

Why Chaplaincy?

Workplace chaplaincy is a pioneering ministry, operating on the frontier between the church and the world. It gives the church an opportunity to engage with people with whom it would otherwise have little contact.

The task of the church in every age is to represent and reveal God's presence in Christ, sharing in the advance of His kingdom through proclamation and service. Local churches are no longer the centre of community life. People find their identity and form networks where they work or spend their leisure, where they shop or are educated and, for all too many, in a shared experience of worklessness. People rarely come uninvited to our churches. Effective engagement with the de-churched or un-churched majority therefore requires that Christians are authentically embedded in the places where people are.

Development of chaplaincy must never be isolated from equipping Christians to embody Christ wherever they are. Indeed chaplains can be a valuable resource to enable the church to do this. The way Christians do their jobs, how they react in adversity or how they deal with people around them will often open opportunities to give the reason for the hope that is in them. (1 Peter 3: 15)

However, there is a sense in which the representative role of the local minister has fallen to the chaplain, both ordained and lay people. Folk religion remains persistent, and many find reassurance in the presence of a recognised minister, especially where he or she has proved accessible, simply offering a listening ear. This is an implicit sharing of God's love and care, unconditionally and without demanding any response.

Chaplains gain insights to offer to the churches. They enjoy privileged access to many areas of society, generally secular and sometimes even hostile. If their faith and ministry can flourish in those places, facing contemporary issues before the churches do, then they have a vital part to play in shaping the church as it moves into an increasingly secular future.

Where chaplains have been visiting an organisation for several years, they find that their views and comments are valued when decisions which affect the lives of staff are to be made. It can be lonely at the top of an organisation, and the chaplain is there for the manager as well as her or his staff.

If we believe that the growth of the Kingdom of God includes, but is not limited to, personal salvation, then chaplaincy has a vital part to play. It brings the values of that Kingdom into everyday life, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes challenging the value systems at work in the many different places where chaplains are found.

“Chaplaincy is a way of living out the incarnational principle of all ministry, not in a way that is qualitatively different to parish ministry but in a way that enables that vision of a universal ministry of service to all people to be lived out more comprehensively than is possible in a purely geographical system... Chaplaincy should be viewed as a normative and valuable part of the mission of the church.”
(from “Chaplaincy and the Parish” – Miranda Threlfall-Holmes & Mark Newitt, “Crucible” October—December 2011, from which I have drawn much of the substance of this piece.)

