

Survey of Chaplains 2019

Part 3 – Change makers



Highlights and challenges of Educational Chaplaincy.

An Occasional Paper of Chaplaincy Central based on the data collected in the online survey of February 2019 completed by 102 subscribers to the Chaplaincy Central website.

Written by Mrs Toni Coulton – Chair of Trustees of Chaplaincy Central. July 2019.

“Seeing young lives changed and outcomes improved” What could be more headline grabbing than this statement made by two chaplains responding independently to the question: ‘What is your biggest highlight of the past year in educational chaplaincy?’

Others added comments which helped to build up a picture of the real impact chaplaincy can have:

“Seeing young people grow and deepen despite some traumatic experiences.”

“Helping a number of young people to feel able to access the school.”

“Several successful mediations between pairs or groups of students that had had serious relationship fallouts (some involving the police).”

“Two students with learning difficulties sharing the news they have found paid employment and the new Principal saying we have his full support now.”

“Hearing from teaching staff that we do make a difference to the young people.”

There were so many positive comments reflecting observable **changes** given by chaplains as the highlight of their year that, in reviewing the answers to question 27 of the survey, Chaplaincy Central Trustees found that they formed the joint largest group of highlight responses.¹

Evaluating the work of chaplaincy is a perennial conundrum and has formed the subject of emails to Chaplaincy Central and workshops at conferences. ‘In common with many companies and organisations, the large institutions that employ chaplains increasingly demand measurable results.’ The question remains: can you measure the work of chaplains and isn’t it a danger that the wrong type of evaluation may collude with the view that only the measurable is valuable?² Whilst chaplains clearly want to make a difference (who doesn’t!) the belief that they are called to their ministry which they execute in an incarnational way makes it very hard for them to speak directly about the impact of their work.

¹ The other large group of highlights was Relationships which will be discussed later in this paper– both had 24 comments

² For a fuller exploration of this see M Threlfall-Holmes and M Newitt, *Being a Chaplain* (SPCK London 2011) p134-136

This survey shows that just by asking chaplains to share the things that put joy in their hearts and a smile on their face, gives them a genuine way to describe the impact of their chaplaincy, and therefore of themselves. At Chaplaincy Central we believe this is a story worth sharing and celebrating. These responses have given us, and the wider chaplaincy support network that we are linked with, such a wealth of information about the value of chaplaincy that we are determined to get it to a wider audience.

There is encouragement for everyone, especially for those respondents in the 15% of establishments that have launched their chaplaincy programme within the last three years. How encouraging to those chaplains who are just 'Getting Started.'³

"When I started, chaplaincy was a blank canvas. Now chaplaincy is the heart of my school with staff and students completely on board with what chaplaincy does."

For chaplains however the reason they are doing what they do and are not just support workers, is that they extend spiritual care to their school or college. The role of a chaplain is 'through pastoral care and spiritual leadership to nurture the well-being and human flourishing of the community in which the chaplain is situated.'⁴ Spiritual care was not a category in our analysis of the survey but it runs like a thread through all the highlights and challenges.

As one chaplain put it their biggest challenge is: *"In a very statutory role, finding opportunities to actually preach the gospel, except by just being nice."* Of course all chaplains are 'nice' most of the time but they do yearn for spiritual engagement: *"representing something relevant to the school community"*. Or as Nigel Roberts commented: 'My role is to pull back the curtain, so people can see the God I represent, who has been there all along.'⁵ Here is a selection of chaplains doing just that in 2018/9:

"Seeing the pupils respond to gospel truths and starting to see Christianity as good news."

"Seeing them grow in faith, and sharing their joy and enthusiasm."

"Seeing young people engage with worship."

"Encouraging a group of boys exploring Christian faith on a weekly basis."

"Following God's lead to start a new student-led prayer group, which I have watched grow and seen students take responsibility for. They are really growing and hearing from God."

