

Daring Compassion:

The Role of Movement Chaplaincy in Social Change

The Daring Compassion Movement Chaplaincy Project is aimed at advancing the emerging vocational role of Movement Chaplain. Movement Chaplains offer spiritual accompaniment — spiritual, emotional, relational and practical wholistic care — to those in social change events, organizations, and movements. While justice movements have become increasingly receptive in recent years to spiritual technologies, individuals need more spiritual support to thrive and attend to the needs of the communities they serve. Our movements lack a cadre of trained and accountable spiritual care practitioners. Daring Compassion offers the training, networks, and structures of accountability Movement Chaplains need to be purposeful, resilient spiritual practitioners.

WHAT IS MOVEMENT CHAPLAINCY?

Movement Chaplaincy is the work of spiritual accompaniment to justice movements and their leaders. Just as there are chaplains who attend to the spiritual needs of people in hospitals, colleges, corporate environments and other settings, there is a need for those who can fill this role within our movements for social change.

Spiritual accompaniment includes spiritual, emotional, relational, and practical wholistic care of those involved in the organizing and activism necessary for systemic social change. Through a focus on attending to the needs of the individuals and groups engaged in this change work, Movement Chaplains use social-emotional tools, spiritual practices, sacred texts, and physical comfort to include healing and care as a part of creating a more just world. Movement Chaplains

have an understanding of movement history and culture and are attuned to the sacred, the personal, the stressful, the painful, and the celebratory needs and moments of our justice movements and leaders. They provide support, spiritual connection, grounding, centering, prayer, encouragement, clarity, and care.

The role of a Movement Chaplain is to focus on the wholistic needs of those involved in social change. Chaplaincy is not primarily an intellectual endeavor. It is an imperfect relationship between training and anointing (calling). It requires fluidity, a mixture of skills, intuition and experience, and understanding of the context in which one serves. Movement Chaplaincy is a particular stream of healing justice that contributes to the creation and resilience of beloved community by equipping self-identified people of faith (or spirituality) to show up utilizing the best skills, tools, practices and knowledge from our deep wells of faith, cultures, elder wisdom and community assets.

WHO IS A MOVEMENT CHAPLAIN?

The Movement Chaplain is a trained, yet not necessarily ordained, “spiritual activist” who is committed to their own spiritual and emotional development, healing and resilience building. It is on their own personal practice and experience that they draw strength to give to others. They practice spiritual disciplines along with other practices of personal and collective care and stay connected to others through vital relationships. Movement Chaplains offer support to activists, organizers and communities and encourage them to support one another.



We have to begin to have a conversation that incorporates a vision of love with a vision of outrage.”

- Ruby Sales

THE NEED

Despite making great strides for equality in the last 60 years, the social fabric of the United States has suffered much, threatened by the segregation of urban spaces, a staggering wealth gap, and an individualistic narrative that now falls flat: Social isolation can be discerned from the highest suicide rate in 30 years, a record number of Americans who believe the American dream is out of reach, and social trust at historic lows for millennials. In the rising tension of a polarized political backdrop, and with a new wave Civil Rights movement that is calling for Americans to implement the rights fought for over the last sixty years, the country is being asked to have a real conversation about its morals, values, and identity.

Historically, religious leaders have helped guide these moral crises, and faith communities have played pivotal roles in social movements, especially Civil Rights Movement. But after the 1960s, more and more Americans began to disaffiliate from religious institutions, and decades later, our sacred world continues to align with empire. Faith often seems to play a one-sided role in American civic and political life – one that is politically partisan, conservative, and one that leads to the further disenfranchisement of marginalized communities.

In this leaderful movement time, many of those engaged in the struggle are marginalized people themselves dealing with the collective and individual trauma of intersecting oppressions. This trauma manifests itself tangibly in physical health disparities, mental health challenges and toxic relationships. Movement spaces are suffering under the weight of “activist martyrdom

syndrome” which leads to compassion fatigue, health emergencies, career changing burnout and at times, as in the story of Ohio Black Lives Matter activist, Marshawn McCarrel, suicide.

Individuals - staff, activists, leaders - are increasingly receiving one-on-one spiritual support, though they need even more. This includes informal support from colleagues, clergy, and healers. However, these solutions are largely piecemeal and uncoordinated. What our movements lack is a cadre of trained and accountable spiritual care practitioners. Chaplaincy offers a model with the training, skills, and standards that can provide discipline, accountability, and purpose to justice-based spiritual practitioners.

