

CHAPLAINS AT WORK



Welcome to our Autumn newsletter. As always there is a wide variety in the content, with post-Lockdown stories from Chaplains, thought-provoking articles, news of future events, and to start, a lovely example of a Chaplain being in the right place at just the right time! Time to make a hot drink, pull-up a comfy chair and have a good read!

supporting the workplace, caring for people

'The Good Intent', in the Great Western Arcade, Birmingham, is Britain's first not-for-profit Bar. The City Centre Be.Friend Chaplaincy Team has been getting out and about again, and Elaine Hutchinson found herself there and finding holy ground...



"Come and Sit Over Here"

Sometimes I wonder what on earth I am doing - and not just regarding Chaplaincy! But here I am rushing out to a pub foodie night after promising the manager that I would turn up. I'm late (as usual) and feeling really guilty I try to be inconspicuous as I arrive at the event.

'Good Intent' (what a great name for a bar), is holding a foodie night, trying to encourage people to enjoy food while socialising. Roz, the assistant manager, said "It's a new initiative which hopefully will get more people into the bar."



Roz, who is an excellent chef, has been serving up amazing dishes and catering for all sorts of events, thinks it might be good for business given the times we're in.

I chat to Roz's partner, who is also helping with the event, but they're both busy so I order a drink and sit outside. I'm a bit out of my comfort zone: I will buy some food, then leave... That's what I'm contemplating, as I sit and enjoy my drink.

But there's a couple sitting outside, and they shout over to me "Come and sit over here!"

Maybe it's my collar, or maybe they feel sorry for me: whatever the reason, they invite me over. Now I'm not one for refusing an invite, so, intrigued, I go over. Shirley and Justin (names changed for obvious reasons) both work at the Law courts and they've heard of the foodie event. Shirley has just finished a bottle of wine and orders another. "It's been a busy day," she sighs. Justin is sipping what smells like whisky; they both look tired.

"Are you a real minister?" Justin asks. "No, I'm just pretending!" I reply. We all laugh and the conversation ranges from faith to Black Lives Matter, and then to favourite meal. As Justin goes to the bar, Shirley asks, "Does it make you happy?" I'm puzzled, not sure what she means. "Does God, your faith, make you happy?" she speaks quietly and I realise that we've got until Justin returns. I pause.

"It depends what you mean by 'happy'. If you mean 'do I get everything I want' happy then no, God doesn't make me happy: in fact God can make me very unhappy." I wonder if that was the right thing to say.

Shirley continues "I've tried everything: Buddhism, Jehovah's Witnesses - my mom's very religious but I'm not sure." I'm digging deep to find something profound to say, but that is about me, not about Shirley, so I continue to listen.

Shirley asks, "Do you have a contact number? I would like to continue this conversation?" I give her my card. Justin returns and that's it, the conversation moves on to other things.

I still wonder at times what I am doing, but at that particular moment, listening to Shirley grapple with faith, I was in the right place: Chaplaincy, holy ground ... sipping cider.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

“We are realising that if you have people walk and bicycle more, you have a more lively, more liveable, more attractive, more safe, more sustainable and more healthy city. And what are you waiting for?”

Jan Gehl

CIGB Annual Meeting

At our Annual Meeting on 17th September we were pleased to welcome into the Zoom gathering some of our supporters not normally able to join us in person: not least Archbishop Bernard and Bishop David.

The 2019 Accounts showed a deficit of £2.5k, partly because of the loss of financial support from Jaguar Land Rover (though Chaplaincy continued). The meeting commended the team of Chaplains for their creative responses to the current Covid situation.

Thelma Mitchell, Team Leader of the Chaplaincy to Bournville College, shares some thoughts inspired by this year’s Guest Speaker:

TRANSPORT OF DELIGHT

A vision for the present and future of transport for Birmingham, for a healthier, greener city with a reliable integrated transport system, supporting a growing population and economy.



Councillor for Lozells, Waseem Zaffar MBE, and Cabinet member for Transport on Birmingham City Council, spoke to the CIGB annual meeting by Zoom about the future of transport for Birmingham.

Knowledgeable, enthusiastic, well prepared, he presented a vision of transport which would be transformational for people. He understands that good public transport can unlock key aspects of lives; skills, jobs, tackling inequalities, clean air and climate change.

Birmingham is still a motor city, built on the motor industry, although the car is no longer king. Mr Zaffar is adamant that the council is not anti-motor, rather pro-people. In his view reducing the reliance on the private car would encourage more cycling and use of public transport.

More, safer, cycle lanes are planned alongside improvements to bus reliability - especially the cross-city service; and car-access to the city centre will be restricted. The government has pledged £1,000,000 to create pop-up cycle lanes, bringing new challenges.



