

Pastoral Involvement  
The Invisible Safety Net

There is a belief that the role of the chaplaincy team and volunteer emergency responders is under reported. In this article I want to share with you some of the work of chaplaincy team at Heathrow and to explore the, usually invisible, contribution that we can make to safety and how we may act as a safety net for both passengers and staff. On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010, Ann Rees was murdered by her husband who later committed suicide. Sadly there is nothing unusual about this kind of tragedy. So why am I even mentioning it? Well the reason that I am mentioning it is because Ann was a team leader working for the United Kingdom Border Agency. She was based in terminal 3 at Heathrow. How her bosses dealt with the reporting of her death provides a fine example of the role that Chaplains can play in the life of the airport. Ann's bosses knew that she was a good team leader who not only got the job done but who also took an interest in the lives of the people that worked for her. For some of them she became their friend and confidant. She was their listening ear, their pastoral support. Her bosses knew that some of the staff would be deeply affected by the news of Ann's death and they were faced with finding the best way to break the news to the staff. They could make a simple announcement to the staff and let them get on with it coming to terms with the news in their own way without much support or they could recognise that people would be affected by the news and provide some pastoral support for the staff and give them space to grieve. They chose the second option and ensured that there were Chaplains

present when the staff were told. The Chaplains were then able to provide the listening ear that many of the staff needed as they came to terms with the news of Ann's death, with their own feeling about her and about death in general. It is a sad fact that the death of one person can often bring out unresolved issues concerning other deaths of family or friends. With people generally living longer it was for some of the staff the first time that someone they knew had died.

For three days the Chaplains maintained a watching brief over the UKBA staff not just in Terminal 3 but across the airport as a whole because, as some of you know, the airport is like a family. People move around from place to place with their jobs so an incident in one area can have repercussions in other parts of the airport. Representatives of the Chaplains were also invited to attend Ann's funeral again providing pastoral support to the staff who also attended. Whilst all of this was going on the passport control area of Terminal 3 continued to function with the minimum amount of disruption.

That was one example where the role of the Chaplain's provided a safety net for the staff enabling them to come to terms with bad news and to continue to function without the need for the professional counselling which is so often offered in these circumstances. I'll look at some other examples of our work as we go on but for now I want to think about pastoral care generally and the role of Chaplain's be they lay or ordained, paid or volunteer in a bit more detail.

To begin with I think that it's important to understand what pastoral care means. It's a phrase that is used quite freely especially in schools but it means different things to different people.

I'm sure that you are all familiar with the image of the shepherd with his or her flock. It is one of those timeless images and we see it every year on our Christmas cards. Many of us have sung about shepherds in the carol 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night'. How many of us have heard at a wedding or a funeral the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, 'The Lord's my shepherd I shall not want'. The image of the shepherd is one of the most powerful ones to come from scripture. In the west the idea of pastoral care is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition of the ordained clergy being given the responsibility of caring for their flock which was in reality the whole community. That care was always about more than just the state of their souls but also concerned itself with their welfare as well. This care for the whole person became increasingly important as people moved away from small agricultural communities into the overcrowded industrial cities. However over time society changed and the government began to take responsibility for the provision of education, health and social services. This took away much of the church's pastoral role in the community leaving the church to focus more on the care of souls. With the increase in secularization people moved away from the church which became more and more isolated from the communities in which it found itself. In 1944 the then Bishop of Sheffield decided to reverse this trend and began the first industrial mission sending chaplains out into the steel works and pits where the people worked. From these humble beginnings has come the wide range of chaplaincies today. From it also came a rediscovery of what pastoral care was really about.

There are many different definitions of pastoral care. Alastair V. Campbell in his book 'Paid to care' says this about pastoral care:

'Pastoral care is, in essence, surprisingly simple. It has one fundamental aim: to help people to know love, both as something to be received and as something to give.' Pastoral care is about doing not being and you know it when you see it. This definition is also helpful because it doesn't limit pastoral care to any one particular faith community or to any particular role. A good manager or supervisor will within the context of their job exercise an element of pastoral care for their people. Anyone who is safety conscious will exercise pastoral care by their actions in keeping themselves and others safe. We are in fact talking about the basic human facility to care for another person and to be cared for in return. However time is money and all too often people don't have the time to spend offering a listening ear to staff. I know from personal experience as a manager that we may only become aware of a problem when someone's performance begins to suffer or their behaviour changes. But by then it may be too late and an accident may already have happened. I also know that there are some things that staff would be unhappy or unwilling to say in a formal interview with their line management. However they might be quite happy, indeed may need to say it to a neutral third party. The same is also true for passengers, meters and greeters and the various other people who are found around the airport and who also have their own cares and concerns. They may also feel the need to talk to someone. But because these conversations often are confidential we become the invisible safety net for anyone at the airport to talk to when the need arises.

The example that I started with of Ann Reed is perhaps one of the more dramatic examples of that listening ear being put to good use in a formal setting but there are many other examples.

There was the baggage handler who confided in me that he was worried about going to his best friend's father's funeral the next day. Was he as focussed on his job as he might have been? Having talked over the issues was he less of a safety risk? Who knows?

What about the lady being forcibly returned to her country origin and who was in a very distressed state. A Chaplain was able to talk to her and pray with her and as a result she was very much calmer. I'm sure that the people on that flight had a much safer and more comfortable trip than they might otherwise have had.

Then there was the Japanese lady who became separated from her husband and son and who became very agitated. She didn't speak any English but one of my colleagues was able to reunite her with the rest of the family. Her experience probably didn't have a major impact on safety but it did have a considerable impact on her wellbeing and could have resulted in the flight being delayed. It also took the pressure off of the airline's staff who would otherwise have had to resolve the situation.

