

Why chaplaincy?

Chaplains share
their stories



Life In Technicolour

Caroline Ainger

*'The thief only comes to steal and kill and destroy;
I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.'
These words of Jesus in John 10:10 define my chaplaincy ministry.*

There is much in this world that robs people of dignity, opportunity and hope: injustice, addiction, homelessness, illness, trauma and poverty in all its manifestations. Jesus tells us that his mission is life-giving and life-changing. He loves a makeover! Just ask Zacchaeus.

So I sensed the joyful presence of Jesus when talking to a man called Mark recently. I first met Mark some three months ago when he was given emergency accommodation by the charity I work for. He had been living on the streets in Greater Manchester and was estranged from his family. Given a safe place to stay, washing facilities, food and opportunities to engage with activities such as gardening, upcycling and sports, Mark has grown so much in confidence. His days now have a purpose and a routine. He stands straighter, he initiates interactions and he makes eye contact when he talks. He has gained a new qualification and he is building relationships with his children. He told me that he was lost but is not lost anymore! This is the privilege of chaplaincy – seeing how God is at work in the world which is loved without limits (John 3:16).

I am a Methodist minister who has served in circuits, in a multi-faith chaplaincy team in acute hospitals, and now as a chaplain in the charity sector. God's leading, God's prompting, God's equipping have been consistent and that sustains me through the challenging times: when a person takes their own life because the pain of living is too



much to bear; when someone breaks down at the food bank because they are ashamed they can't provide for their family; when someone flees to us from a violent relationship; when someone dies of an overdose; when a person tells you they have been trafficked to the UK. I'm here doing what I do as the charity's first chaplain because this is where God is – reaching out in love, demanding justice, commanding mercy, mending lives, restoring relationships, building up communities and bringing hope.

Chaplaincy is life in technicolour! It resembles that moment in my favourite film, 'The Wizard of Oz', when there is this incredible change from dreary black and white to vibrant and varied colour. It is Jesus who works this miracle! Chaplains are those whose deepest desire is to see this transformation, and to bear witness to it to others, including the Church. In following Jesus in this way, I have found that my own faith has been strengthened, broadened and deepened.

Every day as a chaplain is different in the detail. What remains the same throughout is the invitation to listen and to be non-judgmental, compassionate and empowering. The care we give reflects God's love for each and for all.

Chaplaincy Is Risky!



Melvina Brown

I have had the privilege of being the Overstone Pioneer Community Chaplain for the past seven months. My motto as a chaplain is to, "Build caring relationships, with the hope of gaining permission to share the life changing good news of Jesus Christ in a non-threatening manner."

What form that will take in a new community, to be completely honest, I don't know. It will be a journey of prayer, listening to the Holy Spirit and acting on what we hear; befriending and listening to the community, in order to find ways to respond to their needs; as well as partnering ecumenically and with other agencies to serve the community.

One of the most important things that I have learnt whilst being involved in mission or calling, is that if I feel confident or assured that I am doing something that God wants me to be involved in, if I do it, he will be beside me all the way.

This doesn't mean that the venture will be 'successful' in the way that we often measure success, but it does mean that something of value will be planted, learnt or experienced.

With this knowledge, if I am afraid, I'll do it afraid; if I feel intimidated, I'll do it intimidated; if I feel unsure, I'll do it unsure. From experience I have learnt that as you journey, fear, intimidation and unsurety will be replaced by courage and the reassurance that we are not alone, but God's Spirit is working with us.



During a recent online event, I shared an experience of going into the new housing area I am working in, with leaflets advertising The Big Lunch. The aim being to encourage neighbourliness and connections in the community, and to build relationships. After speaking to one homeowner, explaining what the intentions were, he 'kindly' gave me back the leaflet and pointed to all the homes of the neighbours he knew.

He wasn't the only one who didn't wish to engage, there must have been something in the air that day, as several people weren't very friendly. When situations such as this occur and they will, we should always remind ourselves that we are being God's light and love in our communities, and although that light and love will not be welcomed by all, it will be welcomed by some.

Chaplaincy is risky business!

The greatest and most rewarding risk however, is stepping out by faith into whatever area God is calling you into; listening to God's Spirit and walking with him hand in hand and seeing his will and purposes unfold. It is definitely a risk worth taking.

