From England

CHAPLAINS AND THE PAROCHIAL MINISTRY

by Giles Legood

I have always been fascinated by chaplaincy in all its forms. I am impressed partly through having worked as a chaplain, but also because chaplaincy is such an adaptable form of ministry. Chaplains have somehow managed to escape from the boundaries of standard institutional ministry and carved out unique roles within a multitude of different and sometimes surprising contexts. Yet, there remains a mystique surrounding what chaplains are and what they actually do in any particular setting. More than that, the role of the chaplain is constantly shifting and changing as new challenges and understandings emerge. This article will review the historical background to chaplaincy and consider contemporary challenges

Roots of 'Chaplaincy'

The word for clergy working outside parishes is usually 'chaplain'. It is derived from the Latin 'capella', meaning cloak. Tradition says that the fourth century saint, Martin of Tours, divided his cloak one cold night to share with a beggar. After Martin's death half of the cloak became a relic and the priests who guarded it became known as ' capellani' or 'chaplains' in English. Etymologically the word 'chaplain' comes from a situation of pastoral care, driven by religious devotion, directed towards one in need.

The English Chaplaincy Context

In England the relationship between place and pastoral care has a history dating back a thousand years. The parochial system was first sketched out by Theodore, an Archbishop of Canterbury, who died c.690. He drew on patterns already established on the Continent. Theodore defined geographical areas for parish churches and resident priests *(ibi ecclesia et presbyter)*. Yet ever since his day full time, stipendiary clergy have served outside the parochial system. Priests have ministered as cathedral staff, archdeacons, Bishops' chaplains, chantry priests and domestic chaplains to families, amongst others.

They have also served for centuries as chaplains in hospitals, the army, the navy and prisons. Clergy, especially the monastic orders, were involved in setting up mediaeval institutions ministering to the sick and dying. Many charitable foundations, such as almshouses or lazar houses, dedicated to caring for those with leprosy, had nonparochial clergy working in them. In such places the boundaries between physical care and spiritual care were blurred.

Priests accompanied armies into battle as early as the Battle of Crecy (1346) and ships of the English fleet as early as Cadiz (1597). Chaplains were appointed to the newly built prisons of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where they ministered to the condemned, administered the sacraments and organised welfare and education programmes. They also exercised a statutory function meeting all prisoners on their entering and leaving prisons – a tradition continued today. In addition, priests have served in Oxford and Cambridge Colleges as dons. Holy Orders were a requirement of appointment until the mid-Victorian period. The existence of all these ministries is testimony that parochial or congregational clergy have not been the only expression of the Church's ordained ministry.

It is sometimes thought that chaplains are parasitic on the life and work of the Church. This is hardly surprising because for centuries the parish has been the normative model of ministry in Britain, especially in England, where the Church is still established by law. Until the Industrial Revolution most people lived and worked in one place, in one parish, for most of their lives. England did not move from peasant society to industrial nation in one rapid movement. Even before the Industrial Revolution a few craftsmen, agricultural labourers and their families, as well as those in trade and commerce, enjoyed some degree of mobility. An examination of marriage registers from the beginning of the nineteenth century shows that marriage partners were drawn from a wider area than had hitherto been the case. However, it was true that most lay people, for most of their lives, were based in one place.

Urbanisation, however, expanded and new technology altered this relatively static domestication. Many began to travel in ways previously unknown and resided elsewhere during their lives. New generations were born in towns and cities and the link with a parish church and its priest weakened. Subsequently, the nineteenth century saw the Church lose influence in many areas of people's lives. Responsibility for charity for the poor moved from

the parish vestry to local government. Trade unions and employers' associations replaced Christian guilds of craftsmen. The influence of the Church diminished for many to the point of non-existence.

The experience of the First World War (1914-18) profoundly affected the religious mood of Europe and elsewhere. Few chaplains were recruited at the start of the War as the expectation was that the conflict would soon be over. Although some men thought that clergy, the 'God-botherers', had no place in the trenches, others developed affection for chaplains such as Philip 'Tubby' Clayton and Geoffrey Studdart-Kennedy, known as 'Woodbine Willie' because of his distribution of cigarettes to the troops. These experiences led many in the armed forces to feel that there was a need for greater, permanent provision of chaplains to meet the needs of the military community.

