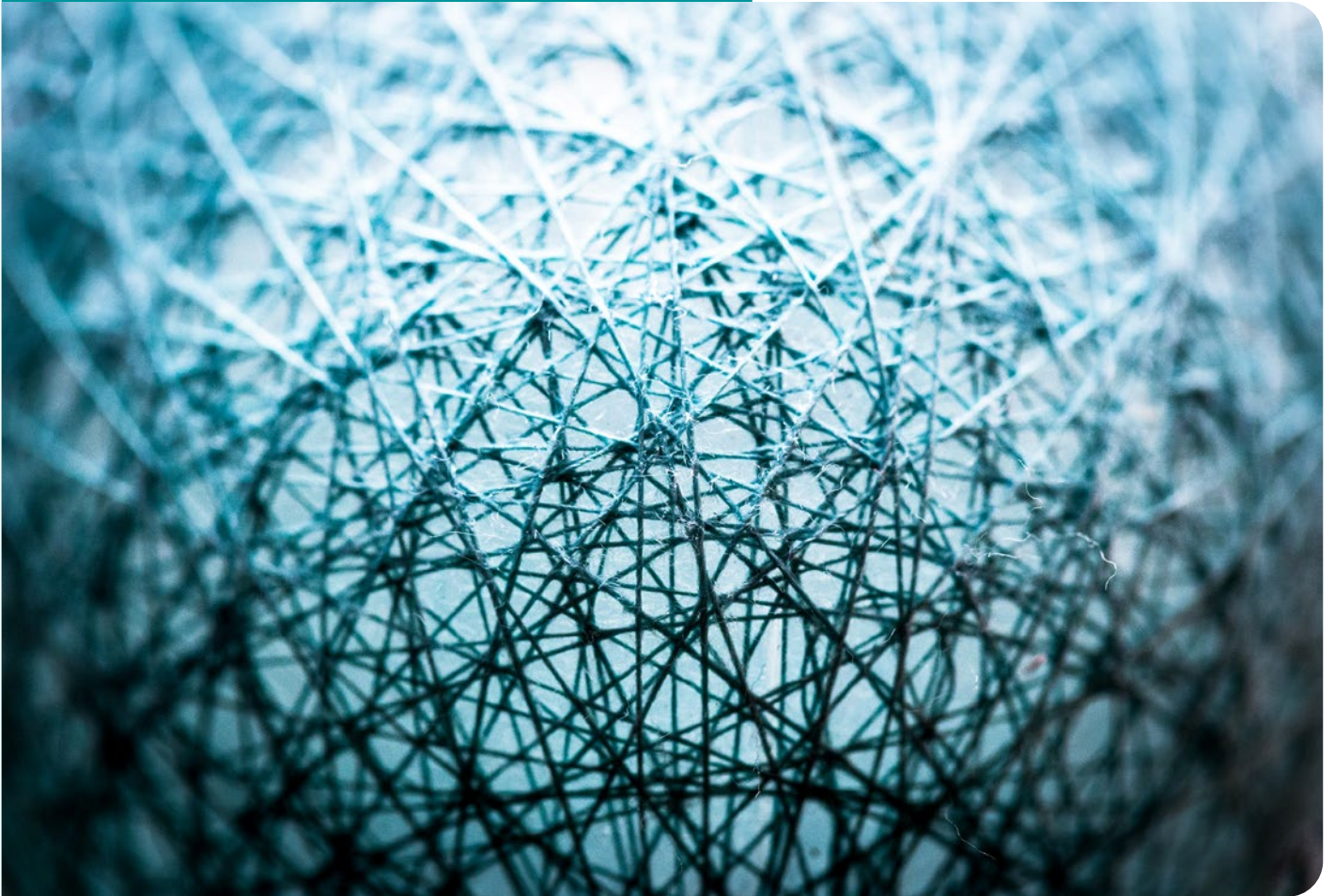




The **Methodist** Church

CHAPLAINCY EVERYWHERE



SESSION ONE

Caught Up in the Mission of God

To be the missional people of God means to be caught up in God's mission of renewal and re-creation. God's mission is the context for everything that follows as we consider the ministry of chaplaincy in the twenty-first century. This first session explores God's mission and our part in it as recipients and collaborators.

