

Informal Agreements

There are many chaplaincies that are not LEPs but function with an informal agreement. Their issues and tensions mirror those in a more formal LEP situation. When an informal agreement exists there is no requirement to consult others before appointing a new Catholic chaplain. However, it is very important that careful consideration is given to the suitability of the person. Chaplains must be able to work collaboratively because they are the stable element serving an ever-changing group of people.

Qualifications, Recruitment & Training

If the chaplain is a priest, it may be assumed that his training will be sufficient general qualification though many institutions require specific training for work in their particular setting. Lay people are increasingly being appointed as chaplains and at present there is no nationally agreed qualification for Catholic lay chaplains. However Ushaw College, Durham runs an ecumenical course for chaplains. Information about this course is available from the St Bede's Institute, 0191 3738517, website: www.ushaw.ac.uk

Resources

Abnormal Ministry? Charlie Chaplaincy? Privately published by Paul R. King, 1997
Health Care Chaplaincy Board – Guidelines for nomination to sessional chaplaincies
Free Church Council

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Committee for Christian Unity, CBCEW
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Guidelines for Catholics in Local Ecumenical Partnerships Leaflet 4: Chaplaincy Partnerships

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What Is A Local Ecumenical Partnership Chaplaincy?

A Chaplaincy is a specialised form of ministry where representatives of religious organisations work within an institution. LEP Chaplaincies almost always include a Catholic representative. Chaplaincy LEPs can be found in hospitals (healthcare and hospice), prisons, educational establishments e.g. universities and FE colleges and business/commerce/industry settings.

In an LEP Chaplaincy all the chaplains sign a Covenant that will commit them to work together to meet the pastoral, spiritual and religious needs of the staff, clients and relatives. The chaplains work together as an ecumenical team with a strong sense of mutual commitment and sharing. They meet together regularly to pray, plan the work of the Chaplaincy and offer mutual support. They may have 'away days' when they reflect theologically and liturgically together.

“Students come to the university tenaciously insular and Catholic, Anglican, Methodist etc. When they leave they go on to become the best ecumenical resource in the churches.” *Catholic University Chaplain*

Chaplains provide worship, sacraments, liturgy, prayer and Bible study. They act as counsellors and give pastoral care. They evangelise and catechise. Chaplains also engage critically with the institution where they serve e.g. through the Ethics Committee, Governing Body etc. They perform many other roles and functions and in an LEP Chaplaincy share this work.

Developing An LEP Chaplaincy

Sometimes the chaplains in a particular institution want to work together more closely and decide to form a Local Ecumenical Partnership. After agreement is reached about the aim of the Chaplaincy, they will write a Declaration of Intent that will indicate what they commit themselves to do together as a Chaplaincy team. It might include team relationships, shared pastoral care, worship, relations with the institution and the wider church. LEP Chaplaincies should have a Declaration of Intent and Constitution which must be agreed by the institution, the various churches involved and finally by the sponsoring body. In the case of a LEP Chaplaincy in a prison, the Headquarters Team of the Prison Chaplaincy Service must be consulted.

When all the relevant people have agreed the Declaration and Constitution, the LEP can be inaugurated at a celebratory service for the chaplains, volunteers, staff and

clients. Church leaders (for Catholics this means the Bishop) and representatives of the institution must sign the Documents and then the LEP will be operational.

Appointments to an LEP Chaplaincy require ecumenical consultation. A panel consisting of the senior chaplain, a representative of the institution, an ecumenical representative and a denominational representative may interview prospective Catholic chaplains. This may be considered acceptable for Catholic lay appointments but priest chaplains may find it problematic.

Issues for Chaplaincy Teams

Problems can arise when different models of Chaplaincy are operating. For instance, a Catholic chaplain may be operating on a 'sacramental' model, serving the Catholic client group while another chaplain may be operating a 'parochial' model across the institution and offering pastoral care much more widely.

'If we can listen – really listen – and move easily among people where they are – sharing in their thinking and living and suffering and rejoicing, there are good prospects for what the chaplain represents.' *Paul King*

Chaplains (and the participating denominations) may have a different understanding of what is meant by ecumenism and have differing degrees of enthusiasm for it.

The institution may impose roles on chaplains. For instance, institutions frequently appoint an Anglican priest as 'senior' chaplain, because the established church has a particular role in their history or constitution. The senior chaplain is likely to be regarded by the institution as 'Head of Department' with authority within the Chaplaincy team. However, practices vary between institutions. In some chaplaincies, the full time chaplains share responsibilities.

Tensions can arise when there are full-time/part-time/volunteer chaplains working on the same team. Attendance at team meetings, away-days and retreats can be difficult for part-time or volunteer chaplains. Catholic chaplains may be employed for a small number of sessions and want to spend all their time giving pastoral care. As a result they can be marginalized or considered not to be collaborating with the rest of the team.

Catholic chaplains are accountable to both the Bishop and to the institution which pays their wages.

'In the noisy confusion of hospital life, how should we balance distinctiveness and common purpose? Perhaps by remembering that the first builds our own empires, while the latter witnesses to the Kingdom of God.' *Catholic Chaplain, NHS Trust.*

The traditional role of a Catholic chaplain has been to minister only to Catholics. While this continues to be the case in some institutions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Institutions now expect all the chaplains to serve the whole institution, although individual chaplains still offer particular care to 'their' denominational group. This means that Catholic chaplains in a hospital may be expected to visit all the people in a number of wards, while continuing to offer sacramental provision to all Catholics. Chaplains will be expected to inform their colleagues if a particular patient needs to see a denominational chaplain. In some interfaith chaplaincies, chaplains are responsible for people of all faiths i.e. Moslems, Sikhs, Buddhists etc.

Provision of sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, can be a thorny issue. Other chaplains, volunteers, patients and staff may not understand Catholic Eucharistic discipline and come forward to receive the sacrament. Some Christian traditions operate an 'open table' when all are invited to receive and Catholic people sometimes accept these invitations. It is important that Catholic chaplains are familiar with the teaching of the Church about the Eucharist, including the *General Norms for the admission to the Eucharist of Christians from other Christian faith communities*, (see *One Bread, One Body*) and that they explain these to the Chaplaincy Team.

Catholic chaplains should also be prepared for these situations and be confident that they can handle them with tact and sensitivity.

'We share, discuss, learn and support each other in an open, honest and respectful way, however challenging that may be at times to our own faith tradition views.' *Catholic Chaplain, Mental Health Hospital.*

The appointment of Catholic lay people as chaplains raises particular issues. The title of 'chaplain' is reserved for priests in Canon Law but 'assistant chaplain' does not give Catholic lay chaplains parity with other chaplains on the Chaplaincy team.

Good relations are essential between the lay chaplain and local priests and clear boundaries need to be established.