At the conclusion of the Second World War (1939-45) such provision was regarded as commonplace. When peace was declared many former service personnel and Church leaders thought that the experience of having chaplains who might be involved in every aspect of the life of an institution should be replicated in a civilian environment. Clergy began visiting factories and the pioneering Industrial Mission work of Bishop Ted Wickham soon became known.

Contemporary Social Scene

More recently, however, the emphasis of the Church's ministry has shifted. With fewer people living and working in just one area throughout their lives, historical attachment to a church building in which families might have been baptised, married and buried has altered profoundly. Local churches have become more congregational in feel and a ministry to those outside the church's boundaries has diminished. Clergy working as chaplains are often more able to maintain a link between pastoral care and place.

Those who call themselves Christians profess a faith by being members of one of various churches. In Britain today these people are an increasingly small group of people. For many the Church, in the form of its local parish church and its resident, ordained representative, has little or no bearing on their lives. Peoples' lives are characterised as 'believing without belonging'. People of twenty-first century Britain do not believe in nothing in spiritual terms but rather believe in a syncretistic 'pick and mix' faith. Their faith, or rather collection of different faiths, does not require them, or move them, to meet together with like-minded others to share and reflect upon their beliefs.

Those holding such amorphous beliefs feel they have no need for buildings in which to meet and worship. They have no need for a special person to be marked out and commissioned to minister to individual or corporate needs. Church buildings and clergy are seen as an historical anomaly. They may have been useful in former generations but now have no connection with the lives of the majority living in Britain.

Some, who perhaps do not hold such eclectic beliefs, do, however, consider themselves Christians. These may not belong to a formal, religious organisation, but they would, nevertheless, be horrified to be regarded as having 'no religion', as a recent Government Census categorised them. They might visit a church for the occasional offices of baptism, marriage and death - the so called 'hatched, matched and 'despatched' - and perhaps at Christmas year by year, if they felt so moved!

One can imagine such a family of people in contemporary Britain, living, working and playing out their lives in different places. The modern-day Smith family, for example, lives in a new, sprawling, expanding suburb on the edge of a big city. Margaret Smith, wife and mother, works as a doctor at the large teaching hospital eight miles from home. Tony Smith, husband and father, works as a marketing and public relations manager at the fast growing regional airport twenty miles away. Andrew Smith (16) is studying for his A levels at a similar local private sector school, whilst his sister Nicola (19) is a first year student at university a hundred miles away. As a family the Smiths occasionally worship, when work rotas and studying commitments allow, at their local parish church, a ten-minute drive from home.

Their vicar realises that the nature of most of her parishioners' lives means that she exercises a ministry to people in 'their dormitory', that is to say, at their point of residency. She believes that it is physically impossible, if not ecclesiologically confusing, to follow her parishioners into all facets of living; thus her work should be, as far as possible, to make links with other clergy working in other forms of ministry. It is the ministry of these clergy in various institutions or sectors of society, which is sketched out in this article.

Varieties of Chaplaincies

In the last sixty years, in addition to the historic spheres of chaplaincy (armed forces, hospitals, prisons), new expressions of Christian ministry in and to particular institutions have emerged both within Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and, to a lesser extent Orthodoxy. Chaplains are found today in

a wide variety of institutions and sectors. They serve in schools, armed forces, hospitals and hospices, prisons, universities, arts and recreation, legal services, police forces, airports, agriculture, transport, industry, retail trade and commercial seafaring, the emergency services, railways, horse racing and the legal profession. Although this is by no means an exhaustive list of the current areas of activity it does at least give a flavour of the wide variety.

Healthcare chaplains have had an important role to play since the creation of the NHS in 1948 at which time specific provision was made for 'spiritual care'. The more recent Patients' Charter has required NHS Trusts to provide for the religious beliefs of 'patients and staff'. The last decade has consequently seen an increase in chaplaincy numbers, though numbers have now reached a plateau.

