

BEYOND FAITHFUL PRESENCE: EXPLORING THE *MISSIO DEI* AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CHAPLAINCY MINISTRY

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Chaplains frequently offer pastoral and spiritual care to people who are suffering from physical, interpersonal, psychological, moral or spiritual woundedness. In the past, the recipients of this care were generally church-goers unable to attend their usual congregation (perhaps due to work, study or incarceration). Contemporary chaplaincy, however, extends pastoral care to people who would otherwise have no connection with the Church. Thus, chaplains occupy a unique missiological space. Chaplains also often inhabit a marginal position. They are not fully part of the organisation that they serve, nor of their “sending” church.

In describing the theology that frames their ministry, chaplains often speak of incarnation. However, the way that they explain this is most specifically related to physical presence, overlooking other aspects of Christ’s incarnation. This paper explores how embracing *missio Dei* as a theological model for Christian chaplaincy has the potential to provide a sense of purpose, meaning and identity to chaplains’ ministries. A theology of *missio Dei* assumes God’s activity in the world as the chaplain’s reason for engaging in their ministry; affirms faithful presence as a core practice of chaplaincy; and points to the priority of listening and discerning how God is at work in the life of each person cared for. By acting in these ways, the chaplain participates in the *missio Dei* and contributes to the careseeker’s holistic wellbeing.

The paper also suggests how learnings from chaplains’ unique context could inform church and missional practice in Western countries experiencing increasing marginalisation of both Church and clergy.