Welcome



Welcome! These are exciting times to be thinking about chaplaincy; opportunities abound and innovation and creativity are leading God's people to become involved in all kinds of places. Over the coming weeks let us open our lives to encounter God, learn more, be equipped, have new experiences, be challenged and have fun. Above all else, know that God is with us in this process of discovery and exploration and has only good things in mind for us.

Opening Prayer



Take a few moments to focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You might find it helpful to light a candle or play some music. At an appropriate time, say together the words of the following prayer.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We meet together in your presence, close to your heart and in your thoughts.

We thank you for this opportunity to gather in your name.

To consider your work in the world.

We name you as the God who acts and we celebrate your work in creation.

We pray that as we hear your story again, we would hear it afresh.

Understanding the ways in which you are calling us to be involved in your work.

We submit our mind, heart, strength and soul to you.

Asking that you will continue to shape us into the image of Jesus Christ.

Help us to listen to you and to one another – speaking and listening as you lead us.

May we be open to change and open to challenge: to hear your call and to respond.

Lead us as we work through this course.

That we may emerge from it filled with courage and in your power.

For your sake and for your glory.

Amen.

Icebreaker



Your small group may consist of old friends or complete strangers drawn from a number of churches in the area. Gather in twos or threes, introduce yourselves and share your answers to the following questions. Spend up to five minutes discussing as a group.

- Why did you come on this course?
- What has drawn you to think about the ministry of chaplaincy at this time?
- What hopes and expectations do you have for this course?

Snapshot: Thoughts about Chaplaincy



Over the next seven sessions we are going to explore the ministry of chaplaincy. By the end of the course we will hopefully have a much clearer picture of who chaplains are, what chaplains do and how the ministry of chaplaincy relates to everything else the Church does. Before we unpack chaplaincy further, let's share some of our own thoughts and impressions about chaplaincy. In your groups, spend around five minutes answering the following questions. It may be helpful, as you discuss, to note down some key words in the spaces below.

- When you hear the word 'chaplain' what comes to mind?

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- Who are chaplains?

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- What do chaplains do?

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Let us Begin at the Beginning



“In my beginning is my end.” T. S. Eliot

Beginnings are important; they tell us about intentions and vision, values and priorities. So often, the way in which something begins affects the way it develops over time. These early moments can very often determine the direction and speed of travel. The creation stories found in Genesis 1 and 2 tell us why creation came into being. Genesis 1 explains God’s intention for taking clay and breathing life into it. What we think about creation shapes everything else we believe and do. Listen to the opening words of the creation poem found in Genesis 1.

Bible reading: Genesis 1:1-5



Four words

- **“In the beginning God...”** Why are the first four words of the Bible so key?

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God loves to create spaces – arenas of potential – and fill them with light, form and life of endless variety! God describes this creation as good. Yes, it is messy and wild, it is spilling over; not neat and tidy, not perfect, but good. God’s good is dynamic, open to change, abundant, incomplete. Into this wonderful creation God places human beings. Let us consider our own creation now.



Bible reading: Genesis 1:26-31



A theology of creation



God takes dust, forms it and breathes life into it: this is the beginning of humankind. Once again, the story talks about the deeper truths of why God created us. The truth being spoken about here is that humankind is made in God’s image. We know from what we have just heard that this image is rich and glorious.

The NIV translation of the Bible phrases Genesis 1:26-28 like this:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

Created to reflect God’s nature



Spend a few minutes considering these questions.

- We are created to reflect God’s nature! How does that make you feel?

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- How do you understand the blessing to prosper, reproduce, fill earth and take charge – and what does this mean for you specifically?