This is at the heart of chaplaincy, *"being able to talk openly about spiritual matters"*. As two respondents stated: *"I'm very new to this role, I love my job, it is always amazing to be able to share the gospel with our students."*

Amazing it might be but it doesn't come without a struggle. Spiritual change makers often have a battle on their hands. Seventeen respondents had their biggest challenges in the area of faith and spirituality, which is the core of their work⁶. Faith issues also figured in some of the comments about relationships with staff and the difficulties in leading chapel

³ Question 6 of the survey

⁴ J Caperton, *A Vital Ministry* (London: SCM Press. 2015) p 9

⁵ P Nash and N Roberts, *Chaplaincy with Children and Young People* (Cambridge, Grove Books Ltd. 2016) p22

⁶ Only 'Time Constraints' scored more highly with 19 comments

or collective worship. There is, said one chaplain, *“cynicism about religious belief and commitment to faith.”*

Chaplains are acutely aware of presenting the gospel as worthy of consideration – with nine actually using the word ‘relevant’ in their answers.

“Keeping chaplaincy relevant when faith and belief is constantly side-lined in educational technological progress.”

And what a joy when hard works pay off, a definite highlight: *“Leading creative acts of worship with good pupil response.”*

And it is the good engagement in worship that is the highlight of chaplains’ work in overseeing and leading chapel services and assemblies. What thrills them most is when students and teachers join the team and lead worship. When the opposite happens it brings sorrow.

“Staff not supporting collective worship in form time.”

Clearly some of these challenges do hit hard – and although tone is never easy to detect in a written statement the words used do convey the writers’ cost in doing the work they do.

“Getting pupils and staff to respond to the more religious and faith filled parts of chaplaincy.”

“Senior leadership team do not hold the Christian Faith and do not fully comprehend what my role is. When asked to explain I find they dilute the role on putting it into terms they understand.”

“A lot of the role is challenging misconceptions and misunderstandings” often because “the institutional church is largely irrelevant and inaccessible to teenagers.”

At Chaplaincy Central we love the wholehearted aim of chaplains to fulfil their spiritual calling. As one comment on the biggest challenge puts it:

“To present the Gospel of Christ, helping others to live out their faith, so that students see following Christ as a credible path in the 21st Century.”

All this takes time and this is something many chaplains feel they are acutely short of.

“The biggest problem I face is that there just aren’t enough hours in the day to get everything done” said one chaplain.

“There is always much more demand and need than I can ever support” added another, making the constraints of time the most commented on biggest challenge faced by the chaplains who completed the survey⁷. Being part time – and clearly some chaplains are very part time⁸ – is a frustration, and one chaplain stated the stark fact, *“if I am not there chaplaincy work does not take place.”*

⁷ 19 out of 92 respondents

⁸ Question 17 of the survey reveals that 28% of respondees work 10 hours or less per week.

Others see a possible threat in having more than one role in the school or community: *“dividing time between the parish and the school”*. They are never in doubt that chaplaincy is worthy of the time required and so one comments that they are in need of *“Clearly protecting my role from an encroaching teaching load.”*

But chaplains are made of sterner stuff than to let it rest at that – though commenting on time issues as their biggest challenge they clearly mean to do their best to overcome them. Two ways of approaching the challenges come through the answers they make. The first is *“working out how to get stuck in with limited time.”* The second is possibly more robust – more hours – either for them or in the form of assistant chaplains or volunteers. Nine out of the thirteen comments about the challenges of funding and resourcing are all about increasing provision whether paid or voluntary.

Here are chaplains as we at Chaplaincy Central know them – providing us with evidence that they love their work and clearly want to do more and better. They demonstrate that they want to turn their threats into opportunities and face the challenges full on. They believe in the blessing chaplaincy can be to a school or college and don't want anything to detract from the opportunity. Increasing provision is something close to Chaplaincy Central's heart too and we want to champion this going forward – not in isolation but in conjunction with any other chaplaincy support groups working towards the same goals. Our survey shows that the biggest funders are still the education establishment (51) with the churches' contribution coming in second (38) and being a combination from the denominations and local trusts. We also shouldn't forget the remaining (16) who are unfunded and could be seen as a gift from the church community.⁹ But as one chaplain commented, their biggest challenge was *“getting churches to engage with the fact that our young people are in school and not necessarily in churches. We have such an amazing opportunity to connect with young people through schools; churches are not making the most of this opportunity.”*

There is work to be done in winning over the hearts and minds of both the educational establishment and the church to grow chaplaincy, and in an age of cutbacks and austerity this is no easy ask. However one chaplain's highlight reveals a possible fruitful future, *“Young people finding out about my role and inspiring them to want to take on a similar career.”* What could be better?

