

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**LIVING CHURCH IN THE WORLD
CHAPLAINCY AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH:
A CASE STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHAPLAINCY IN
A RURAL CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade there has been a recognised but unquantified growth in 'chaplaincy' as a form of ministerial engagement in community contexts in England yet there is little or no research in this area of practice. Basic questions remain unexplored: How do chaplaincy roles emerge and develop? What is distinctive about chaplaincy? What is the significance of this growth? How does chaplaincy in community contexts relate to the mission of the church?

As part of a wider qualitative research project designed to develop understanding of chaplaincy practice, this article presents a Case Study of the development of a chaplaincy role in a rural context. It describes the context and practice along with the processes and relationships involved in the emergence and development of the role. The data is then analysed and discussed with reference to the integrity of chaplaincy as a form of ministry and its significance for the mission of the church as part of the *Missio Dei*. The discussion suggests that chaplaincy as a form of ministry has a key role to play in the mission of the church characterised as 'living church in the world'.

It is hoped that the phronesis gained through the investigation of this particular situation will help to elicit insights and understanding about the nature of chaplaincy in different contexts and about the significance of this form of ministry for the mission and ministry of the church.

1. Introduction

Interest in chaplaincy in community contexts has grown in recent years both from secular organisations such as retail outlets and care homes and from the different church denominations. This is evinced, for example, by the production of a Methodist Church chaplaincy feasibility report in 2009 (Culver, 2009). As Ballard notes in *Locating Chaplaincy: A theological Note* (Ballard, 2009), this growth is reflected in the increasing number and variety of chaplaincy posts advertised in the church press that are of interest to people from a wide theological spectrum. Having spent many years as a hospital and hospice chaplain, in my current research role at The Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology the focus of my work is now to develop the theological understanding and praxis of chaplaincy. I want to understand why chaplaincy has become the focus of so much interest as a form of ministry and what the significance of this might be for the mission and ministry of the church in England.

There is almost no literature or research in this area of practice. Whilst there is literature and research relating to the practice of chaplaincy in institutional contexts such as Healthcare (Mowat, 2008; Swift, 2009) or Higher Education (Church of England, 2002), there is little relating to the theological, ecclesiological or cultural significance of the current growth in interest in chaplaincy in community contexts. Legood's *Chaplaincy: the Church's Sector Ministry* (Legood, 1999) seems to be the only text on chaplaincy practice in varied contexts.

Given this situation and in order to find out more about current chaplaincy practice, in 2009 I undertook a scoping survey of chaplaincy (Slater, 2009). I interviewed chaplains from a wide variety of contexts ranging from the police to the 2012 Olympics along with several National Advisers for different areas of chaplaincy work. What emerged was a complex picture of extensive church involvement in every area of life. However, I found no research into the extent or nature of chaplaincy practice or into the significance of this form

of ministry for the church. There was clearly a need for further research to be done.

In response to this need, this paper presents a case study of the practice of one Agricultural Chaplaincy located in an Anglican rural benefice made up of four parishes with five churches. This may seem parochial. However, the study of this particular context represents a first step in an attempt to excavate the significance of chaplaincy roles for the church and its mission in the world. Whilst this is an Anglican context, I hope that the study will resonate with experiences within different denominations in their parallel attempts to develop understandings of chaplaincy and the contemporary church.

One of the difficult things about trying to study chaplaincy roles in community contexts is that the contexts are dauntingly diverse. They include retail centres, nursing homes, sports clubs and schools to name but a few. In addition, there is no consensus about what constitutes chaplaincy outside the major institutions such as the NHS and prisons. What distinguishes a chaplaincy role from a role as a parish minister? There is a wide recognition that the number of people, both lay and ordained, who perceive themselves to have a chaplaincy role has grown in recent years. However, faced with such contextual diversity, as far as I am aware, no attempt has been made to study this form of ministerial engagement as a phenomenon in its own right. This situation has led to chaplaincy occupying a kind of parallel ministerial universe which everyone knows exists, with which many people are involved, but which no one seems to have studied in a coherent way.