University chaplaincy has also expanded dramatically in the last 50 years. In 1952 there were eight chaplains in universities outside Oxbridge; by 1985 chaplaincies, both full and part time, were established in every higher education institution. This expansion matched expansion in higher education: in 1954 there were 82,000 students in higher education; by 2000 there were 1,900,000. The government plans for this figure to grow further.

Crockford's, the directory of Anglican clergy in the UK and Ireland, lists approximately 100 prison chaplains in England and Wales, the majority of whom are full time. Additionally, of course, chaplains of other Christian denominations are employed as chaplains, so one cannot take this figure as amounting to an accurate head count of clergy working in the prison system. Prison chaplaincy provision in England and Wales, paid for by the Home Office, has grown with the recent expansion of the Prison Service's prison establishments. Chaplains still have statutory duties to see every prisoner on the latter's entry and exit from prison. There is a strong emphasis on multi-faith working in chaplaincies in prison reflecting the Governments policy of inclusiveness.

The provision of armed forces chaplains is approximately: Royal Navy 80; Army 150; Royal Air Force 80. In the last 30 years chaplaincy provision here has shrunk dramatically, perhaps as much as 50 per cent. This is due to the dramatic reduction in armed service personnel and defence spending. Various Ministry of Defence reviews have had implications for chaplaincy, and chaplaincy numbers are now described as in a 'steady state'. Recently, however, the Ministry of Defence has planned for a limited expansion in chaplaincy numbers.

Full-time or Part-time Chaplaincies

One important consideration is the differences which appear between the work of full-time and part-time chaplains. Full-time chaplains work solely outside the parochial or congregational ministry. All chaplains who work in an institution or in a particular sector of society see their ministry as both to the institution and to individuals who work within it. Some chaplains feel that it is easier to understand the structures and more fully to appreciate the life of the institution if they work in the institution full-time. They feel that this increases identification with those who work there and gives greater opportunity to be accepted as part of the institution.

Other chaplains, however, feel that being part-time has merits. Working part-time, allows the chaplain to make links with the wider community and to ensure that the chaplain is not institutionalised and does not fail in relating to the Church. Some ministers who work fulltime as chaplains may work part-time in more than one institution or work in a sector, such as industry, where they visit more than one place each week. They may see themselves as full-time chaplains but be perceived by others as part-time.

Changing Emphases in Chaplaincy

Traditionally 'chaplaincy' has been assumed to refer to clergy commissioned by a faith group or an organisation to provide pastoral service in an institution, organisation, or psychiatric treatment environment. However, in a post-modern context, marked by pluralism and ambiguity towards established religion, chaplaincy appears to be changing as it moves from a specifically religious discipline to one claiming to care for the spiritual needs of patients. This shift is significant insofar as the broadening of the chaplaincy remit from 'religious' to 'spiritual' may require different skills from those assumed as the norm by previous chaplains.

Significantly too, it may well be that in the future there will be no need for chaplains to be ordained clergy or to be rooted in any form of religious community. Thus chaplaincy may be emerging as a discipline charged with the responsibility of caring for the spiritual needs of patients without necessary connection with religious communities. This has implications in terms of developing a unified and general understanding of what spirituality is and what spiritual care should entail in any given context. In view of the current movement towards the 'professionalisation' of chaplaincy, this ambiguity about its central remit is significant.

Non-Stipendiary Chaplaincies

The ancient tradition of chaplaincy has a more contemporary application. For centuries clergy have been employed in schools, universities and other sectors, for work which is not primarily concerned with their status as ordained members of the church. Historically many of these clergy were ordained into such work without having previously served in parochial ministry. Others have been ordained to serve in an unpaid, part-time capacity in a particular parish. In the last generation such people have been known variously as non-stipendiary ministers, (NSM's), local non-stipendiary ministers (LNSM's), ministers in secular employment (MSE's) or other similar titles.

