

## Hospital Chaplaincy: What is it? How can Orthodox Women Take Part?

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Good afternoon. I am honored to be speaking to you today and I hope that what I'm about to say will move all of you to find your own particular ministry or deepen the ministry you already perform within the Orthodox Church. My talk will be fairly straightforward. I'll begin by outlining what Chaplains do in hospitals, then I'll outline the training involved, tell you about some visits I have made as a Chaplain (this section has been deleted from the online version), who my role models are for women Orthodox chaplains, and I will end with how Orthodox Chaplains serve the Orthodox Church.

### WHAT DO CHAPLAINS DO?

The heart of any chaplaincy is the one to one visit, and the conversation often addresses spiritual distress, including its emotional and psychological aspects. The chaplain may be speaking to a patient, doctor, nurse, tech, food service worker, environmental services technician, therapist or security personnel. Chaplains move throughout the entire hospital and everyone in the hospital is a member of their parish (Rev. Johnny C. Bush, CPE Supervisor). These visits may center on theology, family concerns, fears of imminent death, remorse for acts committed decades before the discussion, concerns about hospital protocol, all of which stem from the loss and change that are part of life but are accentuated by hospital stays. Spiritual distress is an opportunity to grow in faith and Chaplains serve in hospitals to help their congregants find their own spiritual core and establish a strong and secure connection to their own spirituality. This is what one to one visits are all about. They may or may not be opportunities for prayer and contemplation. Chaplains often hear confessions and guide patients through confessions. Out of the visit, a chaplain makes a spiritual assessment and plan of care for each patient visited and enters these into the patient's electronic record.

Chaplains also run spirituality groups serving many patient populations such as: substance abuse and recovery; mental health; dementia; cancer patients' support groups; and bereavement groups. Chaplains are mandated members of Palliative Care teams and Hospice Care. Chaplains sit on ethics committees within hospitals, consult regularly with all medical staff about patients under their care, visit pastorally with staff and administration as needed, open and close meetings and community observances, and lead community worship during religious holidays as well as memorial services and weekly worship services.

Chaplains are available and expected to visit patients and staff of all religions, races, nationalities, and sexual orientation. Every person in the hospital is a member of a chaplain's parish and is entitled to all the spiritual care the chaplain can provide.

If this sounds like a big job to you, it is! But it is also exciting and very rewarding. It is not a job for clergy who haven't made a success of their parish ministry: it's not a job to be taken as a substitute for priesthood. Hospital Chaplaincy, along with collegiate chaplaincy or corporate chaplaincy, are vocations in and of themselves. Each one has its own challenges and requirements and you would do well to let it choose you rather than you choosing it.

#### HOW DO YOU BECOME A CHAPLAIN?

Training for Chaplaincy is a long process. These days, training begins at Seminary, with an MA or MDiv degree, and takes anywhere from 3 years on, depending on your family obligations. I encourage all who are interested in Chaplaincy to pursue an MDiv degree. There are often heavy demands to lead worship, and it is helpful to have had the chance to put together your own services before you work under the immediate demands of the hospital setting. Wrestling with the intricacies of Orthodox Great Vespers is invaluable experience for a hospital chaplain. A straightforward generic Christmas Day service fairly rolls off the keyboard in comparison. Orthodox worship, with its structured litanies, is a great teacher in putting together a coherent worship

service with a clear message. Homiletics is also vital, as chaplains are often asked to give weekly sermons.

The other half of chaplaincy training is CPE, or Clinical Pastoral Education. A four unit minimum is required for Board Certification or being hired to a paid position. Each unit is roughly 400 hours of training comprised of visits with patients, formal seminars and training, electronic charting, and attending hospital meetings as needed. At the midpoint and end of each of each unit, CPE students evaluate themselves and their peers, and are evaluated by their Supervisor. After one unit, a Consultation and Assessment may take place where chaplains from outside the hospital will meet with CPE students to review their work. Successful completion of the C and A allows the student to enter Level 2 CPE, a requirement for Board Certification. Board Certification can take place after 4 units of CPE. A Provisional Certification can be granted on completion of 4 units and a review of a student's work by a board of Chaplains. Full certification requires at least 4 units of CPE and a further 2,000 hours paid, voluntary work of internship as a Chaplain. Board Certification is recognized throughout the US and Europe. A final word about training. Keep all your evaluations and certificates. Keep copies of your C and A and Board packets. Document. Document. Document.

In order to go before a certificate board, a CPE student needs to have recommendations and to be endorsed by her home denomination: she may also be commissioned or ordained but neither commission or ordination is a requirement for chaplaincy. At this time, to my knowledge, the GOA and OCA have officially endorsed women MDivs to be Pastoral Care Chaplains.

Being a hospital chaplain is about being present in the moment and trusting that whatever is happening is an opportunity for the patient to find their way to their god. Out of that spiritual journey, patients discover their spiritual core. It is who I am as an Orthodox woman that fuels my

chaplaincy and allows me to guide my patients. I can only speak out of my own experience of Orthodoxy, but that experience has the ability to speak to others of all different faiths.

#### MODELS FOR CHAPLAINCY: ORTHODOX WOMEN WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE

That brings me to the role models for my chaplaincy: Mother Maria of Paris and Mother Gavrilia. They are my role models because their lives share some circumstances of my own: they were both in the middle of their lives when they began trying to do God's work; Mother Maria had been married twice and lost a young daughter; and Mother Gavrilia had been a physical therapist and stayed home to take care of her mother. When both of these women did their work, they had no grants, no insurance, sometimes no passport, and certainly not much recognition to begin. They basically stepped out on their faith and conviction that the work was worthwhile. Orthodox women are still doing that and they must continue.

#### WHAT DO ORTHODOX CHAPLAINS DO FOR THE ORTHODOX CHURCH?

Finally, I want to address the question of what women Orthodox Chaplains do for the Orthodox Church. I believe that Orthodox Chaplaincy is one way for the Orthodox Church to make a difference to the greater communities in which it serves. Although Chaplains aren't Missionaries, and they certainly don't proselytize, they elicit curiosity by virtue of their compassion, understanding and analysis of patient experience. We don't see things the way other Christian denominations do, or Jews, Muslims or Buddhists do. Every denomination is unique. We come from a tradition that is often regarded as quaint, mysterious, picturesque, antiquated or sexist, but it often isn't seen for the strength it gives to those who embrace it. The sheer practicality of Orthodox theology is a surprise to many patients. The fact that Orthodoxy assumes that there is cause for rejoicing in a fallen world, the very physical reality we find in the Incarnation and Resurrection, is a moving surprise to many. It leads to people to ask who we are and where we come from and to find out more. Chaplains are another way into the Orthodox Church. Thank you.

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