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# SWBA NEWS!

South Wales  
Baptist Association

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## Hospital Chaplaincy – caring for the spiritual health of patients, visitors and staff...

Andy Gibbs is a Baptist Chaplain with the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, and Velindre Health Board. This is made up of five hospitals, around 14500 staff and 2000 patients plus many visitors each day.

Chaplains offer patient-centred and patient-led spiritual care for whoever wants it. Being in hospital is a time of vulnerability and uncertainty and Andy comments: *‘Whilst a growing percentage of people may say in the census they don’t have a religious faith, when they aren’t well, people want to explore matters of a spiritual nature’*

Andy estimates that he has around 200-250 key conversations each month...

many of them with people who don’t go to church or have only a loose connection. As part of this there are likely to be three to six end of life visits each week, plus a couple of conversations a month supporting someone who has lost an infant.

It isn’t just patients who the chaplains support either, with plenty of care offered to staff as well. Patients are in and out – often within days or weeks, but many staff are present for years. They are constantly dealing with stressful situations, distressed family members and end of life care. This takes its toll and chaplains are there to provide a listening ear and practical support where possible.



Andy Gibbs, Hospital Chaplain



Chapel at University Hospital of Wales

**“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”**  
Proverbs 17:22

# Welcome!

Many of us are aware of the trend in Wales towards a decreasing number of people identifying as 'Christian'. Fewer people are attending church services whilst the age profile of many churches is increasing.



However, this isn't the only story to be told. Rachel Jordan-Wolf leads a charity called 'Hope Together', whose aim is 'to help everyone, everywhere know Jesus'. At our ministers' conference in February, she used an illustration from CS Lewis' Narnia books to say that "we are seeing signs of spring rather than winter", referring to people's openness to Jesus.

And people don't just explore spiritual matters in a formal church setting. Chaplains across South Wales can testify to many significant faith conversations taking place week by week. A key component of this is that chaplains go to where people are and engage with them in that unique context. It is a significant ministry and one in which Baptists are very much involved.

In this newsletter you will be able to read about Baptist chaplains serving in very different contexts: from hospitals to universities; prisons to the military; a care home to the Wales Millenium Centre. These are inspiring stories of the difference one person can make when they are available and committed to engaging with people at a deep level.

It is important to note that there are many other stories that could be told as well. Sports Chaplaincy is increasing with rugby, football and disability sports all benefiting. Then there is school chaplaincy, street pastors and a variety of work-based chaplaincies.

Whatever the setting, a common theme emerges of the importance of supporting people as they recognise their own spiritual dimension and search for meaning in life. Chaplaincy is an incarnational ministry, as caring through presence offers the opportunity to reflect God's love for everyone and meet people where they are at with their most pressing questions.

We hope you enjoy the stories in this issue.

*Mark*

## Anna Chaplaincy...



*Hilary being commissioned as an Anna Chaplain*

Anna Chaplains are named after the widow, Anna, who appears with Simeon at the Temple, after the birth of Jesus. Both Anna and Simeon are great role models of faithful older people committed to loving God. Anna Chaplains show their love of God in action as they reach out to older people, whatever levels of faith they have. The organisation talks about 'flying the flag for older people', recognising many face significant levels of loneliness, isolation and vulnerability.



Hilary Prichard was commissioned as an Anna Chaplain in 2023 and visits a care home as part of this role. She takes a service once a month and offers one-to-one visits in between times. Significant

conversations can occur during these times as it offers the opportunity for residents to share things that are worrying them or that they are upset about. For example, one resident could share the pain of the death of her granddaughter, another was visited after being upset by the death of another resident. One person commented that "It's so nice to see someone outside of the family". As a former hospital chaplain, Hilary has many skills that are transferable to this ministry as she seeks to offer care for the mental and spiritual health of those she meets.



*The Care Home Hilary Visits*

**Hilary leads the Anna Chaplaincy work of South Wales Baptist Association. If you would like to find out more, please do contact us and we will put you in touch.**

### OUR VALUES

- Passionate for Mission
- Innovative and Visionary

- Generous and Relational
- Committed to Justice



# Prison Chaplaincy, through Church involvement...



Bethel BC in Pontyclun run a prison ministry at HMP Parc Prison, Bridgend, a Category B male prison. Peter Samsom (pictured above) leads this ministry for the church.

