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5

UNIT FIVE

CHAPLAINCY ESSENTIALS

LISTENING AND CARING

The **Methodist** Church 

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Worship

Light a candle and be quiet for a while.

Bible verse:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35 (NRSV)

Use this prayer or one of your own choosing:

Loving God, help us to listen deeply, drawing on your wisdom and strength. Make us unafraid of hard silences when our words can't distract from the pain. Open us to learn new things and help us to forget some of the unhelpful old things. And as we care for others help us to remember that caring for ourselves is not a sin and martyrs can be so hard to be around. **Amen.**

Review of the previous unit

Talk about one of the tasks which you chose from the Putting it into practice list at the end of the last unit.

What's in this unit?

Read

As a chaplain, you may find yourself as the first person trusted to listen and support during a life crisis. Work pressures, family problems, bereavement and mental health challenges are all part of life and consequently become part of the work of chaplains. It is important to recognise what our role is within this; some may be trained in social work, counselling or mental health but most chaplains are not.

This unit will help us begin to think about how we can work safely within our limitations and where additional help can be accessed - both for ourselves and the people we work with. Suggestions will also be made for further training.

The story of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman can show us many of the features of a chaplaincy conversation – what seems like a chance encounter in a public place becomes an opportunity for a much deeper conversation.

Read John 4:1-29.

For discussion

- 1) What feelings might the woman have experienced before talking to Jesus, when speaking to him, and then afterwards? What seems to change for her?
- 2) Though we know part of how the story progresses, we don't know how it ends. How does it feel when we don't know what happens to the people that we encounter in the course of our chaplaincy work?
- 3) What part of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman might not be appropriate for a chaplain today?
- 4) From this, what skills are important for a chaplaincy conversation? Are there any other skills or qualities a chaplain should have?

Chaplaincy conversations

Read

One of the most important things we can do as chaplains is to listen sensitively to what people tell us. It can be an immense privilege to be alongside others at times of challenge and change, hearing stories and supporting people where they are at. There are some important things to consider in doing this well.



Make sure that you listen carefully and respect what the person is telling you. You can help people to feel heard by: giving them space to speak and not always feeling that you have to say something; by reflecting back what you are hearing and using open questions ("How did that make you feel?" rather than 'Did that make you feel depressed?") This allows us to hear properly rather than imposing our own thoughts and feelings onto a situation. We also need to be careful with our body language - crossed arms or staring out the window might suggest defensiveness or boredom.

Sometimes we may be in a position to give information or make a referral to a specialist agency or service, but the individual has the choice of what they do with that.

Fundamental to our work as chaplains is the belief that God loves everyone. Some people will be ready to hear that and want a conversation about it, others will not. It is important that our pastoral care is informed by this belief but not used as a vehicle to force it on people. When people are vulnerable it can be tempting to offer our own experiences of God as a solution. If people are not ready to hear this it can be immensely alienating and ruin a relationship. Always be led by the person you are working with, if they introduce it into the conversation you have been given permission to explore it more with them. However, remember that their understanding and experience of God maybe very different to your own and you need to respect that.

Though we always want to support people where they are at and respect confidentiality there may be situations where this is not possible and we have to take action. If a person tells you that they are thinking about suicide or hurting someone else we have a duty of care to act on that. It can usually be done in consultation with the person by being honest about our own limitations and thinking together about who else could be involved (eg the GP or the Emergency Department at the local

hospital). If necessary, you may need to help them in accessing that support. Also if we have concerns about the welfare of a child, young person or vulnerable adult we have to disclose that. Ensure that you understand the safeguarding policy for the Church and, if it has one, for the organisation that you are chaplain to. If you do find yourself in these kinds of situations it is really important that you seek support for yourself from your supervisor or peer support group.

Do

- Remind yourself of safeguarding best practice. The latest information can be found at www.churchsafe.org.uk.
- Try to listen and understand; don't presume to know what people are experiencing even if you have had similar experiences.
- Use touch with immense care. Though it can be very healing, think about how it could be misconstrued or be unhelpful for that person. Remember some people will have experienced inappropriate touch and may have been damaged by that. It is important to check it out, (eg ask: "Can I give you a hug?") and accept that their answer maybe 'no' verbally or through their body language.
- Be aware that the person you are working with may have to go back in to the work role when they have finished speaking with you. Think about how much you encourage them to tell you at that time. Could a better time or place be offered? If possible, allow a few moments at the end of the conversation to gather themselves.
- Be open and realistic about the amount of time you can offer.

