formal contact with a faith organisation. This can mean that often school chaplaincy is the only contact schools have with a church. In some schools, there is an employed full-time chaplain, in other schools, the local church community develops a project and offers chaplaincy to the school.

School chaplains support the whole school community, from the pupils, to the staff, to parents and carers and to the wider community. This can include leading assemblies and opportunities for collective worship. It might mean offering pastoral support to pupils or staff at difficult times. Sometimes it means appropriately challenging school practices when things don't seem right. As with any chaplaincy, relationships are key.

Your starting point is to explore whether there are any schools chaplaincy projects in your area. You may be able to find these through the Internet. It's worth asking other denominations, particularly where faith schools are concerned.

If there aren't any, you might consider developing a project using the Methodist course, **Chaplaincy Everywhere**, which helps local church groups discern whether God is calling them to setup a local chaplaincy project.

Some useful organisations and links

- **Methodist Schools**
- **Centre for Chaplaincy in Education**

# Workplace Chaplaincy

Workplace chaplaincy supports both people at work and customers, clients or visitors in a wide variety of working environments. There are chaplaincies in town centres, retail centres, supermarkets, manufacturing, emergency services, agriculture, waterways, professional sport, casinos and racing, city and town council offices, airports, courts, building sites, public transport...

Your starting point is to see if there are any workplace chaplaincy projects in your local area. It's worth asking other churches to see if they're involved in any. There may be an ecumenical team to get involved with.

If there aren't any, you might consider developing a project using the Methodist course, **Chaplaincy Everywhere**, which helps local church groups discern whether God is calling them to setup a local chaplaincy project.

Some useful organisations and links

- **Workplace Chaplaincy Mission UK**
- **Industrial Christian Fellowship**
- **Sports Chaplaincy UK**

Some local organisations

- **Black Country Urban Industrial Mission**
- **Chaplaincy Plus (Birmingham)**
- **Churches and Industry Group Birmingham**
- **Faith at Work in Worcestershire**
- **IBEX: Churches working with the economy**
- **Middlebrook Angels Retail Chaplaincy**
- **MitE Chaplaincy (Mission in the Economy)**
- **South Yorkshire Chaplaincy and Listening**
- **Swindon Commercial Chaplaincy**

# Training and Development

There isn't one training programme for chaplains, but there are a number of training opportunities provided by a range of organisations. These continue to develop all the time. Some teams, projects and organisations offer their own training programmes if you join them. It's worth asking what's available and what others have done.

We are in the process of developing our own programmes and are building a **Chaplaincy Learning and Development** section of our own website.

## Final thought...

We hope this booklet is a great help to you in your discernment process. Chaplaincy is an incredibly rewarding ministry: it is exciting to join in with the work that God's Spirit is doing in the world!

But it can also be incredibly challenging and that's why it is important to root everything you do in the Church. Seek to discern your ministry within the strong relationships you have in your own church.

Chaplaincy shouldn't be escapism from your church or others in the Church. It is a sending from the Church to work in places outside the church walls, but very much rooted in the wider ministry of God's people.

Build strong relationships as you connect with other chaplains. You will learn much from them. And very finally, God bless you as you discern where God is leading you.