Paid Specialist Chaplains

There is a further group who work in and for the church in a full-time, paid capacity in which their ordained status is usually, but not invariably, essential to their work. Even within the church structures clergy are employed in such posts as directors of education, directors of training, and as resources advisors. Chaplains working with those who are deaf, for instance, fall within this category, although their work largely takes place within Christian communities. Some clergy work in chaplaincy as part of their parochial duties or part-time for an honorarium. What unites these ministries is that they are all full-time, paid clerical posts which are not centred on the parochial system.

In noting the rise of such specialist chaplaincies within the last fifty years some have asked, 'What was it that chaplaincy could provide which could not be provided by the parochial structure?' The church felt that is was necessary to have persons able to engage with the changing employment and institutional situations. It was felt that parochial clergy working in the areas in which these institutions were set would be unable to do this because they neither knew who people were nor where they could be found. Consequently it was deemed appropriate to appoint clergy specifically for these tasks to ensure that they had no parochial responsibilities over-burdening them in this work.

Defining 'Sector Ministry'

One of the areas of confusion and tension has been the problems over naming or defining chaplaincy. In terms of nomenclature chaplaincy can be a minefield. In the early days of chaplaincy expansion the term, 'specialised

ministry,' was used. This rightly antagonised some parochial clergy who felt that this term demeaned their ministry, as if it was not itself in some way specialised. Acceptance of this term could lead to, 'specialists,' being seen as superior or more expert. To counter these objections the term, 'non-parochial ministry,' began to be used. This too brought its own problems, as chaplains then saw themselves being defined in relation to the parish model of ministry. They felt that the parish was seen as normative and their own ministry as in some sense deviant or abnormal. A term was thus arrived at which seemed to not to offend any engaged in ministry, of whatever type, and which emphasised the rich variety of ministries within the church. 'Sector ministry,' became widely used and accepted; it simply defines the location or sector in society in which the particular ministry is carried out. Some chaplains, it should be noted, are dissatisfied with the term saying that the term may be meaningless to the large number of people who have never previously encountered the phrase. In 1983 a Church of England report entitled, 'Sector Ministries,' gave the following definition:

> *'By the term sector we mean a slice of social or church life which can be identified as containing certain linked values, knowledge, skills and practices and forming an area of professionalism. Ministry within a sector will be carried out by lay or ordained persons who are of proven ability in the professional area and will bring to bear upon it the concerns of the Gospel, the teaching of the Church and its spiritual and pastoral care.'*

Titles of Chaplaincy Posts

It should be noted that the 'titles' of chaplaincy posts can say much about how chaplaincy work is perceived in a particular sector. When, for instance, chaplaincy jobs are advertised it is interesting to read that posts are variously described as chaplain *to/of/at/in*. A post described as chaplain *to* might mean that the position is one funded by the church rather than the institution and that, consequently, the post holder may be viewed as a guest in the sector. Alternatively a chaplain *of* may well be in a post funded by the institution itself and that the chaplain is therefore seen as part of the institution. Achaplain *at* is a more neutral term and it is harder to be certain how the chaplaincy role in such a place is understood. As a consequence, increasingly some chaplains are describing a post as chaplain *at*. Such descriptions have often been adopted in sectors such as hospitals where in recent years it has become popular to identify people by their names and the work they do

rather than by the title they hold, such as doctor or professor. The description chaplain *at* also helps chaplains identify in closer ways with other members of the hospital staff who would not describe themselves as say nurse *of* the hospital but as a nurse *at* the hospital. We should not think from this however that chaplaincy job titles can always be understood in clear and certain ways, but it is the case that titles can often provide useful pointers to how particular posts are understood and funded.

Problems for the Church

In recent years, whilst financially the Church has had to readjust in its task of serving nation-wide, almost all of its deliberations have focused solely on parish ministry. The various churches in England have devoted little time to serious consideration of the issues raised by chaplaincy or to the strategic deployment of chaplains. Little has been published in the field of chaplaincy, and what has appeared has mostly consisted of papers and articles, almost all of which are from the USA. Often, where chaplaincy is, briefly, considered, theological reflection is notably lacking. In 1983, for instance, a Working Party of the National Society produced the report 'Sector Ministries' concerned only with terms and conditions of chaplains. Chaplains are paid to spend their working time with those who do not go to church, those the Church claims it most wants to reach. Clergy working in chaplaincy, however, have much to contribute to the question of what roles the Church should adopt.