This study of one particular context is an attempt to begin that investigation. What it seeks to discover is: how a chaplaincy role emerges and develops; the processes and relationships that are in play, what is distinctive about the role and what its significance might be for the mission of the church. What, in effect, is the integrity of chaplaincy and what part does it play in the mission of the church in the world?

1.1 Knowing through practice

The study aimed to uncover practical knowledge about how a chaplaincy role actually works. I decided that the best way to do this was to take a case study approach. This enabled me to gather broad background information about the context as well as giving the practitioner opportunity to reflect with me on their specific practice in an in depth interview. Having gained the appropriate consent of the participant, the interview was recorded, transcribed and analysed to explicate the main themes and issues implicit in practice. This in depth analysis enabled me to look at the processes and relationships that were important for chaplaincy in this context.

Research within the church is very difficult to anonymise given that locations and roles are specific and can often be identified. This has been made clear to the participant in this case study as part of the ethics procedure and she is aware that the study may not be anonymous. The participant is happy for the data used to be in the public domain; all interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data are entirely my own. Whilst the experience of this participant is unique, the hope is that it will resonate with the experience of practitioners in different contexts thus contributing to further reflection on chaplaincy practice.

2. The context

The context of the study is a rural benefice comprising four parishes with five churches. Chris, the Vicar, is a retired farmer and Self Supporting Minister who trained for ordination after spending most of her life as a livestock farmer in the area in which she now ministers. The farm that she used to own is situated in the village in which she now lives. The largest village in the benefice has fourteen hundred inhabitants and the smaller villages about three hundred inhabitants. In such small villages, the issues and problems associated with living in rural areas are an inevitable part of community life. When Chris was a curate in the benefice, she asked the then bishop if she could take on the role of Rural Life Officer advising the diocese and parishes

on rural issues. The bishop agreed and she was licensed to that role in 2006. When her training incumbent retired, Chris asked if she could take on running the benefice. This was agreed and she is now vicar. This means that at present Chris has several concurrent roles: Vicar of a multi-parish benefice; Diocesan Rural Life Officer and Agricultural Chaplain. In addition, Chris is also Regional Chaplain for the charity Farm Crisis Network which provides a helpline and volunteer support to the farming community. All of this amounts to a substantial and long standing personal and professional involvement in the rural and farming community of which she is a part.

The Agricultural Chaplaincy role has developed within the Rural Life Officer remit in the context of organisational change. Before Chris took on the diocesan Rural Life Officer role, it was a half time paid diocesan role the main focus of which was to offer diocesan wide advice to bishops and churches on rural issues. It was located within the diocesan Forum for Social Responsibility and managed from within the Forum. After Chris took on the role as a Self Supporting Minister, the diocese was reorganised, the managerial post within the Forum for Social Responsibility was abolished and the post is now directly line managed by the Area Bishop whom Chris sees approximately three or four times a year. Chris is licensed by the bishop to minister to the farming and rural community throughout the diocese. She is aware that the potential reach of her ministry across parish boundaries means that liaising with local clergy and maintaining good relationships across the diocese are important aspects of the work. Although Chris produced a suggested job description (Appendix A) for the Rural Life Officer role when she began, there is no contract detailing the amount of time designated for the chaplaincy work.

3. Findings

3.1 The emergence and development of the chaplaincy role

Chris asked to take on the role of Rural Life Officer when she was a curate feeling ‘a distinct pull to do the rural work’ and then subsequently took on the

role of vicar in the same benefice. As a consequence, she understands both roles as having grown or evolved. The fact that the parish and the diocesan roles have developed in parallel is important to Chris. 'I love my work in the parishes' she says, reflecting that:

'I'm not a good floater, I like to be bedded in somewhere, I like to have deep roots and I don't think I could do the chaplaincy work without being rooted in my parish work.'

This understanding of the development of the roles as growing organically is particularly marked in relation to the chaplaincy. Chris reflects that:

'my chaplaincy role is probably different because I have grown the role rather than being put into a role that was already there.'