My Journey



Sue Edwards

How did you discern your call to be a chaplain? How did you know God was calling you?

In 2000, I had my calling to be a presbyter in the Methodist Church. I remember going to attend a diaconate weekend of discernment. As I was sat in the little room waiting to speak to the person in charge of the weekend I noticed a picture on the wall. I can't remember who that was but noticed that he was a chaplain. I have always been a people person and from an early age was seen as a person 'who cared' for others. That call never went away and God placed me in positions where I would get the experience to eventually fulfil this calling.

How did you respond to this call and get involved in chaplaincy?

It took a while to get there but when I became a minister, part of my placement was to be in Longton Cottage hospital as chaplain. This hospital was only a small one but part of my role was to visit patients on either of the wards and to support staff. I also led worship there once a month for staff and their visitors. Eventually working with the social secretary we set a tea and cake afternoon with a topic each week and this gave me time to support staff, patients and their visitors. I also explored other chaplaincy. I was Boys' Brigade chaplain in my first stationing in Stoke on Trent and also in Hucknall. I became Nottingham and Derby safeguarding chaplain from 2016 to 2020. It was eventually to be healthcare chaplaincy that came back to me. In 2019, someone said to me that if I was still seriously interested in healthcare chaplaincy then I should do something about it.

I started to explore just what was out there and someone I knew who had died recently launched me into thinking about how I could do this. I then applied for summer school at Cliff College and someone gave me a phone number to get in touch with the head chaplain at NUH NHS Trust. I was invited in for a chat which became an interview (although I hadn't realised this). I was invited to go on placement at City Hospital in the summer and then started voluntary in the September. I then applied for part time role which I began in February 2020 and was then offered full time hours in the middle of the pandemic and started full time in April.

How did you know you had the right gifts to be chaplain?

I've always been a people person. Putting others before my own needs, although there are times when you need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. Being able to listen and hear what someone is saying, sometimes reading between the lines. Empathy.

Were there any challenges?

I started as the pandemic started so we lost our ward volunteers, training was no longer face to face (my last one being in Cardiff at the beginning of March). I had to learn how to wear the PPE. We were faced with patients who had covid, many losses including staff. Chaplaincy took another turn which I had to learn day by day. Other challenges: being with people who faced terminal diagnosis, lost children/babies/loved ones through death. Not to take on too much and making sure you get some time to reflect on what has just happened.

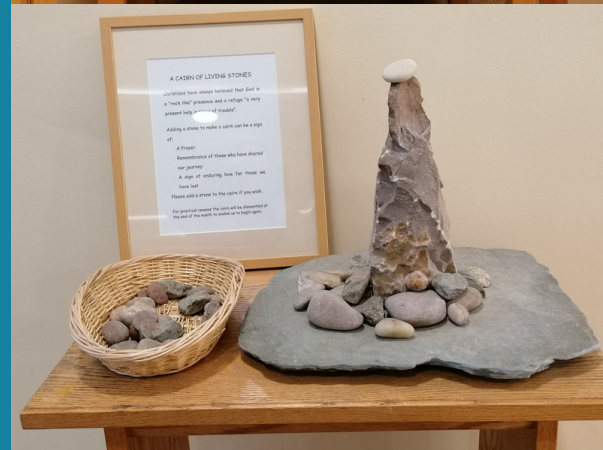
What has your journey as a chaplain been like?

The calling has always been there and some of that journey you have already heard; there have been ups and downs, twists and turns, and not always easy, but I love it.

What do you enjoy about chaplaincy? Why is it such a fulfilling calling?

I love working as part of team. You have support, encouragement, people to sit and pray with and listen to you from the team. We are there for each other. I love that every day is different.

You meet different people with different situations but you have the privilege of being alongside them on their own journey wherever it is taking them. It is a privilege that even when there have been no or a few visitors you can send messages on loved ones behalf; you can put them in touch with loved ones through facetime. There have been those special times of giving thanks for a baby being born as well as at the end of life. I have taken part in a pre-wedding when a family member would not have been able to attend the couple's actual wedding. I have sat with patients as we watched live stream funerals. I have laughed with them at times. I have prayed or read from the bible to them. You don't always know what happens when patients leave the hospital, but knowing that your visit may just have made a difference, whether it's been a kind word, holding someone's hand or just being there.



