

CHAPLAINCY EVERYWHERE



SESSION FOUR

The Cloak of Chaplaincy

Martin of Tours saw a scantily-clad beggar in need of shelter and so he cut his own cloak in half and shared it with the man. Martin became known as the first chaplain. This session explores the sacrificial, caring and compassionate aspects of chaplaincy in the world. It will draw together some of the foundational values of chaplaincy as we consider how chaplains are called to be in places away from our church buildings.

Welcome



Has the idea of being caught up in the mission of God captured your heart? Has Christ's example inspired you? Have you grasped that we are all called to be as Christ in the world? Do you feel empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a witness? Has the theme of chaplaincy, as it has been presented so far, pointed to possibilities in your local community that God might be drawing you to become involved in? We hope so.

This session is called The Cloak of Chaplaincy. The cloak in mind has to do with an old chaplaincy story that we will consider together. We will then think about the ways in which early Methodists were involved in their local community and how such involvement helped to transform a nation through acts of compassion and witness. This session is about compassionate engagement: the kind of intentional and ongoing work that distinguishes chaplaincy.

Opening Prayer



Take a few moments to focus on God as creator, redeemer and sustainer. You might find it helpful to light a candle or play some music. At an appropriate time, say together the words of the following prayer.

**God of love and all life, we have glimpsed something of your glory.
Your glory in creation, your glory in Jesus. Your glory in re-creation, your glory in us.
We thank you for your unconditional love for us. For the abundant life that you offer.
You satisfy our deepest longings for living water.
You equip us for service: to love as you love, beyond our comfort zones.
In those places, you are with us.
We thank you for your faithfulness and an invitation to be with you.
We praise and worship you, the one who delights in us.
Amen.**

A Cloak



Watch one of the following videos about St Martin of Tours:

youtu.be/rtpApoFt55U or youtu.be/-nKvZOj6mNo

Once upon a time, on a bitterly cold night, a Roman soldier called Martin saw a scantily-clad beggar huddled by a wall. Seeing his need, he cut his military cloak in half and shared it. The cloak was called a capella. That night, Martin dreamed of Jesus wearing the half-cloak he had given away saying: "Here is Martin, the Roman soldier; he has clad me."

St Martin of Tours became known as the first capellain or chaplain.

After his ordination, Martin was commissioned to work away from church buildings in places where people were in special need. Buildings created for this special work were known as chapels!

Chaplains offer critical pastoral need



The story of St Martin of Tours has all the qualities of a legend. No one knows precisely what happened that night by the gates of the city of Amiens, nevertheless, the story of the shared cloak gets right to the heart of chaplaincy. Martin of Tours saw someone who had an obvious need and shared something that made a real difference. In this case, the cloak covered his nakedness, but the need might have equally been a word of encouragement or someone to listen at a moment of crisis. Chaplains offer critical pastoral care to those in need. However hidden or cleverly disguised, there is still much need in the world today and many people at different times and in different circumstances may well reveal their struggles. Chaplains must be ready to respond with compassion when such opportunities arise.

What is your cloak?



Spend a few minutes as a group responding to the following question. What is your cloak?

- Make a list together identifying what you bring to chaplaincy.

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Noticing others



The story of Martin of Tours is instructive as we consider the ministry of chaplaincy. Martin noticed a man in need; he had eyes that observed the world around him and noticed others. Very often, we see without really seeing. In today's world, scenes of tragedy and suffering are broadcast on the Internet and via our televisions on a minute-by-minute basis. Tragedy and suffering on this scale and at this pace can literally numb us to pain, to such a degree that if we are not careful we can stop noticing. We live in a world that is increasingly sceptical and suspicious: thinking that people might be trying to take us for a ride as they approach us with a request for help. It is very easy to become hardened to the needs around us. Martin shows us another way; his eyes were wide open to the needs of others and, with compassion, he responded.

There is a chaplain who works at a large industrial factory in the UK who has what you might call a 'ministry of waving'. As he walks around the large facility he is constantly waving to people and they wave back. The ministry of waving might otherwise be called 'the ministry of noticing others'. This is a key part of what it means to be a chaplain. To notice others is to put others before yourself. Noticing and responding to others is an expression of sacrificial love.

Who do you notice?



Take part in the following activity: youtu.be/vJG698U2Mvo

Sometimes we are so focused on what we are doing, that we miss other things that are happening. Chaplaincy is about noticing others. Imagine your journey from home to church and answer the following questions.

- Who do you notice?

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- What are some of the needs you see?

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Chaplaincy as caring for others



“Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.”
Catechism of the Catholic Church

What greater reputation might we have than to be known as people who love others?
This catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that love is at the heart of what it means to be human. The Scriptures tell us that God is love. Everything that God does is therefore an expression of his love, even his judgement and discipline!