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Creativity and Community



God's vision for humankind is that we are to prosper, reproduce, fill the earth and take charge. Here, God bestows upon human beings the ability to keep on creating. Human beings are essentially creations who make creations, who make yet more creations: a process that will go on forever. This sense of ongoing creativity and vitality is at the heart of our identity as human beings. Bringing about the potential within creation is therefore deeply embedded in what it means to be a human being.

In community

However, we do not do this work in isolation. We are created to form deep connections: with one another in communities, with the earth from which we were formed, to the God who breathed life into us and walks with us. Within the mix of all these connections we find our true self and integrated people and communities are formed, leading to health, vibrancy, creativity and beauty. You might call this kind of connected life 'blessed'.

God's mission seen in creation

God's original mission therefore, was to create communities that reflected God's way of being. God's desire is for deep, connected, integrated communities from which creation's potential can be developed and God's glory reflected. The important point to note here is that God invites us to do this as free people. The words 'creativity' and 'community' describe so much of what it means to be made in God's image. Humans are social and creative beings and, as we grow in these areas, we become more fully human, more fully alive, more glorious.

Reflect



Take some time to reflect on what you have heard so far. Feel free to write down your thoughts to the following questions.

- How do the themes of community and creativity inspire and challenge you?

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- How might you respond to God's call to community and creativity in a deep and ongoing way?

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- Thinking about the distance between our beginnings and our current reality can be very emotional, painful even. We might feel a thousand miles from God's blessing. The Psalmist constantly cries out to God, wondering why God allows the wicked to prosper and the righteous to suffer, yet he/she always finds a way to praise God, even in the midst of disappointment. If it is appropriate in this setting, write a word, thought or the beginnings of a prayer or psalm. You may want to share these with each other.



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Fragile Dreams



What an amazing vision set out in Genesis 1. What an incredible gift God gives in creation: of life, community and creative freedom! What an invitation: to live with and work alongside God. Of course, we know that the story continues and, very soon, takes a drastic turn away from this beautiful vision of extravagant creativity and deepening relationships.

Genesis, in recounting the tale of Adam and Eve, conveys the truest story ever told – not necessarily because it happened exactly as described, but because multiple versions of the story happen every day in our own experiences. We often call this story ‘the fall’, however, the word doesn’t really get to the heart of the matter. What we are talking about here is a catastrophe!

Disconnection



The consequences of this catastrophe are all too real. We witness them every day in the world around us. One word that sums up this state is disconnection.

We have been disconnected from God, the source of abundant life. We have been disconnected from one another and have too often hurt each other: pushing otherness away, even destroying it. We have become disconnected from our environment and are currently witnessing the results of years of taking more than the earth can sustainably give. The result is pain and brokenness, death and decay.

- In what ways are humans disconnected – from God, from the world, and from each other?

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The Mission of God is Modified



Thankfully that is not the end of the story! After the catastrophe of the fall, the mission of God remained essentially the same, but with a slight modification. Instead of creation, God is now focused on the act of re-creation. Liberation, renewal and restoration are the themes we see running throughout the Bible. The sense of repairing what has been profoundly broken becomes the grand theme of the Bible. Many people call this story 'salvation history'. In other words, there is a need for a saving act; humanity needs a Saviour.

As God begins this recreative work, he chooses to work through another man and woman. It begins with a command to Abram and Sarai to leave their home and family. God promises to give them a son, even though Sarai was barren.

Bible reading: Genesis 12:1-4



The call to go

God called Abram to leave his family and travel. What God wanted to do through Abram and Sarai could not be done whilst they remained with their family in comfortable and familiar territory. Instead, God required them to leave their comfort zone and trust that he would show them the way to go. Not only that, but as they obeyed, God promised to bless them and make them into a great nation.