'It's a ministry that evolves as you grow into the role.'

'It's constantly evolving depending on what the current circumstance and problems are'

It is striking, if not surprising in this context, that seventy three per cent of the metaphors used in the interview transcript to describe the chaplaincy role are ones of organic growth. As well as current circumstances, Chris recognises that another significant determinant of the shape of the role is the personality of the chaplain:

'It's a unique role and everybody has their own take on it – its people's personalities that evolve the role, I think.'

The predecessor in the role did not develop a chaplaincy component but Chris has developed the role as fifty per cent Agricultural Chaplain, fifty per cent Rural Officer.

3.1.2 Training and support

Chris finds the Area Bishop who line manages her very supportive of her work. There are also national and regional meetings of Anglican Rural Officers at which ideas are exchanged. However, there has been no training for the chaplaincy work:

‘I think mainly because I’ve always farmed and I’ve had a faith and (pause) it’s just grown out of that... I think it would be difficult to have any training (pause) I think time to reflect.’

Chris would welcome peer support and the opportunity to reflect on practice with colleagues:

‘I think a network of chaplains working on their own would be a good thing because... Agricultural Chaplaincy is different, because I don’t work in a team and I don’t work in a team in my parishes. I’m very much working on my own in both jobs.’

3.2 Characteristics of the chaplaincy work

3.2.1 Being alongside

In terms of what the chaplain actually does, Chris is nearly always at the county stock market on a Monday where she perceives herself as having ‘mainly a listening role’; she is ‘a safe pair of ears’ for people to talk to about anything at all. However,

‘It’s because they know me as a farmer that they will talk; they know that I would understand’.

The context in which the ministry is offered is known inside out and there is ‘an empathy or a deep understanding of the people’: identification with the farming community is seen as fundamental. Although Chris talks about the

importance of being rooted in the parish work, she is also very much embedded in the farming context in which she ministers as a chaplain. Whilst the church authorises her to be there as a minister, she is trusted by those whom she draws alongside because she is of their community, recognised as someone who understands and shares their concerns and has their wellbeing at heart. This points to one of the main themes emerging from the data: the fundamental importance of trust arising out of the establishment of good relationships built on listening, empathy and understanding. Sometimes Chris goes to farm sales or to local hunt meets and:

‘it’s generally just meeting farmers where I meet them really, which is all over the place.’

If a farmer needs support, the chaplain may help practically by liaising with organisations such as Farm Crisis Network or with other appropriate funds and agencies if there are money issues. In a wider context, she may be asked to take baptisms, weddings and funerals as a result of the relationships that have been built and she is happy to do this in consultation with local clergy. Chris also gives talks to organisations such as the Young Farmers or Women’s Institutes:

‘quite a lot of stuff like that which is on the periphery but it is raising the profile of the church and it’s raising the profile of all chaplains everywhere.’

However, the essence of the work is repeatedly characterised as ‘being alongside people’. Very often that means ‘being alongside people when they’re at their most vulnerable’. Underlying this is what is termed a ‘just in case role’. This means that having established a trusted presence, if there is a personal or communal crisis such as the outbreak of a serious disease like Foot and Mouth, ‘we are there ready’:

‘It’s being alongside people so that you build up a trust, so that the trust is there when you need it.’

3.2.2 Getting hold of jelly

The above pastoral and practical dimensions of the role were quite clearly described by Chris but her instinctive response to the question ‘What are the main components of your role?’ was quite different. The initial reply was, ‘it’s like getting hold of a piece of jelly.’ This points to a dimension of the role which was harder to articulate than the practicalities of everyday encounter. This relates to the dynamics of the experience of being a chaplain. The role is compared to that of chaplains employed in major institutions such as a university:

‘they have set agendas – they might even have a chapel or a room or somewhere, the only chapel that I’ve got is the tea room at the farmer’s market.’

It is also compared to parish ministry:

‘It’s not like a parish role where you’ve got set things which you do’

The perception is that in this role, the agenda is set by the circumstances or the person with whom the chaplain is involved:

‘you are there for people without having a specific agenda or role or pattern of anything.’

