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1

UNIT ONE

CHAPLAINCY ESSENTIALS

BEING A GUEST

The **Methodist** Church 

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Worship

After a short time of quiet share this prayer together:

God the welcomer
God the host
you invite us as guests to your great feast of love
Make us welcome in our worship

Jesus the visitor
Jesus the guest
you accepted hospitality in places where people of faith feared to go
Come and be our guest

Holy Spirit the celebration
Holy Spirit the joy giver
you inspire our life and hope
Fill our hearts with joy. Amen.

What's in this unit?

Read

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Lazarus (John 12:1-19) and Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-49) – these are just three of the people who welcomed Jesus as a guest in their homes. In the Gospels we read of Jesus enjoying hospitality, often with quite surprising hosts. Everyone has been a guest and knows how it feels to receive the hospitality of family or friends. Most of us have also experienced being uncomfortable or feeling out of place as a guest. In this unit we will think about chaplains as guests and what that means for our work.

1) Being a guest

This picture and meditation describe a chaplain making a visit in a hospice. Read the meditation slowly then spend a few moments looking quietly at the picture

Read

Knock, knock
I knock on the door and slide into the room.
You look at me from your bed, wondering who I am.
I look at you and smile, hoping to appear calm and friendly.
I explain who I am.
You look wary, but do not tell me to go away.
I ask if I can sit down. 'How has your day been?' You tell me.
And from this small beginning a plant begins to grow.
As you talk and I listen, we water the plant.



For discussion

Look again at the words and picture and ask:

- What does the chaplain do and say to show he is a guest?
- How does the chaplain help the person they are visiting to be in control of the situation?

Activity

Make two lists, one of ways in which we behave as guests when staying with friends and the other of similar ways in which your chaplaincy can be a good guest in the organisation or place where you work. Add more of your own ideas in the left hand column and your creative responses in the right hand one. Discuss this in the group or with your mentor.

Guest in a friend's home

Offering to do the washing up.

Not making a noise after people have gone to bed (keeping the unwritten rules of the house).

Bringing a gift, card or flowers.

Showing interest in your friends' concerns, hobbies and taste.

Asking for news of your friends' family.

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The chaplaincy as a guest

Helping to look after the chaplaincy environment (eg Street Pastors picking up bottles, football chaplain helping to collect litter in the grounds).

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2) Living with our hosts

Read

If the chaplain is a guest then it follows that the organisation or the place where the chaplain serves is their host. You will find this language of 'guests' and 'hosts' in a number of places in the course. In other units we will be looking at the importance of understanding your host and their culture. The vast majority of organisations which host chaplaincies are secular not Christian or religious organisations. So it is worth asking why these organisations are willing to welcome chaplains. Here are some of the reasons which an organisation might give for hosting a chaplaincy:

- to look after the staff or customers who are 'religious'
- to provide personal support in times of need or distress
- to help manage complicated religious differences
- because chaplains are cheaper than counsellors
- because chaplains save money if they help staff to have less time off work
- because spiritual values are important in their organisation
- because it helps to build their brand as a caring company
- because there have always been chaplains in this kind of organisation
- because they are legally required to have chaplains.

Activity

Go through the list and mark the reasons which you think might be important for your host organisation, put a different mark against any of the reasons if they are also important to you as a chaplain.

Talk about your lists in the group or if you are working alone make some notes in your log book about what you have learnt. Did any of these reasons surprise you? Did any of the bullet points have two marks against them (one for the organisation and one for yourself)? Did you learn anything about your own motives as a chaplain?

Read

Part of being a guest is accepting that the culture and ways of our host may be very different to our own. Chaplaincy is a ministry which takes place beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. A secular place is not one in which there is no faith, rather it is a place where people of all faiths and none live and work together. Working in secular organisations it is very important for Christian chaplains to understand and respect this diversity and shared space.

In some chaplaincies this diversity is very obvious, and the chaplaincy teams will include people of many faiths. In other chaplaincies the diversity may be less obvious but it is just as important.

The key skill for you as a chaplain and a guest in a diverse place is to show respect for the different beliefs you meet and integrity in your own faith.

Chaplaincy Case Study

Elaine is a chaplain at her local FE College. The college arranged an evening reception for local community leaders including representatives of the local churches and other faith groups. The chaplaincy team were invited to attend. At the reception Elaine met and talked to a number of people she knew from the churches and community and was introduced to others she had not met before. A member of staff from the college introduced Elaine to one of the local faith community leaders, but when Elaine held out her hand to shake his the faith leader politely explained that he is unable to shake hands with a woman. Despite the obvious courtesy and friendliness with which Elaine was met she still found this experience strange and uncomfortable.

For discussion

- How would you feel if you were Elaine?
- How would you respond if you were Elaine?
- What are the underlying issues for Elaine?