He blessed them with new names, Abram became Abraham: the father of nations. Sarai became Sarah: the mother of nations and God blessed her with a son. God's blessing, of his presence and renewing work, was never meant to rest with Abraham and Sarah but was given so that the whole world might be blessed through them. They were blessed instrumentally!

- How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt about leaving behind all that was familiar and stepping out into something new? Share your thoughts.



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God's mission to us



The blessing was meant for everyone, even us today! God's mission to renew, recreate, reshape and reconnect humankind applies directly to our own lives. Too often, mission has been thought of as an activity of the Church: something we do to others. However, mission is not something that we initiate or do, it is something that God is! As we get caught up in the life of God we are transformed. Mission transforms us; God transforms us.

Since we live in a universe where God is at work, our lives are continually caught up in the process of renewal. God's invitation to us is to reorientate our lives towards him and know the depths of his life and love.

Ultimately, the focus of God's mission comes through the incarnation, as God the Father sends the eternal Son in the person of Jesus Christ to save us. Jesus Christ is the cosmic Saviour. It is he who enables us to be reconnected to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is Jesus Christ who enables us to find peace with one another as we find ourselves 'in Christ'. It is Jesus Christ who helps us to live in step with creation – healing and not exploiting. It is Jesus Christ who helps us to be at peace with ourselves. The language of reconnection shows us what renewal and restoration is supposed to look and feel like.

Recreated



Take five minutes and begin to write down some of your responses to the following questions. This is a very personal exercise and you might want to continue responding to these questions later in private.

- How is God's mission changing you?

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- What specific areas of your life does God want to renew/reshape/repair?

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- God continues to call people out of their comfort zones! What comfort zone is God calling you out of?

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In a moment of silence, invite God's life and love to fill you.

God's mission through us



Remember how, in the beginning, God invited Adam and Eve to collaborate in creative work? As our lives are caught up in the process of recreation, so we are also invited to participate in God's mission as co-labourers. The good news is that we don't have to be good enough to join God in this work; you don't need three years' experience in the church or a degree in theology.

God's mission of renewal is not only towards us, but also through us: we are called to collaborate in his work as we assist others in bringing about creation's renewal. We cannot change people, only God can do that. However, we can be instrumental in helping others walk a path of Christian discipleship. We are blessed in order to be a blessing. Blessing flows through our lives towards others. It has always been this way and God's vision is that his blessing touches all life.

Conclusions



Chaplaincy is a powerful expression of God's mission. Chaplaincy themes have been implied in almost every part of this first session. It is now time to list some of these themes, that set the context in which the day-to-day realities of chaplaincy work happen.

- Chaplaincy takes place in a world that God created and still works within.
- Chaplaincy is a creative act that responds to God's call to release creation's potential. Therefore, nurturing people, communities and places is part of the work.
- Chaplaincy is collaborative. We join in with what God is already doing and acknowledge that this is always the way God has wanted to work: with us, not apart from us.
- Chaplains are called, like Abram and Sarai, to leave their comfort zone.
- Chaplains are therefore sent. The Church sends and commissions chaplains to work beyond the gathered community.
- In the same way that God creates spaces as arenas of potential, chaplains also create spaces that might be filled with life-giving conversations and a myriad of activities that promote God's work to heal and renew.
- Chaplains are present to people. The gift of time and space that chaplains give creates the space for people to bring whatever they are carrying. Chaplains create spaces where healing might take place. If God's mission is creation healed through reconnection, then chaplaincy has the same goal.
- Chaplaincy is a formative process. Joining with God in his mission is an act of discipleship.
- Understanding chaplaincy in the wider context of collaborating in God's mission is the right place to begin, as everything else finds its natural place within this larger story.

Prayers and Dismissal



**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.**

Matthew 6:9-13 (New King James Version, NKJV)

**Go into the wide world that God has created.
Hear God's invitation to join in and collaborate in re-creative acts.
Know that God's blessing will flow towards you and through you to others.
For the good of the whole world.
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Four Quartets, T. S. Eliot (Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943)

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