Unlike in a parish where there are set things to do:

‘chaplaincy, you go with the flow.....you go where you’re led almost.’

Chaplaincy is seen as providing the freedom to engage with people in the context of their everyday lives, to listen to their experience and concerns and

to respond flexibly and appropriately because 'we're not hide-bound in a structure.'

The chaplain therefore needs to be able to work in faith and trust with an element of not knowing:

'you don't quite know what you're doing, and you don't quite know what seeds you're sowing... and you don't know what they're going to grow into.'

This is seen by Chris as one of the main challenges of this form of ministry:

'you don't always know whether you're doing any good or not, a lot of it is hanging around listening to people and talking a little bit and its only by the spin-offs from then you realise that your chaplaincy – all chaplaincy work I think – does have a role'

3.3 Chaplaincy and the mission of the church

Chris was very clear that her chaplaincy work is part of mission but, 'it depends on what you call mission'. In this context, it's 'a different mission to getting bums on pews'. In the chaplaincy work:

'It's bringing God into people's lives at a time when they are vulnerable without ramming it down their throats... it's bringing the understanding of God into their problems by what I say or do.'

The possibility of engaging with people in their everyday lives depends on the building up of relationships of trust through listening and genuine encounter that takes seriously their experience as the locus of God's activity in the world:

'it's the being alongside people and being with them so that you understand their problems.'

As most of the people she works with as chaplain are not church goers, Chris is 'very cautious' about offering to pray with or for people:

'because being too much in your face can sometimes ... not help people.'

Apart from in the context of the occasional offices such as funerals, theology usually remains implicit. Inspiration is gained from the words of Francis of Assisi, 'Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words.' Chris reflects that because she wears a collar, people can expect her to be 'quite theological' but most of the livestock farmers:

'see me as more of a practical person which gives them the security to open up.'

However, Chris does wear a collar and is a Christian minister, clear that 'I am doing all this with God'. She identifies Creation as the main theological theme underpinning the work. Farmers too are working with Creation:

'and when you see new life born every Spring...then you can't help but be conscious of theology, of creation and most farmers would never in a million years articulate that but they're doing it... it's not something that you can put into words – but it happens.'

This implicit theological dimension runs throughout the work as in when she goes to buy dog food from the farmer's merchant:

'I have conversations there which are theological but the person that I'm talking to doesn't know that they're having a theological conversation with me'

It is rare for the theological dimension to be voiced and made explicit. Mission in this context bears the essential character of implicit gracious gift:

‘It’s always an unspoken..... gift of faith that hopefully I might be able to bring into a situation.’

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1 The emergence and development of the chaplaincy role

One of the clearest findings of this study relates to the origins of the chaplaincy role. The role emerged in the context of a diocesan reorganisation in which the half time Rural Officer post was abolished. Already working as a self- supporting curate, Chris was able to see this as an opportunity to take on and to develop the role in a way that was responsive to the community context. This could be seen as an entrepreneurial initiative by someone who understands the context inside out, is part of the rural community and can therefore discern the opportunities that there are for ministry within that community. That is to say, the role was not pre-established by the institutional church but came into being as a response to the pull to work with a particular community with which the individual had established relationships. Chris sees rootedness in parish work as facilitating the chaplaincy work but she is also deeply rooted in the farming and rural community. In a very real sense, her identity as a farmer and her ecclesiastical identity as an authorised minister are both equally necessary to the fulfilment of the chaplaincy role. The authority to work alongside this community is both conferred by the institutional church through the bishop granting her a licence and bestowed by the community itself who view her as a trusted member of their community. This bears out Ballard’s contention in *Locating Chaplaincy: A Theological Note* (Ballard, 2009) that a key characteristic of chaplaincy is that it’s primary context is the world rather than the institutional church and that a defining characteristic of chaplains is that they are ‘embedded’ in social structures. The parochial minister works mainly in, with and from the structures and culture of the church and reaches out to the community but the chaplain, whilst having links with the institution:

‘is situated in the structures of the wider society...which provides the matrix that shapes the job.’ (Ballard, 2009, p.20)

In this case, the relationship with the institution is key. At the local level, Chris sees the parish work as a place of rootedness that enables the chaplaincy work to happen. The institution authorises Chris in the Rural Officer role, allows her to develop the chaplaincy work as part of that in ways that she thinks appropriate and provides some supportive line management. She works collaboratively with her church wardens, emailing them her diary at the beginning of each week so that they can see what she is doing and she relies on them to alert her:

‘if the balance of my chaplaincy and rural work was shifting in the wrong direction and I hadn’t realised it’

This means that whilst Chris is at one level affirmed in her chaplaincy role by the institution, at another level it remains an individual initiative because the role is not strategically embedded in the organisation. In fact, there is no designated time for the chaplaincy work in the Rural Officer job description and Chris herself confirms that:

‘my parishes come first, the chaplaincy role runs alongside’

The danger here is that if Chris were to leave the role, it is not clear on what basis the chaplaincy work would be accounted by the institution. This raises a question central to this study: How does chaplaincy work relate to the institutional church? On what basis might chaplaincy work be accounted by the institution without it losing its entrepreneurial freedom and its responsiveness to its situatedness in the world?

This also relates directly to the question of training. The experience that Chris brings to the role and the expertise and skills that she has accrued in doing it remain unarticulated; the perception is that the role is instinctive and training would not be possible. There is no forum where unconscious or

implicit knowledge can be made conscious so that it can be shared and practice can be developed intentionally.

The fact that there is no designated time for the chaplaincy work in a job description relates on one level to the organic way in which the role has developed: an individual has developed the role by building on relationships within the community and 'being led by what's going on.' However, it could also be argued that this lack of any ecclesial profile also represents a kind of institutional hiddenness that is characteristic of chaplaincy as a form of ministry and points to the problematic that provides valency to this study. Increasing numbers of lay and ordained parish ministers engage with people's lived experience through chaplaincy roles but the work is often unquantified, lacks representation within the institution and lacks a theological rationale that could provide the basis of that representation. The growth in chaplaincy work may indicate an instinctive acknowledgement of its strategic importance as an adaptive ecclesial response to the prevailing cultural context. However, I am not aware of any attempt to explicate the nature of that strategic importance for the mission of the church. This kind of chaplaincy in community contexts understands the point that Percy makes: engagement with contemporary culture can no longer take place out of the privileged certainty of an inherited discourse but has to be on the basis of genuine participation within conversations and encounters (Percy, 2005).

The majority of people with whom Chris works as a chaplain are unchurched or not regular church goers. As long ago as 1994 in *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Davie, 1994) Davie drew attention to the disjunction between practice and belief as characteristic of post-war religious life in Britain. She asked the prescient question:

'If churchgoing in its conventional sense is diminishing, through which institutional mechanisms can those concerned about the religious factor in contemporary society work outside of the church itself?' (Davie, 1994, p.107)

I suggest that the development of chaplaincy roles in community contexts is one of the ways in which the institutional church is instinctively adapting to the changed post Christendom, post-modern cultural context. Ballard asserts that:

‘the chaplaincy model is...an attempt to express the relevance of the gospel to every facet of life, each of which demands its particular response.’ (Ballard, 2009, p.19)

This study presents one example of a role developing in order to do just that.