The responses to the survey support the understanding that chaplains clearly have a deep concern for the wellbeing of the young people and the staff in the schools and colleges where they work. They speak of 'diverse needs, personal issues, societal pressures, behaviour problems, self-harm, mental health, poor morale, exam stress, serious relationship fall outs, marginalisation, hopelessness ... the list is all encompassing. Despite the challenge of *“The amount of pastoral support needed by the students that they can't get elsewhere on campus”* chaplains are there attempting to *“meet the diverse needs of staff and students, finding ways to engage on the same level with everyone.”*

Chaplains find some of their greatest highlights in working in pastoral care, building up relationships and rejoicing in each small step of change. *“Journeying with young people*

⁹ Question 7 of the survey

through their joys and challenges: being a source of strength to them and bringing hope into every circumstance.” “ 100 + 1 little moments of being with people and helping them see the light in dark times”. In the 24 comments about the joy of relationships being forged there are instances of really serious pastoral matters such as funerals and mental health matters and parental issues to the requests for prayer and the general pleasure of students stopping to chat in the corridor. How chaplains rejoice when, as three of them said, *“they had gained peoples trust and confidence”.*

And being part of the school or college is certainly a top joy for sixteen of those who responded. They use terms such as being accepted, becoming more known, integrated into the life of the school and staff investing in my role.

“Becoming a more established figure in the school community and being able to provide meaningful support for both pupils and staff.”

“Chaplaincy becoming mainstream.”

“Told we were an asset to the school.”

“Chaplaincy is helping to impact positively on the Christian ethos of the school.”

And because they are part of their school or college, chaplains celebrate when the whole school does well at inspection, SIAMS or wins awards as three shared in their answers.

In Conclusion

The trustees of Chaplaincy Central want to thank all those who have participated in this process. It has been an immense privilege to evaluate the data so generously provided. Much has been learnt both by the trustees and the chaplains, who after all *are* Chaplaincy Central. We are convinced that the findings will also be invaluable to the wider support network for educational chaplaincy.

But we don't just want to share this with those who are already persuaded that chaplaincy is the way forward. We hear the words of chaplains who feel that the 'church doesn't really get it' and 'the staff don't understand'. We know that funding is tight and recruits not always easy to find. So we want to use the information entrusted to us to enable better advocacy for chaplains and chaplaincy in as many places as we can. Chaplains have given us precious gems and we need to use them wisely.

All of the contributions of challenges provide Chaplaincy Central with an impetus to provide more tailored encouragement and support going forward. Two of our wonderful chaplains have already sent us material for the website that will be of use to others:

- (a) How to work with dual line management, and
- (b) Some key things that chaplains might like to do.

But there are other areas that need a response, whether that be with short papers for the website, conference themes and workshops or in a more general training programmes.

Chaplains do many things as part of their day to day responsibilities 'The offering of a spiritual perspective.... A simple prayer or something more extensiveworking in a

pressurised environment,’ and this ‘requires chaplains to have a stability that comes from their own well of faith and the ability to think and reflect critically.’¹⁰ Chaplaincy Central is honoured to be there alongside.

And let’s give the last word to a chaplain who clearly knows what they are about and claims that the highlight of the year is;

“Being part of the process that engages pupils in an understanding of faith both spiritually and academically.”

About this Paper

In February 2019 Chaplaincy Central launched an online survey of its 450 web subscribers. The survey was divided into 3 sections: About Chaplaincy (questions 1 – 11), About Chaplains (questions 12 – 25) and individual responses on Highlights and Challenges of the work (questions 26 and 27). 102 completed surveys were received and analysed. The data and editorial comments of the first two sections were released to the web subscribers of Chaplaincy Central over the months of May and June. 92 of the respondents provided written evidence of their highlights and challenges, some making more than one contribution. Such was the wealth of this response that the trustees decided that these contributions demanded a paper solely dedicated to the answers to questions 26 and 27. I have had the great joy of assessing these contributions, seeing the heart of chaplains’ work day to day and joining with them in their celebrations and struggles.

Now that all the reporting is complete the findings will be made more widely available to all interested parties.

Methodology

Great care has been taken to protect the identity of the respondents throughout the reporting on the surveys. This is particularly pertinent to this last section where comments are more easily identifiable. Because of this we will not publish individual comments that compromise data protection.