The BA cabin crew dispute has produced more than one story of abuse etc where divisions have occurred between staff. Now under normal circumstances those issues should be dealt with through the HR disciplinary procedures but for that to happen there has to be evidence and that can be very hard to obtain when it is one person's word against the rest of the cabin crew. Instead the result can be depression leading to long term sickness or even worse to suicide.

In the current economic crisis people are worried about their own jobs or perhaps a family member is facing redundancy. Who can they turn too to share their fears with? Equally a member of the family or a friend may be ill or even dying; a marriage may be breaking down. The lists of reasons why a person's performance may be affected are legion.

Where does the staff member go to find consolation and support if they are not part of a faith community? The HR department is as stretched as everyone else and may not have the time or resources to listen to the staff member's tale of woe.

We do have the time and so provide a listening ear allowing people to tell their stories. We give permission for people to vent their anger and frustration about people, systems and the world in general and we can sometimes provide practical support for them or give them the courage to address their issues through the proper channels.

We do have a duty of confidentiality to our clients which is based on trust. However if a client reveals something to us that clearly identifies them as a safety risk and which they are unwilling to discuss with the appropriate authorities then we would need to consider that duty of confidentiality and take appropriate action.

People can leave us calmer and, I would suggest, safer and more focussed.

Those conversations and many more like them happen every day around the airport. They happen in canteens, rest rooms, corridors, offices, meeting rooms and even in the chapel or in the multi faith prayer rooms. Indeed they happen anywhere that people gather. They are not formally recorded and we can never measure how much difference they make to safety. But even if just one of those conversations

helps prevent an accident then they are worth it.

Now none of those examples was specifically faith based. But from time to time issues of faith do arise and can have an impact on safety and people's attitudes to work.

For Muslim's the month of Ramadan has just come to an end. This is a time of fasting and prayer. It is also a time when people are noticeably more tired and irritable, when having breaks at the correct times becomes more important. I would suggest that it is also a time when workers need to take particular care as they may be more prone to making mistakes. Safety plans should take into account any religious observances that may impact on people's performance and therefore safety.

In the Sikh tradition it is forbidden to touch a man's turban or to remove it in public. Imagine how people felt when a directive came down that in future turbans would have to be removed and searched as they counted as headwear? Fortunately this order was later rescinded but until it was then there was an angry section of the community and angry people are not always safe people. Do you drive at your best when you've just had a row with your partner?

But pastoral care can be much simpler than the examples I have given.

Imagine that you are an airport cleaner. You work long hours on minimum wage. No one spares you the time of day unless they want to get you to do something. It can feel as though nobody cares about you or that you even matter. You are just a very small cog in a very big machine. Then out of the blue someone smiles at you and says hello. Just for a moment you are recognised for what you are a human being, someone who matters. That is also pastoral care, recognising that people are human beings capable

of showing love and being loved in return.

So far I have tended to focus on the invisible work that chaplains do around the airport and which may in some small way contribute to safety. By its very nature it is, I would suggest, almost impossible to include this kind of work in a safety plan or indeed in any formal policies and procedures. Now I want to look at some of the more visible events where chaplains may provide their own particular brand of pastoral care and which can be included in policies and procedures. It is a sad fact that people do die on aircraft. I am certain that there are well documented procedures for dealing with the situation. However the danger with any procedure is that it can be dehumanising. Not long ago there was a death aboard a Qantas flight. As well as implementing the appropriate procedures the station manager also decided to inform the chaplaincy. We were able to meet the plane and spend time with the relatives of the deceased who were also on the plane and arrange for them to meet the people who were waiting for them in a quite spot out of public view. We were also able to spend a short time with the crew helping them come to terms with what had happened.

There were no major safety issues involved but a traumatic experience had been made a little bit better and people were helped to cope. Indeed the station manager was so impressed by the difference that having chaplains around had made that he is recommending that we are always informed when there is a death.

Finally we have the major incident. At Heathrow the chaplains are far from invisible in the event of a major incident. We are factored into the equation as part of the airport's initial humanitarian response. We come under the Heathrow Travel Care

banner and they provide the overall command and control structure.

We use our particular skills and talents in order to:-

Provide pastoral care of the bereaved family members and friends.

Comfort people in shock.

Deal with people's emotions and anger.

Provide spiritual ministry where one or more persons ask for a chaplain to pray for and with them.

In short we offer kindness, concern, and tenderness with tears that complements the professional competencies of the other agencies, and so offer an additional aspect to the support framework.

This ministry may be exercised in all of the main areas used in emergency i.e. in the survivor's reception centre, in the friends and relative's reception centre, in the reunion centre and in the staff centre. Although our primary responsibility is to the survivor's, their friends and relatives we also feel that we have a responsibility to all of the other people working in the various centres including the 'blue light' services.

We are very fortunate in that, as well as having our own emergency response plan which is audited by Heathrow Travel Care, we are also included in any emergency exercises that are held and our views are sought as part of the washout process. Indeed it is probably in the event of a major incident that the work of the Chaplains and volunteer emergency responders can most easily be factored into the plan.

As I reflect on my time at Heathrow I can think of very few times when my actions have had a directly measurable impact on safety. But what we can never tell is what might have happened if we hadn't had that pastoral encounter with someone, if we hadn't spent that time listening, that

time spent sharing a word of encouragement or consolation.

Chaplains and volunteer emergency responders can draw on a wealth of experience in dealing with people at the most stressful times of their lives. We have seen how unpredictable people can be. Our neutrality means that we can be a safety net for people who have no-one else to turn to. We are not there to judge or to make converts, but to help in any way that we can to make the airport a happier, healthier and ultimately safer place.

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