

Transform Work UK National Conference

Workshop : Chaplaincy

Presented by: Chris Dinsdale
Rev David Driscoll
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The aim of this workshop was to discuss and explore the nature and function of chaplaincy, looking at two different models and examining the results of research into the needs and possibilities within the context of the workplace.

Model 1

Chris Dinsdale opened the workshop with an outline of Chaplaincy Plus, the model of chaplaincy with which he has been engaged since 2003. He received his own personal call from God to be available to people in 1992.

Chaplaincy Plus serves the people of Birmingham. One to one pastoral care in the form of counselling is offered, with the aim of encouraging and supporting Christians in the business community and above all giving them time. This is the main thrust of this ministry, and it is supplemented by monthly e-newsletters and hosting different types of "Gatherings." Larger ones are held quarterly, while smaller ones take place at lunchtimes, currently in 13 firms/geographic locations/peer groups. There are also lunchtime support gatherings for about 20 Christian group facilitators meeting in firms.

Chaplaincy Plus holds certain events regularly e.g. Carols in the Cathedral, Spring Breakfast, the Birmingham Prayer Breakfast (jointly with the cathedral). Speakers are drawn from both secular and church backgrounds and have included Mark Greene, J. John, Geoff Shattock, Andrew Watson (Bishop of Aston), and Matt Baggott (now chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland).

"City Women" meets 3/4 times per year for networking and teaching, and "City Lights" develops the work among young adults.

Chaplaincy Plus also runs courses such as "God at Work" and "Questions of Faith".

There is also an Annual Celebration in the autumn.

Chaplaincy Plus works alongside the churches, especially the Cathedral, and has relationships with about 30 church leaders/chaplains.

Funding comes from individual donations, charitable trusts, churches, and the business community itself. It is handled by Trustees. This size and model of chaplaincy requires about £70,000 per annum.

Model 2

Rev David Driscoll then spoke of the Mission in London's Economy (MILE), which after four and a half years now covers Greater London. This model of chaplaincy has at its heart the desire to support Christians working in the institutions of London's economy. It has developed a website which is its main source of resources, including

a weekly reflection on a Gospel reading, and on which its aims and objectives are clearly stated.

Practitioner Groups are specifically dedicated to developing each aim/objective by identifying tasks and evaluating the outcomes when those tasks have been carried out. For example, PG 4 is dedicated to the support of Christians working in the institutions of London's economy and consists of Christians working in the public, private & voluntary sectors of that economy. PG 3 is an informal group of about 60 active workplace chaplains devoted to recruiting, training, supporting and supervising chaplains in their day to day work. Other PGs work with the churches and other faith groups in addressing workplace-related issues.

The Practitioner Groups prepare papers and other resources which are available for download from the website; MILR also recently released a statement on the current financial crisis which was picked up by the G20!

There are plans to develop a monthly service. Otherwise MILE events are run only occasionally, the website being the main forum for networking and keeping in touch. Members are encouraged to join one of the Practitioner Groups which interests them.

Funding is provided by grants from different denominational groups in the London area. There is no membership subscription.

Research

Sue Hutson was commissioned to undertake research on 3 main questions.

1. What impact has the current economic recession had on ground level chaplaincy?
There has been an increase in anxiety levels overall, but particularly in the south. In addition, chaplains are seeing anger and resentment and a higher degree of competitiveness; financial difficulties appear to be of less importance than social/economic ones.

2. What training & resources are available?
Training appears to be mainly self-organised; there is a Masters degree available but many do not know about it.

3. Who is currently networking with whom?
Clearer communications need to be established across the nation. Not enough networking seems to be happening. There should be a natural symbiotic relationship with the church but it seems to be very patchy. A mapping exercise would be helpful, perhaps leading to a national conference but funding is also very diverse – there is a constant question of who should pay.

Discussion

There followed a discussion session.

1. Does a chaplain need to be ordained? Should a chaplain have spent time in a secular profession?

Not necessarily either – being able to connect with people is the most important qualification. Some people prefer to speak with a lay person; others are reassured by being able to contact an ordained minister.

2. Why do some people find it so difficult to seek support?

This is an acknowledged problem –there is a culture which suggests that to ask for help is a sign of weakness and inability to cope. This is more prevalent in certain professions and workplaces e.g. soldiers, firefighters, business. People fear that they will lose their jobs and/or the respect of their colleagues. Confidentiality may be an issue. One possible aid to combat this could be a form of e-chaplaincy, which would offer anonymity.

Conclusion

Everyone agreed that whatever model of chaplaincy is in place, the most vital role is played by the Christian in the workplace. In living out their faith at work, they fulfil at least part of the role of the chaplain themselves, while providing a bridge to the sort of ministry a properly trained and experienced chaplain can offer. At the same time, they themselves benefit greatly from the availability of workplace ministry. It is the aim of all that God should be glorified in the world of work.