Councillor Zaffar pointed out that in parts of Birmingham many streets were built before the car took over. The result is

an unacceptable level of traffic and parking. Tough decisions must be taken, with a city at gridlock and people dying prematurely of pollution. Cleaner air is a priority despite some opposition to the proposals.

Questions followed. The Councillor was asked what plans the Council has to make walking and cycling safer. Mr Zaffar said that, as well as pop-up cycle lanes, there are plans to connect into green spaces in the city and on the towpaths. He said that the council were investigating using canal watertaxis for the Commonwealth Games. However, the towpaths are frequently not lit and users have been open to attack and abuse. Walkers also find them difficult as cyclists consider them for their use only. The Waterways Chaplain said that there could also be difficulties between boaters and cyclists.

Mr Zaffar hopes that in the coming months there will be more financial investment from the government and added involvement from BAME communities in the planning. The Council would like to leave the legacy of every child with access to a bike, able to cycle safely.

A Bus Chaplain spoke about the long term decline in bus ridership: passengers and bus drivers were frustrated by journey delays. The Council are looking at options, such as giving buses more space, and an investment into Sprint Buses and other projects. The Council has limited power, however, on the unregulated bus market.

Another question concerned businesses within the Clean Air Zone, who would be priced out of business by the lorry charges. Mr Zaffar spoke about the financial mitigations on offer and agreed to visit a particular factory to view their situation.

This lively and informative talk from Councillor Zaffar, who was thanked warmly, set a very positive tone for the Annual General Meeting.



STOP PRESS

Chaplaincy to the 2022 Commonwealth Games!

We’ve just heard of this exciting opportunity: volunteers are needed for a team offering Chaplaincy to those taking part in this prestigious event. Recruitment will start early 2021.



Watch this space for details!

QUOTABLE QUOTE

"Nothing that grieves us can be called little; by the external laws of proportion a child's loss of a doll and a king's loss of a crown are events of the same size."

Mark Twain, 'Which Was The Dream?'

"Aren't you over it yet?"

Over the spring lockdown we prepared ourselves to understand some of the painful feelings around bereavement and trauma that we might encounter when we returned to Chaplaincy (writes Peter Sellick).

One attitude that can really hurt people who are traumatised or bereaved is expecting them to be 'over it'. We all need time for lament, and sometimes we never 'get over' it. After much sadness in the last six months, many churches are planning to use the November 'Memorial Season' to give people permission to grieve, as they may need.



'The Leaves of the Trees': an artwork by Peter Walker at Lichfield Cathedral

CIGB Chaplains have come up with creative ways to help people hold memorials in the workplace or community, if they cannot get to church. People know it is important and want to do something to mark their grief. Memorial leaves on a remembrance tree; a tribute notice board; a cairn of pebbles: these are some of ways people have used to honour colleagues or family they miss.



Our Chaplains are finding greater need in the workplace. There are increased mental health concerns and now worry about unemployment. Conversations are deeper and staff are connecting with Chaplaincy a bit more.

If traumatised people feel that friends do not want to hear any more about their trials, they may stop talking about their feelings. Workplace Chaplains can give space for those conversations.

Black Pound Day

Black Pound Day is a new national monthly initiative to encourage people to use black-owned businesses. Black Pound Day is the first Saturday of every month. The initiative has been embraced by the Birmingham Chamber of Business and the City Council.



This year's Black Lives Matter movement has raised awareness to the barriers facing many people from our Black communities. One of those difficulties is the struggle for their businesses to fit into the mainstream networks.

One comment from a British Black Caribbean woman in a report by the Federation of Small Businesses: "Networking can be tough, you have to show up and keep going back until you're accepted. I had to learn this, as I felt a lot of the time people questioned me and questioned why I was there. There's so much conscious and unconscious bias. "

According to their research ('Unlocking Opportunity') Ethnic Minority working age people in West Midlands are more likely to be entrepreneurial and innovative, either out of necessity or choice. Black and Asian people are twice as likely (compared to White British people) to be trying to set up a venture or run a start-up business. Businesses run by ethnic minorities are three times as likely to be trying innovative changes to their businesses.



According to a report from Aston University's Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME), firms run by entrepreneurs from black and minority ethnic backgrounds contribute as much as £25 billion to the UK economy. Professor Monder Ram from CREME spoke at CIGB Annual Meeting in 2018.

This October's Black History Month will also note many of the other inequalities facing the Black Community: the on-going Windrush scandal, the UK's slavery history, as well as the health inequalities and Covid-19 mortality rates.

Peter Sellick

**QUOTABLE-
QUOTE**

“Sometimes all a person wants is an empathetic ear; all he or she needs is to talk it out. Just offering a listening ear and an understanding heart for his or her suffering can be a big comfort.”