Who Me?



Kerry Halliday

Who me?

If someone had told me 20 years ago I was to become a Christian and MHA Chaplain I would have laughed them out of the room, yet God had other plans.

Once I felt God's calling, prayed and acted on it I found that quite miraculously doors were opened and opportunities arose. Initially I was very doubtful and asked God "Who me?" , but he gently laughed at my doubt and things fell into place

Although training as a Local Preacher, my initial lack of confidence in God's calling meant I nearly didn't apply for the role of chaplain. The reason for this and a reason I have heard from others considering becoming a chaplain was not having an in-depth theological knowledge. However, I soon found out what is more important than in-depth theological knowledge is knowing how to listen and bring comfort in a way that works for the individual.

So what do I do as a Chaplain?

No two days are ever the same. Often my working day can include offering pastoral care, organising activities and events that lift the spirit to name a few. So I can end up doing a variety of things during my day including art and crafts, going out, listening to music with the residents and often just having a cuppa and a chat about love, life and the universe.



Love this Calling

I do get to lead worship regularly and as you may imagine worship for adults living with Dementia and Alzheimer's needs to be quite different to a traditional Sunday service. Having a good sense of humour and thinking outside the box helps with this.

I regularly invite Local Preachers and ministers from different denominations to come in to lead worship. Also, if anyone from a different faith wanted fellowship with their faith group I would organise this.

I have the privilege of being with residents at the end of their life to offer them comfort and support, as well as relatives and staff. Of course there are profoundly sad times, yet equally there are fun times and I find I laugh with people as much as I share in their sadness and grief.

Being a Chaplain with people in their later life is wonderfully challenging and fulfilling, it isn't just a job it's my calling which I love. #Lovethiscalling!

Gifts and Gospel Values



John Hostler

How do you tell if the job you are doing is one that God calls you to do? My simplistic answer is: if it feels right, with regard both to God and myself. With regard to God, if it's in line with Gospel values; with regard to myself, if it uses the particular abilities and gifts I've been given.

My main career was in education and that was certainly a calling. The purpose of my work was godly, I was good at it and often I felt fulfilled. But when eventually retirement came I was not grieved: by then I had given what I could and was glad to hand over to others. Like many newly retired folk I then looked around for something useful to do. For a few years I volunteered with local charities in various roles. Then a project I was helping with came to an end, leaving me with spare time, and at that point an item appeared in the church notice sheet advertising for volunteers at our local hospital chaplaincy.

Do you discern providence at work in that coincidence? I confess I didn't at the time: it just seemed a convenient opportunity. I'd had no experience of the NHS and I thought it would be 'something different' to keep me from getting bored.

I worked as a chaplaincy volunteer for two years and was then appointed as a part-time paid chaplain (employed by the NHS). I've now been in the team for seven years. Currently we have six paid chaplains, all but one of us part-time, and seven volunteers.

Most of our work involves visiting around the hospital wards, talking with patients, visitors and staff; but from time to time we also conduct funerals, lead worship in the hospital chapel, contribute to staff training and so on.

We work to NHS guidelines and a professional code of practice. Those documents define our work as 'spiritual care', care for people's spirits. Many of the people we meet are in good spirits, facing difficult circumstances with resilience and even cheerfulness. Others are not: they are in low spirits, bowed down by anxiety, exhaustion, hopelessness or the weight of life's troubles.

As chaplains and volunteers we offer a listening ear, encouraging people to talk and share their worries and listening in a warm, compassionate and non-judgemental way. If people have religious faith we also offer support through prayer and scripture but most of our conversations have no explicit religious content.

Like chaplains in all sectors I see the core of my role as offering to others the love that I receive from God. Working in an acute general hospital enables me to give that help to people at some of the darkest and most difficult times of their lives.

Has God called me to do it? I wasn't sure at first but as time has gone on my confidence has grown. I know it's work that God wants doing (Matthew 25: 35-40) and I know it's work that uses me – my particular abilities and gifts – fully and to good effect. I feel privileged to be able to do it and I'm very grateful that I can.