Bible reading: 1 John 4:7-21



This reading is certainly among the most challenging found in Christian Scripture. We are created to love one another as an expression of our humanity. The Holy Spirit brings us into the community of love: of God and his kingdom. The community of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the community in which we live and move and have our being. Love is our context: our habitat and our home.



Not only that, but this passage tells us that we are to be like Jesus in this world. The way we love is in response to God’s love. And yet, if we claim to love God but harbour hatred in our heart, then our claims are empty.

The command to love one another is our highest calling as followers of Jesus Christ – it authenticates our claim to love God. These deep themes layer upon one another to describe ‘shalom’: God’s dream of everything being as it is meant to be. Shalom is the kingdom of God present among us in its fullest sense. Shalom: God’s peace – the reign of love. This is, in a very real sense, the outcome of chaplaincy. Chaplains are ambassadors of God’s kingdom, bringing love and reconciliation, playing their own part in making everything new.

Reflecting God’s caring heart



- Continuing to reflect on your journey from home to church, what does it look like to reflect God’s caring heart? How could you respond to who you notice and the needs you see? Ground the theory in some practical examples.

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The compassion of Christ



“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Matthew 9:36 (NRSV)

Jesus lived on earth with great sensitivity. He responded to what the Father was doing, through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus saw people in need and had compassion upon them and, in compassion, he acted. Each one of us can nurture compassion and empathy, becoming increasingly sensitive to those we work with and live among. To understand people’s stresses and strains – the causes of their pain, and to share in their joy and celebrations; this is doing life together and is a very powerful aspect of chaplaincy. Being available to people in all of life’s turbulence is a part of chaplaincy’s gift.

Bible reading: Mark 12:41-44



Here Jesus notices what is happening around him and his response shows the love he has for people.



In pairs, use a Bible to find an example of where Jesus demonstrates compassion. Share this with the group. Here are some possible passages: Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 15:32-39; Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 8:1-8; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:33-35; John 23:37.

Nurturing compassion



Spend a few minutes reflecting on the following questions:

- Remember the times when people have empathised with you and acted towards you with compassion. What did they do that made a difference?

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- What can you learn from their compassionate responses that is important for chaplaincy?

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The Early Methodists



England was experiencing a time of considerable moral and religious decline. The country was on the brink of a revolution like the French had experienced. Thankfully, John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed at about a quarter before nine, whilst listening to Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans at a religious society in Aldersgate Street. In that moment, he experienced a conversion to Christ and the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. Along with his brother Charles and friends like George Whitefield, they began to preach salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

Both John Wesley and George Whitefield found that they were often unwelcome to preach in pulpits around Britain and so they found themselves preaching in the open air: in fields and mine pits, factories and market places. In fact, it is said that there are few places in England where John Wesley did not preach.

They did not wait for people to come to them, but instead went to where the people were. Not only that, but John and the people who were called Methodists ministered among the poor, the sick and the prisoners. The religious leaders of the time reacted strongly to such activities and labelled them fanatics. 'Methodist' was not originally intended to be a label of admiration, but of disdain. Yet, these nonconformists reached out to people in need, to the working classes who were mostly overlooked by the Anglican Church of the day. Through their witness and preaching, industrial Britain experienced a revival that many say saved England from a bloody revolution.

The understanding of 'being sent to go to others' has been in the DNA of Methodism from the very beginning. John Wesley travelled about 5,000 miles per year by horse, stopping to speak to whoever would listen; this sense of being on the move is very much at the heart of the understanding of what it means to be a Methodist.

Open fields in the 21st century

- Thinking about your local context, where, outside the church building, do people gather and what opportunities might this present?



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Chaplaincy for the 21st century



It is truly exciting to think that nations have been transformed by groups of Christians who collaborate in God's mission by going to where people are. Over the years and for various reasons, chaplaincy has found itself divided into various disciplines. Education includes chaplaincy in day schools, independent schools, further education and higher education. Statutory chaplaincy includes chaplaincy to healthcare, prisons and the armed forces. Workplace chaplaincy covers everything from the emergency services to factory shop floors, civic offices to agriculture. Of course all of these places are workplaces, but the categories help to allocate resources and training and develop supportive networks.

Chaplaincy has a history of being a dynamic and vigorous expression of God's mission. Too often, chaplaincy has happened independently from the local church. However, in light of all that we have considered, we want to offer a complementary vision for the future of chaplaincy: a chaplaincy for the 21st century that comes from the heart of local Christian congregations.

A revolutionary sentence



Spend a few minutes discussing the following sentence (perhaps give it to your church leaders to include as a point of conversation at a church meeting!) Note down any thoughts that come out of the discussion:

- Local, congregation-led chaplaincy is one of the most effective ways to collaborate in God's mission in the world; local people responding to local needs over time can change the Church and the world!