Following the Church of England report *Mission Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* (Archbishop's Council, 2004) the development of ‘Fresh Expressions’, ‘emerging church’ and the training of ‘pioneer ministers’ have all been responses to the recognised need of the church to find ways of connecting with people who are closed to institutional belonging but open to ‘God’ and the transcendent. In this case, chaplaincy is one structure through which the church is able to do this. In this respect, Chris’s observation is pertinent:

‘the only chapel that I’ve got is the tea room at the farmer’s market’

As Davie observed:

‘Religious life...is not so much disappearing as mutating, for the sacred undoubtedly persists and will continue to do so, but in forms that may be very different from those which have gone before’ (Davie, 1994, p.198)

The more recent research of Heelas and Woodhead bears out this observation concluding that traditional forms of religious association are giving way to and being influenced by new forms of spirituality for which engagement with personal experience is a key component (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). Underlying this turn from religion to spirituality is the

‘subjectivisation’ of contemporary culture within which conformity to external obligations and dogma has become less important than sensitivity to inner life and well-being. In *The Spirituality Revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality* (Tacey, 2004), Tacey relates this cultural phenomenon to religious traditions recognising that they need to take account of personal experience and accept it as a potential source of revelation if they are to continue to thrive. He suggests that just as Christ ministered in the community, binding secular lives to the sacred, so the churches need to focus on revealing the presence of God in the everyday circumstances of people’s lives in the community. The tea room at the farmer’s market is one such place where that can happen.

In contrast to this chaplaincy which has developed by listening to people’s experience and responding accordingly, Davie suggests, in a rather crude way but nevertheless one that may point to some truth, that parish churches now sit awkwardly in this cultural milieu:

‘for they continue to provide ...a production rather than consumption version of religion; providing, that is, a consistent pattern of worship and pastoral care, dictated by the obligations of their role’ (Davie, 1994, p.200)

Chris’s use of organic metaphors of growth to describe the development of the role is entirely apposite given that the role is characterised by not being ‘hide-bound in a structure’ but is rather responsive to the context and ‘led by what’s going on.’ Chris here may have articulated the central strength and importance of chaplaincy: in a plural society where orthodox Christian religious practice may be in decline and institutional belonging has become a matter of minority choice, chaplaincy affords ways for the church as the people of God to be *alongside* people in their daily lives offering, in Chris’s words, the ‘gift of faith’. Chaplains are in a position to engage with those who are not church members and to address individual and social concerns from within the particular realities of everyday life. As Chris remarked:

‘it’s a very privileged role....it’s special and it’s privileged to be alongside people and...it’s a gift that God gives us to be there.’

4.2 Chaplaincy and the mission of the church

In this context the opportunity afforded by the chaplaincy role to come alongside people in their daily lives is seen as a gift given by God. If this form of ministry is seen as a gift given to the church then the question to ask is: What is the significance of this gift in the life and purpose of the church? In *Reimagining Ministry* (Heywood, 2011) Heywood points out that over the past two decades, understandings of mission have changed and:

‘Mission has moved from the periphery of the church to its centre.’
(Heywood, 2011, p.1)

Mission is no longer seen as an optional activity undertaken by a particular kind of church but rather the church’s core identity is now understood as being constituted as the bearer of God’s mission in the world. In this understanding, the very nature of God is missionary; the Father sending the Son into the world and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. This is the *missio Dei*. Heywood points out that the community that Jesus gathered around himself was to be the visible sign that the kingdom of God was arriving in him and in the Gospel of John, Jesus entrusts the mission of God to this community with the words, ‘As the father has sent me, so I send you’ (John 20.21) (Heywood, 2011). In *Transforming Mission*, Bosch similarly describes mission as:

‘the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.’ (Bosch, 1992, p.519)

The missionary God sends the church into the world in order to establish the kingdom. This is the goal of mission and as Heywood remarks:

‘Rather than following a universally applicable blueprint, the community is called to discern the shape of God’s mission for each place and time and to allow its own life constantly to be renewed by the Holy Spirit so as to fulfil that mission.’ (Heywood, 2011, p.113)

He points out that as understandings of mission have changed, so the key question about ministry has changed too. No longer is it:

‘How is the church to be governed? Today, the relevant question is: How is the church to serve the mission of God?’ (Heywood, 2011, p.13)

I suggest that the understanding of mission that Chris seeks to articulate in her chaplaincy practice relates directly to the doctrine of the *missio Dei* outlined above and to an understanding of the church as the servant of Gods’ mission in the world in order that the kingdom of God may flourish: bearing witness to the good news of Gods’ love ‘for the sake of the world’.