When reading through both the highlights and the challenges it became quickly apparent that there were significant areas of agreement amongst chaplains as to where they found their joys and sorrows. The first task was therefore to cluster the responses and identify appropriate titles.

Highlights: This process revealed that there were two major areas of chaplaincy work providing the largest proportions of encouragement and two further sets of responses that also featured well.

Change-making (24)

Relationships (24)

¹⁰ Threlfall-Holmes and Newitt *Op cit* p 113.

Being part of school and college life (16)

Chapel/Assemblies (13)

The remainder of the responses revealed other lesser groupings all with under 10 comments.

Events (9)

Small Groups (7)

Prayer Spaces (2)

Finally 9 comments (out of the total of 104) were grouped together as 'Other'.

Challenges: The first impression was that there was more of a spread in the responses to this question than to the Highlights. So there were 11 comments (out of 91) in the 'Other' category and a slightly higher number of smaller groupings as follows.

Understanding the role (7)

Relations with staff and pupils (6)

Future Planning (3)

Challenges of getting started (2)

Tension with the wider church (2)

However, there were still four significant groups, even if the number in each grouping was less than for the highlights.

Time constraints (19)

Faith-related issues (17)

Funding/recruiting/resourcing (13)

Mental health/pastoral issues (11)

So much could have been said about all the responses given but the decision was taken to concentrate on the significant comments from each of the four main categories in the Highlights and Challenges. Note has also been taken of the minor categories and the 'other' groupings. Where data provided in other areas of the survey helps to clarify comments or add to them it has also been referred to.

Cross-checking our Findings

The survey did not give a tick box selection to suggest how the chaplains might list their biggest challenges or highlights but merely asked the question and invited a response. This gave the respondents full range for their comments, making it all the more significant that their answers show a distinct pattern of downs and ups in educational chaplaincy in 2019. Is it possible that these answers help us to get a glimpse of the state of educational chaplaincy generally?

How did their answers tie up with the reality of what chaplaincy in education is all about? There are various lists of What is Chaplaincy? – we at Chaplaincy Central have such a list: pastoral, spiritual, missional, educational, liturgical and prophetic¹¹. Another more focussed on what chaplains do is provided by the Diocese of Bath and Wells: pastoral care, nurturing spiritual growth, ethics, and building community.¹² Cross-checking these with the highlights and challenges shows that the chaplains who responded are doing exactly the role they were asked to undertake and finding reward and opportunities in their work.

In order to test whether these were just the result of a self-selection of chaplains in our quantitative survey we compared our results to another recent piece of research undertaken by Salisbury Diocese, Board of Education: *The Impact of Chaplaincy in Secondary Schools in Salisbury Diocese*.¹³ This was an in depth qualitative study with a carefully selected sample of school chaplains from across the diocese using a reflection technique based on the Most Significant Change model.¹⁴ The research identified six key themes

1. Accessible provision for all.
2. Provision of care for the whole person.
3. Confidence of young people increases.
4. Quality of worship and the involvement of young people in worship increases.
5. Opportunities to explore spirituality are increased and this is an acceptable choice for young people.
6. Impact of what the chaplain offers has a ripple effect on individuals, the school and wider community.

Although our categories are labelled differently there is a high degree of correlation between the findings of both works. The chaplains in the Chaplaincy Central survey reveal a high degree of accessible provision as the comments on relationships with leaders, staff and students demonstrate. Pastoral care features as both a challenge and highlight in the Chaplaincy Central survey as does the quality of and engagement with worship. Spiritual exploration gives the chaplains who responded more joy than challenge with a big emphasis on being relevant, and the high number of relationship highlights, reinforces the view that what chaplains offer is making a real difference to individuals, the school and the wider community.

The trustees of Chaplaincy Central are therefore more than persuaded that the information they have from the chaplains responding to their survey is of significant value to the development, training and resourcing of chaplaincy.

¹¹ <http://www.chaplaincycentral.co.uk/chaplains/What-is-Chaplaincy/>

¹² <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/four-aspects-of-chaplaincy.pdf>

¹³ Copies of this research can be obtained direct from Chaplaincy Central.

¹⁴ Davies and Dart 2005