

Chaplaincy in the Community – Being alongside others

**Cuddesdon School of Theology & Ministry Study Day,
Saturday 22 May 2010,
Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire**

The following notes were made by Andrew Presland.

About twenty-five people were present, mostly Anglicans from Oxford Diocese.

The first session was an overview of chaplaincy work to put it into context. This was given by Victoria Slater, Research Officer at the Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology. It drew on the results of her recent survey of Anglican chaplaincy work, which involved interviews, visits and desk research, carried out over eight weeks, including chaplaincy to workplaces, schools, police, courts, rural areas, FE colleges, detention centres and the homeless.

Chaplaincy could be summed up by the phrase “it’s all quite messy” – with it having different purposes in different settings, using different definitions of ‘chaplaincy’, covering a range of churchmanship and with varied types of training and employer. The status of chaplains varied widely too, from authoritative moral leader in some independent schools, to humble servant elsewhere. There were nevertheless some common themes, such as concerns over limited opportunities for training and support. Many chaplaincies were under financial pressure, particularly in dioceses that were increasingly channelling scarce financial resources towards parochial work.

Interest in chaplaincy appeared to be growing, aided by the recognition within contemporary thinking on mission that people - even if reluctant to take part in church activities - were often happy for Christian people to walk alongside them in their everyday life.

This was followed by three case studies, each with a presentation followed by discussion:

- Rev Glyn Evans (Oxford diocesan rural officer and of the Farm Crisis Network) spoke on the varied roles of chaplaincy within the rural church, again with there being no single model. Some agricultural shows had their own chaplain, whereas other chaplains had a much wider remit, with diocesan rural officers arguably carrying out some chaplaincy roles themselves.
- Debbie Thompson (Simeon Trust) spoke about her work as Chaplain to Older People for the Greater Alton Project in Alton in Hampshire, in a project supported by most local churches. This involved her developing links with, and visiting, a range of residential and nursing homes, and local organisations.
- John Caperon (Director of the Bloxham Project) spoke about the Project’s work since 1967 alongside school chaplains. Its traditional focus had been on independent and church schools, but he noted that chaplaincy work took place in other settings – with a Wiltshire curate doing mentoring work in a primary school being among those labelled as a chaplain.

After lunch in the theological college refectory, those present took part in small group work, looking at chaplaincy work and the parish context. The day ended with feedback from the groups and discussion. Key points were:

- Although chaplains tended to have a ministry of presence rather than one of proclamation, the fact that they went to where people were meant that they often had a bigger impact on non-Christians than church-based ministers.
- Street Pastors are in some ways prime examples of chaplains – they might even have been called ‘street chaplains’ if they hadn’t come out of a Pentecostal stable.
- There is scope for parochial staff teams to include full- or part-time chaplains for some types of chaplaincy work, such as work in a town centre. As well as avoiding the feeling of isolation, this could be a pragmatic way of benefiting from shifts of money towards parochial ministry, rather losing out from such changes.