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Unexpected Endings



Before we conclude this session, it is important that we add one last insight to our growing understanding of chaplaincy. Chaplaincy encounters often have unexpected, even unknown endings. We see this clearly in the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Bible reading: Acts 8:26-40



- What aspects of chaplaincy are displayed in this reading?

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Sensitive to the Spirit

Once again, the details in this story tell us so much that is instructive for chaplaincy. We spoke earlier about how Jesus lived with great sensitivity. Here we read that Phillip the deacon, or the evangelist as he is sometimes known, hears the Holy Spirit tell him to head south. He was obedient and began to travel until he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was in charge of the treasury of the Kandake. The Kandake was the Queen of Ethiopia who was thought to be half woman, half divine. The Ethiopian was therefore a powerful official with much authority.



The kingdom of inclusion

Not only that but he was a eunuch. As a eunuch, the Ethiopian belonged to a sexual minority that was not fully welcome in the worshipping community of Israel. The story tells us that the man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, but would have certainly been marginalised in the temple courts. This story tells us that the first Gentile convert to Christianity is from a sexual minority, a different nationality and would have been marginalised. Here in Acts, we see that God's mission is radically inclusive!

Partnering with God

As we observe Phillip in this story, we observe some other interesting details which are important factors in the ministry of chaplaincy. 'The Spirit told...' is a phrase that features more than once in this story. The invitation to partner with God in his mission by his Spirit could not be any more explicit: the Spirit told Phillip to 'go to that chariot and stay near it.' In other words, the Spirit of God told Phillip to 'hang around.'

Phillip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah and started a conversation with the question 'do you understand what you are reading?' The theme of helping people to understand has been present in many of the stories we have studied during this course. The eunuch invites Phillip to explain the Scriptures.

Removing cultural barriers

Not only that, but when they come to some water, the eunuch asks the question, 'what is keeping me from being baptised?' What an incredible scene! Revelation leads to action. There was clearly nothing stopping him from being baptised – apart from cultural barriers – and so Phillip, aware of his surroundings, used the location as a prompt and helped the eunuch access God's radically inclusive love!

Unknown endings

When the eunuch came out of the water, having been baptised, Phillip was transported by the Spirit of God to Azotus and continued to travel about among the towns preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The unexpected and unknown ending of this encounter teaches us a very important principle about the ministry of chaplaincy. Although, many chaplaincy relationships are developed over time, some chaplaincy encounters are brief and the endings unknown. Chaplains have to trust that what happened in those few moments will have some impact: that a seed of transformation has been planted.

These ambiguous endings are part of the dynamics of chaplaincy and chaplains shouldn't push too hard for a conclusion. Entrusting the ministry of chaplaincy to God is an essential aspect of the work; knowing that it is the Spirit who guides us to participate in the mission of God and will bring it to a good conclusion.

Received and welcomed

All Christians are sent into the world to be witnesses, however, chaplains are received by the organisation within which they work. In this story, Phillip the deacon was welcomed by the Ethiopian eunuch. Phillip was invited to sit with the Ethiopian eunuch and help him make sense of the Scriptures. Understanding that chaplains are guests; invited, received and welcomed in a specific place, distinguishes chaplaincy. This means that chaplaincy is always a negotiated presence. We will think more about the practicalities of what this looks like in the next session.

Conclusions



During this session we have thought about some historic examples of chaplaincy and also began to think about what chaplaincy might look like as it evolves to meet the needs of the world in the 21st century. We have seen that:

- Chaplains offer critical pastoral care.
- Chaplaincy happens away from church buildings and communities.
- Chaplains share their cloaks, whatever that might mean in a practical sense.
- Chaplains offer the comfort of a caring listening ear.
- Chaplains reflect God's compassionate heart.
- Chaplaincy is motivated by God's love and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Chaplaincy is an act of compassion: the enactment of love towards a person or community in need.
- Chaplains respond to the nudges of God's Holy Spirit.

- Chaplains regularly use the props and prompts around them.
- Chaplains embrace uncertain endings, trusting God with the next step.
- Chaplains are sent and authorised by the church and received by the organisations in which they work.
- Chaplaincy is therefore a negotiated presence.

Prayers and Dismissal



**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.
Amen.**

(From the *Methodist Worship Book*, NRSV)

**Go, responding with sensitivity to the nudges of the Holy Spirit.
Go, with eyes open to the needs of those around you.
Go, with the love of God in your heart, knowing that his love is enough.
Enough for you and for the whole world.
Love that is making all things new.
Love that enfolds us in a healing embrace.
Love that is at our end as in our beginning.
Go, with love; in the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

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Methodist Worship Book, NRSV (1999, Methodist Publishing).

2392, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2nd ed (Doubleday, 1997)