This begins with the need to discern the shape of God’s mission in this particular context. It begins with the assumption that the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere already at work in people’s lives. As Chris puts it:

‘because they’re working with creation all the time they are working with God but they don’t realise that they’re doing it.’

As a representative of the church, Chris represents her work as incarnating the good news of Gods’ love for the sake of the world although that is rarely made explicit. Discerning what God’s mission might be in this place demands an attitude of humility: a drawing alongside people to listen to their experience and to what is going on in their lives and in their community. This builds the deep relational foundations of trust that enable people to talk to Chris about the reality of their experience. This is the starting point for discerning what God might be doing in the world and how the chaplain, as representative of the church, can serve that mission. Mission in this context is understood not as being about getting people to come to church but as

being about collaboration with Gods' work in the world. The work is characterised by:

'building up trust and being alongside and being part of what they're doing.'

It is this that enables Chris to bring:

'the understanding of God into their problems by what I say or do.'

and so to contribute to the flourishing of the kingdom in however small a way.

The findings suggest that, due to its characteristic location in social structures and its capacity to be 'led by what's going on', chaplaincy as a form of ministry may be ideally suited to the discernment and service of the mission of God. Its approach to engagement with particular contexts and contemporary culture exemplifies what Steddon terms 'guest' in contrast to 'host' theology. According to Steddon, guest theology asks, 'Please may I come to your place and be part of what you do?' whilst host theology engages in order to say 'Come to our place and do as we do.' (Steddon, 2010, pp.11-12). If contemporary culture has set an ecclesiological imperative to renegotiate the relationship between the 'church' and the 'world' then it would appear that chaplaincy is at the forefront of that renegotiation.

Spencer (Spencer, 2007) characterises mission within postmodernity as 'finding hope in local communities'. Referring to Bonhoeffer and to Donovan's missionary strategy with the Massai in *Christianity Rediscovered* (Donovan, 1978), he states:

'The common theme found in Bonhoeffer and Donovan is of the Church laying aside its power and wealth and becoming vulnerable to the local community, listening before witnessing, changing and being changed by the encounter.' (Spencer, 2007, p.175)

Through genuine encounter and dialogue the opportunity for authentic witness often occurs. In this paradigm, Christian witness is expressed through Christians offering themselves in service to local communities:

‘so that they may give and receive hospitality and care and so that genuine dialogue and witness may take place.’ (Spencer, 2007, p.180)

The important components of mission in this postmodern context are: the willingness to engage with people’s lived experience and to listen before witnessing, humility, mutuality, encounter, dialogue and depth of discipleship. Of course, the willingness to engage in genuine dialogue and listening also implies the need to risk genuine openness to mutual learning and transformation. This is what Bosch speaks of as the church ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ others (Bosch, 1992, p.375), contributing to the flourishing of the kingdom as part of God’s sending. In Heywood’s terms, the chaplain is not there ‘to uphold the church’s institutional presence’ but ‘as a sign of the social, moral and even spiritual significance’ of the life of a particular community. He suggests that when engagement is on this basis, what is chiefly valued about the minister’s presence is not what sets them apart but what brings them alongside:

‘A shared humanity, vulnerability, a willingness to share the struggle, to explore the meaning of the mundane activities through which social life is maintained, perhaps to offer the hope of a better world.’ (Heywood, 2011, p.14)

or as Chris puts it:

‘it’s being alongside people so that you build up a trust, so that the trust is there when you need it.’

It is interesting to see that this missiological approach is advocated in a recent article in the Church Times entitled: *Centred on service to the world: the Church needs a new ecclesiology focused on reaching outwards* (Hollis,

2011). In this article Hollis, significantly I think, also a Self Supporting Minister, calls for a new ecclesiology that can accommodate the call to serve the mission of God in the world. He asserts that the Church's primary vocation is to make love:

'real in purposeful action in the world....so that those outside [the church] reach their full manhood and womanhood in body, mind and spirit, individually and socially.'