Whilst there are currently no paid SWBA Baptist Chaplains, there are those who are actively involved in Prison Chaplaincy. Bethel BC lead two services on one Sunday a month at HMP Parc Prison, Bridgend, a Category B male prison.

These times make a difference. The chaplaincy team at the prison are pleased to have different people so that prisoners aren't simply seeing the same faces. For those prisoners who don't have visits from family or friends, this contact time can be particularly valuable. The opportunity to be prayed for after the service is regularly taken up. Relationships in particular are challenging for many prisoners, and prayer is often asked for that.

For Peter, the opportunity to tell prisoners that God loves them is the key message – it highlights that they have worth. He says, *“A lot of people are in prison not because they are bad people but because they have made bad choices. And there are testimonies of those whose lives have been completely turned around as they experience the presence of Jesus.”*

## Chaplaincy at the Millennium Centre



**Owen James is Chaplain for the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff. Mostly known for the theatre, it is also home to the Welsh National Opera and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. There are around 150 staff, 200 volunteers and over 1.4 million visitors a year!**

The theatre chaplaincy has developed over the last couple of years. Owen's wife, Lindsay was working as a dresser with 'The Lion King' production and Owen was a volunteer steward. In a conversation with one of the actors who was a Christian, Owen was asked whether it would be possible to have a time of prayer and fellowship. Touring companies move from town to town and the timing of the shows often make it hard to attend church. As a result of this interaction, Owen approached the management of the centre to suggest the idea of chaplaincy. From here, the idea has evolved, and Owen is now employed for eight hours a month as a chaplain. There is also a quiet room that has been set aside for use as a prayer space.

Owen visits the offices, walks around the building and sits in the café area, seeking to make himself as visible and available as possible. Most weeks this leads to what Owen would describe as a 'significant conversation' taking place. Anxiety, stress and well-being issues are regular topics that are brought up.



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## Military Chaplaincy



Jon Birch is a chaplain to the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia). They are members of the army reserve – people who hold a civilian job but who combine this by serving alongside regular soldiers. In practice this means attending a drill night during the week, plus on average one weekend a month and an annual camp of about 16 days training.

Jon's primary responsibility is to deliver pastoral care, spiritual support and moral guidance irrespective of someone's religious background. This involves being present, approachable and available for those who would value a chat. Mostly this is about listening and caring as typically stresses and strains of life outside the army are shared – for example, bereavement and relationship breakdowns.

Jon became interested in the possibility of army chaplaincy through speaking with a Baptist minister who was a reservist himself. It planted a seed in Jon's mind that is now coming to harvest as God has continued to lead him in this direction. Jon says of being a chaplain, **'It is intensely rewarding. The culture of the army is that people talk openly about all sorts of things. They are thinking about big questions of life because it's a demanding and risky role. These are people I would never otherwise have contact with outside of this role.'** Jon enjoys being able to join in with some of the 'soldiering roles' – running around, fitness training, the sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

## University Chaplaincy



*The Meeting House, University of South Wales*

**Michelle Romaniw is Head of Chaplaincy Services for the University of South Wales. Based in the Treforest Campus at 'The Meeting House', the team serves across five campuses, additionally in Newport, Cardiff, Glyn Taff and Merthyr. The Chaplaincy offers confidential and non-judgemental support to staff and students whilst at the same time seeking to build a sense of community for all.**

'The Meeting House' is a key space and one that Michelle manages as part of her role. Here staff and students can be assured of a warm welcome and it a place where people of all nationalities, cultures, faiths and ways of life can relax, chat, discuss, play or pray. There is a lounge area with tea, coffee and cold drinks available; a quiet room for prayer and reflection; rooms that are bookable for meetings and events. And, of course, importantly, there is the opportunity to speak with a chaplain. The aim is to create a safe space where staff and students can open up about issues they are facing.

Loneliness, stress, anxiety and bereavement are all regular issues that are discussed.

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Michelle is head of chaplaincy, seeking to support staff and students



For more stories across South Wales Baptist Association, please do see our website and follow us on Facebook and YouTube.