Read

There are some very simple things which you can do to be a good guest in a very diverse place:

- Don't be afraid to ask! Most people will be only too pleased to explain the things which matter most to them.
- Arrange to visit a different place of worship. If you do so, ask how you are expected to dress or behave for the visit. This can be a powerful experience of being a guest in someone else's space.
- Be willing to learn just a little about the belief groups you meet. Remembering to greet Muslims on the feast of Eid, or why May Day might be important to a trade union member is a good way to build relationships and begin conversations.
- "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Just as you should be willing to listen with genuine interest as others explain their beliefs it is important to be confident that you can explain your own faith without using Christian jargon.
- Try not to make simple connections between practices in different religions – what one person means by 'prayer' might be very different from what another means. The key is to listen carefully.

If you need to explore diversity further in your chaplaincy work you will find some suggestions in the Additional Resources section of this unit. You will also find some thoughts about working in diverse chaplaincy teams in Unit 3.

3) Further reflection – the Covenant of Chaplaincy

Read

Quick Quote: "Guests, like fish begin to smell after three days" attributed to Benjamin Franklin.

Most guests stay with us for quite a short period of time, but chaplains are looking for a long term relationship in the place where they serve. We make a commitment to our host organisations and need to show that we are willing to continue to support them even when it is difficult to do so. Not everyone will make you a welcome guest and there will be times of frustration. So far in this unit we have used the image of chaplains as 'guests' visiting the 'host' organisation. Another way in which we can think about chaplaincy is as a covenant with the places where we serve.

Methodist people value the annual Covenant Service in which we renew our commitment to God and hear again God's commitment to us. The words of the Covenant prayer used in the Methodist service are very powerful and it is worth reflecting on what these words say to us as chaplains. We pray that God's will be done:

When there is work for me
and when there is none ...
when I am valued
and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment
and when it is lacking¹

The Revd Richard Smith has written about the importance of this prayer during his time as Methodist Army Chaplain serving in Iraq:

I printed out a copy of this prayer and stuck it to the wall of my makeshift office. On good days, it reminded me of why I was there; trying to follow the path I had felt God leading me down. On the bad days it reminded me that I would not be there if God did not want me there, and in that, I took some comfort that if God was in control then perhaps I would be given the resources and strength to minister in such a place. On the quiet days, when nothing happened, when I spoke to next to no one, I was reminded to be faithful. When no one came to a church service, I was reminded that being empty and having nothing was part of the plan. On the really bad days, when people died, I remembered that this was not my ministry but God's. That God would have to use these willing hands and direct my words and actions as I was lost in a daze of confusion and pain.²

You may wish to spend some time in your own devotions reflecting on these words and how the covenant prayer speaks to you as a chaplain.

¹ *The Methodist Worship Book*, (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 1999) p.288

² Richard Smith, *Methodist Covenant Chaplaincy – WW1 and Today*, in Robert Jones (ed) *Sacred Presence and Ethical Challenge* (London, Methodist Publishing, 2014) p. 33

4) Putting it into practice

Before the next session:

Choose at least two of the following activities – one from **A** and one from **B**. Make notes about what you have learnt from these activities in your chaplaincy log book.

A

- Make a copy of the Covenant Prayer on p.228 of the Methodist Worship Book or from the website (see Additional Resources). Use a highlight pen to mark the parts which seem most relevant to your chaplaincy work at the moment.
- Read the covenant prayer before you begin a chaplaincy session, during your session be aware of the times when you feel there is work to be done and when there seems to be none. Make some notes about this in your log book.
- Arrange a debriefing meeting with a colleague after one of your chaplaincy sessions. Focus on the moments when you felt vulnerable. What have you learned about being a guest?
- Have a conversation with someone in your host organisation about what they think the chaplaincy is for or why they value the chaplains.

B

- Arrange to visit either another chaplaincy which works in a very different kind of place to your own chaplaincy team.
OR
- Arrange to visit a place of worship from another faith tradition (mosque, temple, synagogue, gurdwara etc). If this is not easy in your area then visit another church which is completely different from your own.

In your visits be aware of your status as a guest, afterwards make notes on how you were welcomed, what made you feel comfortable and what made you feel less comfortable in your visit. Reflect on how this can affect your chaplaincy work.

Summary prayer:

God who welcomed us as we met,
who has been the guest in our meeting
and who waits for us as we go,
bless us now as we go in love
to our lives and homes, our work and witness
in your world. **Amen.**

Additional resources:**Methodist Covenant Prayer**

The full prayer in its modern language version is on p288 The Methodist Worship Book (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 1999). A short study guide to the prayer is available from the Methodist website www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/a-covenant-with-god.

Richard Smith, "Methodist Covenant Chaplaincy – WW1 and Today" in Robert Jones (ed) Sacred Presence and Ethical Challenge (London, The Methodist Church, 2014). This reflection on chaplaincy and the covenant prayer is available on line at: www.methodist.org.uk/media/1187935/chaplaincy-sacred-presence-and-ethical-challenge-0614.pdf

Diversity

The Inter Faith Network has a number of helpful short publications about living and working in a diverse society including some advice on issues which can be important in workplaces. The leaflet Building Good Faith Relations is an excellent introduction to good practice in conversations between people of different faiths. www.interfaith.org.uk/

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation, based in London, offers resources and training in building good conversations between people of different beliefs www.stethelburgas.org/fbfe (Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education) offers resources for chaplains working in diverse environments. www.fbfe.org.uk/publication/chaplaincy-resources/