God Encounters



Elaine Hutchinson

"I think you're called to what you already naturally do, so I think that I've been doing chaplaincy long before I was trying to do chaplaincy".

I'm the person standing at the bus stop that people begin a conversation with, or sitting on the bus minding my own business and again someone will feel absolutely comfortable sharing their most inner thoughts with.

Deeply resonated

So, while I was studying at The Queen's Foundation, we had a guest speaker, the Revd Neil Johnson, come to talk about street ministry and the words chaplaincy got me sitting up and listening. This ministry resonated deeply with me, it seemed to help articulate or fit what I thought I was already doing so I wanted to explore it more.

So, I went on a two-week placement at the NEC, where I had the opportunity to shadow then the lead chaplain, the Revd Stephen Willey.



It was an eye-opening experience to say the least, journeying with people in their place of work just seemed a natural place for the Church to be, and the recipients seemed very appreciative to have a chaplain around to listen and journey with them too.

The placement experience was helpful in allowing me to encounter the importance of listening, the importance of journeying and that God was already at work in the workplace.

I had no idea what God had in store, and in 2009 I was appointed as Birmingham City Centre Retail Chaplain offering chaplaincy to people who work in the retail sector of the city. Be.friend is the name of the chaplaincy because it's what we do, befriending through being an intentional presence by journeying and by listening.

All in a day's work

At first, I think people found it a bit unusual having a chaplain, but as they've got used to us visiting, most retailers are very happy to chat and tell us how things are.

We often share the concerns of individuals, which vary from meeting organisation targets, to dealing with redundancy, celebrating wedding plans to listening to someone who has lost a loved one, it's all in a day's work of a retail chaplain.



Being a chaplain is very rewarding and not always quantifiable but we trust that God is in the process, that God is always present and these encounters are sacred moments.

The ministry of chaplaincy continues to be a space of God encounters, God in the ordinary incarnational transformative where the Church moves outside its walls and walks along those with the workplace. This is the gospel going out and encountering disciples, making disciples, encouraging disciples, journeying with disciples.

May God reveal to you his will for this ministry and may you respond, here I am Lord send me!

Please continue to pray for the team of volunteers who are committed to this ministry and to the work of retail chaplaincy in Birmingham City Centre.



Stand There!



David Newlove

How did you discern your call to be a chaplain? How did you know God was calling you?

I have been a hospital chaplain for a number of years so I was already aware that chaplaincy is a model of ministry that I am familiar and comfortable with. The call for my current chaplaincy came as a request from the Chair of District when I moved to Cumbria. I sensed that it was part of the reason why God had led the Stationing Committee in their decision.

How did you respond to this call and get involved in chaplaincy?

As in many things I just turned up – availability is a key aspect of any chaplain's role. Once there I spent the first few weeks looking and listening. After any visit I reflected Ignatian style asking of myself: Where did I sense God leading me, what worked, what didn't, how did I feel and if a similar opportunity were to arise again how would I take it? I found that using this method I grew into the chaplaincy, the people grew towards me and each interaction became an affirmation.

How did you know you had the right gifts to be a chaplain?

By listening to what others were saying about me, through my reflections and by the continuing sense of call. I make sure that I reflect after each session (I use a notebook to help me do that) and I don't leave without a positive – even if that means sitting in my car and waiting until in my heart and my mind I can turn a negative around.



Were there any challenges?

Yes, many, in that I have nothing to offer but myself – I am not there to trade. It may sound daunting but actually it is quite liberating to be free and outside of the church context.

What has your journey as a chaplain been like?

I won't lie, there have been times when I have found being there really tough, when no one would talk or I felt out of place. It has been enough to just remain there. In moments like this I remind myself of what a friend said "Don't just do something, stand there". I use the time to pray and listen more and you know what, people do respond. Most often at this point someone will just walk up to me and talk – even if it's just about the weather it says they value my presence.

What do you enjoy about chaplaincy? Why is it such a fulfilling calling?

I enjoy the people, I enjoy hearing their stories and learning from them about their livelihood. I enjoy being outside of the structure of the church where all I have to offer is all I am and fulfilment comes from knowing that this is how God wants me to be so that he can work through my ministry unfettered. It is an awesome, privileged role.