The role of Movement Chaplain has emerged as a source of solace and support for activists, organizers, and communities. Chaplains – those who offer spiritual counseling to people in great transition or distress – are often associated with formal institutions like hospitals - but are desperately lacking in more “secular” activist communities whose well-being is at stake from the distress of oppression and the fight against it.

The dominant model in our society for spiritual leadership places the religious leader within a particular religious institution - think imam and mosque. In contrast, chaplains work within a specific “non-religious” institutional setting such as a hospital, military unit, or prison, providing spiritual care to those within that institution. The chaplaincy model fits movement culture because instead of people entering a building set aside for religious practice, a chaplain meets people where

they are in order to explore, create, and nurture spirituality. This is especially important given the secularization of our culture, including diminished participation in congregational life, which means it is even more important people are able to access spiritual care resources and caregivers.

Showing up at a protest or community meeting in a clergy collar no longer means people trust you as an authority or community ally. In the words of Ella Baker, “strong people don’t need strong leaders.” The people want change and are willing to fight for it - but that doesn’t need they don’t need a encouragement, prayer or a grounding rituals. In fact

it is a core need for sustainable, relationship-based social change - the development and maintenance of integrated ways to stay connected, held, cared for, and strengthened as we do the very real work of dismantling oppressive, evil systems and creating alternative structures and ways of being that allow everyone to flourish. There are more theologically trained, ministry minded, justice focused faith leaders interested in serving communities outside of congregational ministry than ever before. There are countless justice-minded soulful caregivers ready to offer their gifts and training in the service of those doing movement work. These are the Movement Chaplains.

WHAT DOES A MOVEMENT CHAPLAIN DO?

- Commits to personal practices of spirit and/or religion, self-care and healing in community, from which they have the resources to serve others
- Commits to the multifaith work of justice by humbly accompanying people of all or no religion
- Provides accompaniment and witness during notable, intense or traumatic times
- Supports others in connecting spiritual and/or contemplative practices to movement work.
- Offers healing modalities as trained and educated to do so, e.g. bodywork, somatics, herbal remedies, etc. to the communities they serve
- Meets people “where they are”, listens, holds space for emotions, laments, tears, pain and struggle
- Centers & maintains a focus on the spiritual, emotional, relational and physical needs (like warmth, thirst, touch, eye contact) needs of individuals and communities engaged in movement work
- Contributes tools, texts, practices, rituals and activities for spiritual and emotional healing and resilience to organizations, actions and communities
- Develops and co-creates liturgies, ceremonies, prayers, celebrations, laments for protests, rallies, meetings - gatherings of any kind. Serves as a resource for spiritual, inspirational and relevant material for remembering, centering and grounding
- De-escalates, mediates and provides relational support during times of emotional intensity
- Provides and/or coordinates non-medical emotional, spiritual and physical support before, during and after non-violent direct action

HOW DO I BECOME A MOVEMENT CHAPLAIN?

Chaplaincy is a vocation. It is something that a person discerns is their role in life or in a community for a specific time or season of life. Becoming a Movement Chaplain can take both a formal and informal path depending on the skill-set, experience, knowledge and community of the chaplain. Formal training through a workshop, course, class or cohort is one pathway to gaining knowledge and skills and is what we offer through the Daring Compassion Movement Chaplaincy Training through Faith Matters Network.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF MOVEMENT CHAPLAINCY?

The future of Movement Chaplaincy is what we create in our communities and across the globe together. We at FMN look forward to working with people to expand, modify and iterate this curriculum as we learn and grow. It is our desire to create co-learning communities where facilitators and participants learn from each other. Movement Chaplaincy is just one of the ways people create positive social change and bring healing to communities. As the idea continues to grow and change with each generation, it will become core to social change work. Just like organizers, safety team members, medics and others fill vital roles at protests and meetings, Movement Chaplains will fill this role that has been birthed along with the movements for liberation in every generation.

This work is evolving and moving.
We are always looking to expand our conversation and highlightwork.
If you have an experience or project to share, or simply would like more information about the project please contact:

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You can also visit our website:
www.faithmattersnetwork.org/daringcompassion

**Training will begin with an
online learning cohort pilot in 2019!**
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