Roy T. Bennett

Chaplaincy stories

In our Summer newsletter Peter mentioned that Chaplains were starting to resume their work as the country started to come out of lockdown. Here are some stories written just before new guidelines and the ‘Rule of 6’ came into operation. Firstly we hear from Graham and Pat Wigley, Chaplains to Kings Heath shops:

Kings Heath Retail

Returning to Chaplaincy visits after 3 months’ Lockdown appeared very different with our formal risk assessment; face coverings; gloves and hand sanitiser; and Perspex screens in shops.



Much caution and nervousness abounded; some shops remained unopened, others permanently closed. Conversations were distanced: some through open doorways, some by ringing a bell and then having brief doorstep chats. Shops that had been allowed to remain open had struggled: some had been creative, taking telephone orders and delivering to homes. One business was experiencing a boom by trading online. One or two shopkeepers were still deeply distressed with the trauma of home life and wondering whether future business would survive. We were able to be a ‘sounding board’ and listening-ear as fears were voiced. Since then some of the distress has eased but uncertainty and fears for the future remain.

Mid-September brought additional Covid restrictions to our region and we have again suspended all visits. With very recent announcements for national restrictions in social activities, probably lasting six months, and tighter enforcements possible, Chaplaincy, as we know it, is postponed indefinitely.

Chaplaincy is about care and prayer; about being, as well as activity; so we can still be Chaplains, even if we can’t meet personally. God, who knows and understands the needs of everyone, is able to reveal and inform our thoughts and prayers as we seek Him for those we know. Romans 8 v 28 reminds us, *“...the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what/how we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

More stories and news on our FACEBOOK page...

@CIGBChaplaincy



CIGB Workplace Chaplaincy
Birmingham Solihull

The aviation industry has been hit hard with many losing their jobs. Tanya Arroba, lead Chaplain at Birmingham airport writes:

Birmingham Airport

After shielding for 3 months due to my age, I returned to a very different airport. It was a ghost town, half of it shut down. There were very few flights, so not many people around. Managers were on the front line, everyone was mucking in. Masks were mandatory; hand sanitisers, signs to encourage hand-washing and social-distancing everywhere. A clever machine that takes everyone’s temperature as they enter was installed at the entrance to the terminal ; something I find most reassuring!



Gradually optimism grew as lockdown eased. More retail and food outlets reopened, familiar faces reappeared as more staff returned and there were more flights. In this strange environment the Chaplains seem to provide a welcome familiar presence. I have been told many times how important we are, a sentiment not much expressed before the pandemic. There is more opportunity to talk with staff in the quiet times between flights. People seem even more willing to talk with us than usual, with conversations often touching on deeper issues more quickly. It seems that our listening-ears and calm presence are welcomed.

All the team are back now and we will go on doing all we can to support airport staff in this difficult time for the aviation industry.



Our National Express Bus Chaplains are back too. First we hear from John Bradley:

National Express buses

Like all the Bus Chaplains I observed the Lockdown restrictions. As Lockdown eased, we asked National Express to allow us to resume. They invited us to support their people on non-company premises (eg bus stops and bus stations) in late June; and in early September at the bus garages.

I was able to go into Birmingham Central bus garage straightaway; and as soon as I walked into the mess room I was greeted with the usual mildly-abusive banter from one of the Assistant Managers – I immediately felt

QUOTABLE QUOTE

"This is the problem with dealing with someone who is actually a good listener. They don't jump in on your sentences, saving you from actually finishing them, or talk over you, allowing what you do manage to get out to be lost or altered in transit. Instead, they wait, so you have to keep going." Sarah Dessen, Just Listen

at home! There were long conversations with key people at the garage, and lots of catching-up after several months of separation. It emphasised how pleased people were to see me 'return to the fold,' and have somebody to talk to.

This reflected the welcome I had received at the bus-stops two months earlier. There are still a lot of brief and fleeting chats but now quite a few longer conversations on subjects such as health and bereavement. It is good to see how they now value my listening-ear a bit more and take time to listen to what I say. These times are not easy for drivers as not all passengers bother about social-distancing and wearing masks. National Express is doing all that it can to keep public transport safe and this includes employing extra cleaners at bus stops, and thorough, Covid-19 style, cleaning in the garages.



I'm finding that being a Chaplain seems even more of a privilege in these current times.

Another NEX Bus Chaplain, Christine McAteer writes about her first day back at two bus-garages after Lockdown:

Back On The Buses

I was delighted to be allowed to resume Bus Chaplaincy on 4th September after nearly 6 months. As I cycled in, just after 7.45am, I noticed many school pupils catching school buses for their first week in school since Lockdown.



