

What can you expect of your Chaplain?

Appreciating what we can expect of our Chaplain is an important part of the way in which we can understand how we run our Chaplaincies. This User Guide has been prepared to help Chaplaincies and should be read in conjunction with the User Guide 'How Do We Run Our Chaplaincies?'

As in all areas of Church life, conflict most often arises when people are seeking to undertake responsibilities that properly belong to someone else. The ministry of Chaplains will be greatly aided if there is a clear understanding of what are their responsibilities, together with a clear understanding of the source of their authority (the relevant 'Canon Law').

Along with many historic Christian churches, the Church of England orders its life around the work, ministry and authority of its Bishops. We are all accountable to one another within the Body of Christ for our life as a Christian community, Chaplains however are under the primary authority of the Diocesan Bishop for their ministry of leading worship, pastoral care, preaching, as an enabler of mission and outreach, and for the administrative responsibilities associated with their role. As priests, chaplains minister according to the ordinal*; as licensed priests, they minister according to the terms of their licence** from the Bishop; and as licensed priests in your chaplaincy, they minister according to the terms and conditions agreed between you and them, so that ministry may flourish in that place.

The following list of responsibilities relating to the role of a Chaplain is not exhaustive, but highlights some key areas, and may help to provide clarity for others in the Chaplaincy (eg church wardens, musicians, lay ministers).



The Chaplain has responsibility for leading worship, and for the form and content of all worship, including the music (Canons B1 to B20).

Only forms of worship authorised by the General Synod are to be used by Chaplains (Canon B1).

The pattern of services is a matter for decision by the minister (ie the Chaplain) and Council, jointly; the vesture to be used (i.e. the style of robes used when conducting public worship) may be decided by the minister only once agreement has been obtained from the Council. (Canon B8);

Clergy with Permission to Officiate, and Lay Ministers who hold the Bishop's Licence, exercise their ministry under the authority of the Bishop and the Chaplain (Canon E6);

Churchwardens are the Bishop's principal lay officers in each Chaplaincy, and exercise their ministry under the authority of the Bishop in representing the congregation and in co-operating with the Chaplain (Canon E1);

The Chaplain has responsibility for pastoral care and teaching and for co-ordinating these (Canon C24);

Those who assist with the distribution of Holy Communion must be duly authorised after suitable training, and following a resolution from the Chaplaincy Council (Canon B12);

The Chaplain is responsible for ensuring that current safeguarding policies and processes are observed and clearly understood (Canon C30).

A Chaplain is primarily accountable to the Bishop who oversees his clergy through the Ministry Development Review (MDR). This is a robust and wide-ranging process, which seeks to provide support and affirmation, identify training and developmental needs, as well as addressing concerns and anxieties. As a part of the process, Lay officers in the Chaplaincy, as well as regular worshippers, can be invited to provide observations to this review alongside the input of your Chaplain. In some depth, it covers areas such as:

Worship and spirituality

Pastoral care

Vocation and leadership

Organisation and management;

Growth in faith

Personal well-being and relationships with others

In conducting their ministry, the Chaplain, as well as every member of the congregation, will be seeking to ensure that those people for whom the Church of England is not their native or natural spiritual home are welcomed and embraced in the Christian fellowship of the Chaplaincy. They are drawn to us for many reasons - not only for reasons of language. This brings diversity and a welcome sense of the wider Christian Church to our worshipping communities. It is also important to be generous and confident about what makes us distinctive as the Church of England. A Chaplaincy is under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, and integrity requires us to be clear about what this involves: that is, the Constitution of the Diocese, together with the requirements of governance, and the doctrinal and liturgical implications, applies in full

We rejoice in different insights, expectations and experiences, yet we remain confident of the distinctive dimension we bring to the one, holy catholic and apostolic church – because it is big enough for all of us

to be at home, with all our distinctiveness and diversity. This is especially so when we are working with such close and creative ecumenical relationships. Exploring difference is a two-way process – and the Anglican way of faith at its most authentic should be a hospitable arena for making these discoveries together.

*** The relevant extract from the ordinal is:**

“They are to proclaim the word of the Lord, to call their hearers to repentance, and in Christ’s name to absolve and to declare the forgiveness of sins. They are to baptize and prepare the baptized for Confirmation. They are to preside at the celebration of the Holy Communion. They are to lead their people in prayer and worship, to intercede for them, to bless them in the name of the Lord, and to teach and encourage by word and example. They are to minister to the sick, and prepare the dying for their death. They must set the Good Shepherd always before themselves as the pattern of his calling, caring for the people committed to their charge, and joining with the people in a common witness to the world.”

**** The relevant extract from a typical licence is:**

“We grant you licence to minister as a priest in the office of Chaplain of X, you having first made the Declaration and Oaths required” This oath and declaration includes the priest’s commitment to the faith of the church and due obedience to the Bishop, whose licence is being granted.