

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN

The restaurant on campus is always a good place to meet people, students and staff. This morning over breakfast I chatted with a member of catering staff who told me she had just put in her resignation. We chatted about her reasons for leaving, about her loyalty and commitment to the university and about how leaving felt right, but how her decision was tinged with sorrow. Some of the changes made by the new catering company have not been easy for staff to manage. Going across to the main reception, there was opportunity for a brief chat with reception staff as I informed them I was expecting a visitor the following day: the local police community cohesion officer. All visitors' names have to be recorded. The Chaplaincy Centre on campus is open every weekday from 9.00am; students were already making tea and coffee when I arrive; the large sofa is a good place to chat with students, one worrying about an imminent presentation, another is concerned as she felt too ill to go to her part-time job, another wanting to talk about how to balance the paid work she has to do to support herself and full time studies.



After lunch, it's time for some preparation for the holding of a vigil on campus commemorating recent deaths in a terrorist attack overseas; firstly, getting the permission to use the very open public space at the entrance to the university and secondly, checking that no major university events were taking place which would mean it could be difficult to hold a vigil. As guests on campus, the chaplains are always in the position of having to negotiate on use of space and about events. Responses to the enquiries are all positive, so the next step is to talk with our part-time Muslim chaplain who comes onto campus every Tuesday; he is happy to change the time of his visit, so he can participate in the vigil as it's important that the university Muslim community and the local Muslim community feel supported. The Chaplaincy Centre is busy today with students dropping in, between lectures, or hanging around because, for some, today is a 'no lecture day'. It's been said that the Chaplaincy Centre is a 'home from home', particularly for international students and those from the EU. The centre is cosy and warm; the Chaplaincy Assistant offers a welcome and hospitality and makes a cracking cup of Fairtrade coffee! At my desk, I have added the new Student Union CEO to the Fairtrade group and circulated proposed meeting dates for our next university Fairtrade meeting, a group I am privileged to chair. At its next meeting we will review Fairtrade Fortnight and start to plan, with the university environmental officer, for a spectacular Fairtrade Fortnight in 2020. Our Chaplaincy Assistant is off to

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do the shopping for the Global lunch which regularly takes place on Tuesdays in the Chaplaincy Centre.

Last task of the working day for me is to have a phone conversation with a former student who has created a Bedford branch of a mental health charity, originally founded by a current PhD student, on one of our other campuses. As vice chair of the Bedford branch, I have been standing in for her, as chair, while she cares for a close relative. One of our regular Chaplaincy volunteers is also a mentor for students and today she has used our space to see some of her student clients; it's quiet, and away from the hustle and bustle of the main part of campus. Many of her clients also become regular visitors to the Chaplaincy Centre as they feel happy in a space where they can simply be themselves. The Scrabble board is out and so is Four in a Row, our late-night opening has become a games night! Revd Cass Howes, Methodist, Co-ordinating Chaplain (multifaith chaplaincy), University of Bedfordshire.

For more information about HE chaplaincy and the work the FCG are doing in this area:

[https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/chaplaincy/what-makes-a-good-chaplain/ What makes a good chaplain?](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/chaplaincy/what-makes-a-good-chaplain/What%20makes%20a%20good%20chaplain?)

<https://www.freechurches.org.uk/higher-education> Free Churches Group Higher Education

Pray for your local universities and those from your congregation who are studying at university.

Reaching out to universities – a church resource for you! <https://www.freechurches.org.uk/news/2019/5/2/reaching-out-to-universities-a-church-resource-for-you>

<https://www.freechurches.org.uk/documents-publications>

Let us pray - Throughout the academic university year:

Majestic God, as students aim higher and develop their God-given potential, give students firm foundations in your wisdom, rooted in your love and stability. We pray for the tutors and chaplains in universities - loving God, give them the wisdom, clarity and patience to support the students and staff with compassion.

In Jesus' precious name, **Amen**