In Hollis's view:

'The work of the Church is in the world. Jesus commissioned the apostles, and through them the whole Church, to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Worship may inspire its actions, but the vocation of the Church is in the world.'

5. Conclusion

This single case study has articulated some of the significant themes and issues relating to the development of a chaplaincy role in a rural community context. In undertaking this study I set out to explore four basic questions: How do chaplaincy roles emerge and develop? What is distinctive about chaplaincy? What is the significance of the recent growth in chaplaincy roles? How does chaplaincy relate to the mission of the church?

The findings have shown that the role has emerged as a result of the personal initiative and vision of the participant who was able to spot the opportunity within the context of a diocesan role for developing this particular form of ministry. Fundamentally, the role has been developed by building on relationships of trust within a community which is known from the inside out and with which the chaplain identifies as a farmer herself. The chaplaincy work is indeed embedded in the social structures of the farming community and the participant's solidarity with that community is as much her source of authority in the work as is her official authorisation for the work by the church.

Structural opportunity, personal vision and a strong understanding and empathy with the community involved have all been instrumental in the development of the role. However, the role remains hidden in the context of the institutional narrative about ministry in that there is no time designated for the work and no training either available or envisaged relevant.

The distinctiveness of the role is described in terms of its embeddedness in social rather than ecclesiastical structures; its lack of structure and its consequent capacity to be flexible in its response to circumstances; its focus on the engagement with the everyday reality of people's lives. The chaplaincy work begins where people are, listening to their lived experience and seeking to discern where God is at work in the world. This mode of ecclesial engagement with the contemporary cultural context may represent one significant way in which the church is adapting to the contemporary turn from religion to spirituality and the subjectivisation of culture. The study suggests that chaplaincy is the church, living out its vocation in the world as part of the sending of God.

This suggests the significance of chaplaincy today within the mission of the whole church of God. If the church has been sent to serve the *missio Dei* by working with the world for the flourishing of the kingdom then chaplains who are able to come alongside people in their daily lives have a central role to play.

This case study supports the view that chaplaincy can be seen as one way of living church in the world, of being alongside and bringing hope and the gift of faith to many who are not open to institutional belonging but do recognise the transcendent dimension of life. In these terms, chaplaincy does indeed have its own integrity as a form of ministry within the mission of the church.

However, this is just one case study in one particular context. This piece of research generates further questions and the need for further empirical research in different contexts: questions about training and resources and the perceptions of chaplaincy within the institutional church ripple out from this

study asking to be addressed. The next task is to undertake further studies in comparative urban and semi-urban contexts in order to provide fuller evidence of how chaplaincy develops and is sustained in different contexts. The hope is that the findings from further case studies will locate the conclusions drawn from this study in a wider context and thus contribute more substantially to the description of the integrity of chaplaincy as a form of ministry and to the articulation of its place within the mission of the church as a significant contemporary way of living church in the world.

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APPENDIX A

Proposed job description for NSM Rural Life Officer

- To act as advisor to the Diocese on rural life and agricultural issues
- To assist clergy and laity to engage effectively with rural and agricultural issues by giving practical support, specialist advice and providing information on resources as needed
- To raise the profile of rural issues within the Diocese

I would anticipate that the above could be achieved by all or some of the following activities:

1. Attending as a clergy person such meetings as; National Farmers Union, Country Landowners Association, DEFRA, together with events such as Farm Sales, Livestock Market etc.
2. To work collaboratively with other diocesan officers as required
3. To act as a 'channel' in providing information to rural parishes about urban issues and vice versa
4. To work in collaboration with the Arthur Rank Centre, the churches national and ecumenical structures and other rural Life Officers
5. To assist new clergy to the diocese to understand rural/farming issues e.g. by farm walk, visit to livestock market
6. To reflect pastorally and theologically on the work undertaken and to share this for example by preaching or writing articles
7. To be available to provide knowledgeable support in the event of another farming or rural crisis
8. To assist rural churches who may be feeling isolated and struggling
9. To work with others to continue to bring environmental issues to the fore across the diocese

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