Yardley Wood Garage was quite quiet due to most drivers being out on the School Run but I found myself warmly received. It was quite emotional, actually. The fairly-new Union Rep, Steve, proudly showed me the food collection staff have been contributing for the Food Bank at Yardley Wood Baptist Church since Lockdown began.

In the early days of Lockdown when bus services were greatly reduced and staff furloughed, days were extremely long and dull for those working in the garages without the usual banter. Instead, Steve faced long nights, with phone calls from stressed drivers about their circumstances.

As I entered the garage it was reassuring, but at the same time heart-breaking, to see the one-way walking systems, the removed seats in the Booking-On area, the 2-metre social distancing spots, hand sanitizers and all the posters displaying cancelled social events.

My visit coincided with a surprise physically-distanced celebration of the retirement of Frank, one of the managers at Acocks Green Garage, which included the traditional "bus pull". This is when the person leaving sits in the driver's seat of the old vintage bus. The bus is not really pulled along any more for health and safety reasons, but colleagues pose for photos. I was not only invited but expected to join in. It was wonderful to be part of such a special occasion.



COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019. Birmingham and Solihull are still subject to local restrictions, to reduce risks and transmission of Covid-19. Chaplaincy visiting, if at all, should only be undertaken with great care, for everyone's safety. Risks need to be assessed and recorded. www.cigb.org.uk/covid-policies

Support for the Unemployed

CIGB Chaplains have joined up with the Ignition team at Jericho Foundation to use our experience of the working world to help people restart their future after redundancy.

Rates of Unemployment in our region are now the worst in the UK, after Hull and Blackpool: and expected to get worse.



**QUOTABLE-
QUOTE**

“Sometimes its not the strength but gentleness that cracks the hardest shells.”

Richard Paul Evans, Lost December

MEET THE CHAPLAIN

Ann Polson from the Solihull Town Centre Chaplaincy shares some of her story:

I have been a Retail Chaplain for almost 20 years. It all began when Revd. Simon Lloyd was appointed as a Chaplain to the building site which would eventually become the Touchwood Shopping Centre in Solihull. Simon, realising the value of Chaplaincy, continued the work by developing the Solihull Town Centre Chaplaincy team which began shortly after the Centre was completed in 2001.



As retail Chaplaincy was in its infancy, people across the country were interested in setting up their own teams. As a very novice volunteer

Chaplain, I found myself demonstrating Chaplaincy to Bishops, Senior Clergy, Student Ordinands, and even the Mayor. Much to my great amusement I was placed as Chaplain in the two stores I most used, Marks & Spencer and Sainsbury’s.

Being allowed behind the scenes and seeing how the business worked from the inside was very interesting but, most of all, being a Chaplain to the staff has been a huge privilege. Sharing the highs and lows of people’s lives, listening to their stories, being there in the bereavements and the joys continues to be a humbling experience. What an honour when people share their deepest thoughts, talk about their fears and anxieties or show me pictures of their new babies, dogs and even their building projects.

I always pray that God will direct my steps during a Chaplaincy visit, so can feel disappointed when nothing much happens during the visit. Then, so often, the most important conversation is the ‘accidental’ meeting in the street on the way home! The staff member who needs to talk, away from the confines of the workplace! the person who had just that day returned to work after a bereavement, or the relative whose elderly aunt had been on the news following an attack; and memorably, the lady who had completely ignored me for the previous 6 months charging across the store when I was shopping after she had heard some bad news, saying “You need to know this!”



Do you feel challenged to support Ministry in the Economy at this time?

FRIENDS support us with £15pa
Help us to respond in this urgent time



Chaplains’ Weekly Worship

When Lockdown began in March many of our Chaplaincies were put on hold, our churches were locked and meetings were forbidden making it difficult to share any Christian fellowship, and even more difficult to maintain the team cohesion that we were used to. It was decided that a weekly worship and prayer session using Zoom would be a good idea and Thursdays at 9am became our meeting time.

Several Chaplains offered to lead these sessions and they have become a fixed point in our week offering a time and a space to meet together, albeit virtually, to offer praise & worship; to pray for our Chaplaincies and ourselves; and, of course to see each other! The sessions last around 30 minutes and are varied in content, giving a lovely fresh feel to our worship each week.

Do come and join us!
If you’re a CIGB Chaplain there’ll be a weekly email message with the details. If you’re not a Chaplain but would like to join us, email Val at the address at the bottom of the page.



PLEASE STAY IN TOUCH

We love hearing your stories— the exceptional ones and the more everyday ones. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this edition of “Chaplains at Work”.

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CIGB 1 Colmore Row B3 2BJ 0121 426 0425
val.dalton@cigb.org.uk www.cigb.org.uk