Don't

- Feel that you have to fix things, have the answers or make things better. Often the best chaplains are those who can sit alongside and be in the sad and difficult places without trying to avoid the pain by seeking solutions.
- Ever promise total confidentiality (remember if someone states that there is a risk to themselves or others you have a duty of care to inform someone) but do be clear about when and who you would tell and in what circumstances.
- Work beyond your competency, but, if possible, remain available and supportive if they seek professional help.

For discussion

Why might the following responses be unhelpful in a chaplaincy conversation?

- 1) "Oh I know just what you mean, something similar happened to me last year and I did..."
- 2) "You really need to pray about this, God will..."
- 3) "I promise I won't tell anyone. It doesn't matter what it is; I will keep it to myself."
- 4) "Sorry. I got distracted. What did you say?"
- 5) "Come here, a nice big hug will make it all better!"

Chaplaincy case study

Peter regularly visits a department. Mary, one of the staff, is normally happy and welcoming; a big presence in the team. Today she looks very down and withdrawn. Peter notices it and asks if she is OK. She shakes her head and looks like she wants to cry but says she can't talk now. Peter asks if she wants to meet up during her break. They meet and she tearfully discloses that her sister died two weeks ago; she has had to come back to work but is still feeling very upset. Her manager is not being very sympathetic and expects her to be back to normal.

For discussion

- 1) What might be a helpful response from Peter? (Think particularly about body language, questioning, reflecting back and silence.)
- 2) Should he pray with her?
- 3) Given that she is at work, what things might Peter need to bear in mind?
- 4) Who might be able to give further support if Mary felt that she needed it?

Further reflection - supporting ourselves

Chaplaincy work can be immensely rewarding but also demanding. It is important that we look after ourselves. Though each chaplaincy is different, it should have clear structures for support and accountability of the chaplain. If it has not, it is important to make sure this is put in place. In addition to a supervisor or support group you may also want to think about finding a spiritual director or soul friend who you can talk to about your relationship with God, chaplaincy work and your life in general. More information on this can be found at: www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirection.html.

Putting it into practice:

Make a note of any useful contacts and any reflections in your log book as you do the following exercises.

- Think about a situation from your own context and look at some of the resources that have been listed below. Which would be the most helpful for you?
- Make a note about what other support is available locally, eg contact details of the out of hours GP, local support groups, etc.
- Carefully think about what training you have had which is relevant to chaplaincy. What additional training might you need? Can you imagine any situations in a chaplaincy context that you would dread occurring? You may want to explore that more with your mentor or group.

Summary prayer:

Creator God forge in us the strength to support others,
loving God deepen in us the capacity to care,
encourager God inspire us with hope for the hopeless,
broken God challenge us with the weeping of the wounded,
healing God bind all our hurts and make us whole.

Amen

Additional resources:

Training: It is important to understand that Chaplaincy Essentials is not a course in pastoral skills to that this unit is no more than an introduction. For further training in pastoral care you may want find out if a local church or circuit is offering the Encircled in Care training course. This course offers nine issue based sessions covering some of the situations which we might find in our pastoral work. The course is available from www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/.

If you encounter a lot of people who are experiencing mental health problems you may find the Mental Health First Aid training course useful: www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

Other resources

Listed below are just some of the websites available to offer support. It is important that you think about your own context and what is available locally.

For support regarding legal, housing, money and other advice contact the Citizens Advice Bureau: www.citizensadvice.org.uk.

For resources to support positive mental health in the work place: www.time-to-change.org.uk.

For children and adolescent mental health: www.youngminds.org.uk.
For adult mental health: www.mind.org.uk.

For support with bereavement and loss: www.cruse.org.uk.

For information on addictions:

Alcohol - www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Drugs - <http://ukna.org>

Gambling - www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

For information on eating disorders for people with the condition and their families and friends: www.b-eat.co.uk.

For those affected by self-harm: www.selfharm.co.uk.

In supporting people who are suicidal, in addition to contacting local health services, you can contact: The Samaritans: www.samaritans.org. Telephone: 08457 90 90 90.

For young people who are suicidal, contact POPYRUS: www.papyrus-uk.org Telephone: 0800 068 4141.

Further reading:

McClelland K, (2014) Call the Chaplain – Spiritual and Pastoral Caregiving in Hospitals, Norwich, Canterbury Press

Based in the experience of hospital chaplaincy this accessible book is an excellent introduction to the pastoral work of a chaplain.