Tensions for Sector Ministries

Tensions lie in the differences between parochial clergy and chaplains. It may be useful briefly, in conclusion, to highlight four of these tensions as they raise issues about the theological underpinning of chaplaincy.

First, some parochial clergy have felt that their position is threatened, both specifically and generally by the presence of chaplains. For hundreds of years the parish has been the basic unit of the church's life and work. Sector ministry might be seen as contributing to the breaking down of the unity of the church and producing a focus that detracts from the traditional parochial model. From a sociological view-point, however, the social situation is so radically different today from the pre-industrial age that the ministry of the church needs to reflect this.

Secondly, sector ministers have been seen as a threat to the primacy of parochial ministry. Over the last two decades the number of people ordained by the church has steadily fallen. The work of parish clergy is

increasingly stretched and clergy are taking on more responsibility than their predecessors. In rural areas a single priest can be placed in charge of up to a dozen parishes. In this light, sector ministers can be seen as a drain on diocesan resources. Some ask if it is right to continue to fund clergy for chaplaincies whilst the parish system is so strained in fulfilling its historic responsibilities.

Thirdly, some parish clergy may feel that chaplains have opted out from the 'real' hard work of parish ministry. Sector ministers, unencumbered in maintaining costly mediaeval buildings, can be characterised as inhabiting a cosseted, unreal world. Chaplains have pointed out in reply that wherever human life is to be found that is the real world. Institutions within which chaplaincies operate contain a variety of human experience and life; they are communities where it is appropriate for the church to exercise ministry.

Fourthly, another factor that has prevented a better understanding between chaplains and parish clergy is the fact that chaplains often return, after some years in a sector ministry to the parochial system. It is easy, therefore, for chaplaincy to be seen as an interruption or a break from the real work of parish ministry. Unlike other countries, most notably in the Episcopal Church of the USA, chaplaincy work in the United Kingdom is often not regarded as a long-term ministry.

Points forWider Positive Reflection

The parochial ministry might appear to be a single, homogenous whole, yet referring to 'chaplaincy' generically is complicated, given the wide range of provision.

Chaplains often work in an ecumenical way which their parochial colleagues are not able to do. A range of paid chaplaincy provision may be made by institutions opening up exciting possibilities for ecumenical dialogue and practice. Similarly, many chaplains work in inter-faith situations. Where chaplaincy provision is small Christian chaplains may carry the role of 'religious professional'. Where more provision is available Christian chaplains will work alongside chaplains of other faiths.

Parishes are now larger. In the 1630's George Herbert's benefice of Fugglestone and Bemerton, for instance, had a population of 400; today it is 8,000. Parish priests inevitably have more people to whom they must minister. Chaplains often minister in smaller situations and have greater

opportunity for intimacy with those around them. This is not always the case: the chaplain at Heathrow Airport, for example, ministers to 40,000 staff alone, apart from the millions of passengers.

Chaplaincies allow the Church to engage more easily with the challenges in the society it seeks to serve. For instance, armed service reluctantly, started to highlight such concepts in the Christian tradition as the economic realities brought about by falling church membership have forced churches to think of more imaginative ways of maintaining mission and ministry. By happy co-incidence these new ways are cheaper! Whatever the motivation, these patterns of ministry are to be welcomed. Chaplaincy work may be well suited to assist the Church in these efforts. Indeed, it should not just be chaplains who are enthusiastic about chaplaincy work, but with greater understanding of what chaplaincy involves, parochial clergy too, like the Smiths' parish priest, can be caught up in recognising what the Church can offer chaplaincy and what chaplaincy can offer the Church.

Whilst not claiming in any sense to be a definite list of points emerging from a particular chaplaincy experience or from chaplaincy in general, the items mentioned above, together with the historical background, are offered as starting points for a further positive general reflection on chaplaincy.

The Revd Giles Legood is a university chaplain in the diocese of London.