

## "What is a chaplain? What do chaplains do?"

A chaplain is essentially a spiritual representative attached to a secular institution. Chaplains may or may not be certified, have a theological education, or be ordained or commissioned by a particular denomination, though many are.

While chaplaincy has traditionally been associated with representatives of the Christian faith, the term is now used for representatives of any faith. Some chaplains are expected to represent multiple faiths, acting as a sort of neutral spiritual resource.

Chaplains are expected to serve the spiritual and emotional needs of others. Some chaplains perform wedding or funeral ceremonies, administer communion, deliver spiritual messages, offer prayer at public meetings, and provide regular counseling.

Other chaplains meet the need of the moment, usually through listening and prayer. Chaplains may also function as advocates; hospital chaplains, for example, may make requests of a nurse to help meet a particular patient's needs; military chaplains may provide for marriage enrichment retreats.

Chaplains work in many environments. Most commonly, chaplains are attached to the military, to hospitals, to law enforcement and fire departments, to political bodies (such as the United States Congress and Senate), to sports teams, and to educational institutions. Some corporations, music groups, and even households (historically the nobility, and now certain monarchs), may also employ chaplains.

In my email recently came *another* list of suggestions on how to tell if your church is healthy. The warning signs of a sick church were lack of outreach ministries, increasing dropout rate, church conflict, little corporate prayer, and finally, the pastor has become a chaplain.

It's becoming increasingly common to infer that when a pastor becomes a "chaplain," the church is in trouble. A few years ago, one website encouraging "innovative" ministry listed five types of pastors that a church might call: Catalytic, Cultivator, Conflict-Quelling, Chaplain, and Catatonic. The page clarified that "each of these types carries positives and negatives," but it seemed clear that the further one went down the list, the more problematic was the pastor. At the top of the list were Catalytic pastors, who are

"gifted in the prophetic and tend to be charismatic leaders. These pastors have lots of energy and are focused on the mission of the church ... that is, reaching the community for Jesus Christ. In the 'right' church, they'll grow it without a doubt."

A Chaplain pastor, on the other hand, was mired near the bottom. A Chaplain pastor is "wired for peace, harmony, and pastoral care. This is the type of pastor that has been produced by seminaries for several decades, though a few ... a very few ... seminaries are retooling.

Chaplain pastors eschew change and value status quo. They don't want to stir the waters; rather, they want to bring healing to hurting souls." And if that weren't bad enough, "Chaplain pastors don't grow churches. In fact, a Chaplain pastor will hasten a congregation's demise because they tend to focus on those within the congregation rather than in bringing new converts to Jesus Christ."

The assumptions here are all too common, I'm afraid. So we hear in many quarters that pastors should be leaders, catalysts, and entrepreneurs, and the repeated slam about pastors who are mere chaplains.

This, of course, inadvertently denigrates every clergyperson who is literally a chaplain—in hospitals, in the military, and elsewhere, as if these ministers are second-class clergy. If they were real ministers, they'd be growing a mega church. Instead, they are only good enough to "bring healing to hurting souls."

We find ourselves in an odd period of church history when many people have become so used to large, impersonal institutions that they want that in their church as well.

Thus the attraction of mega churches, where people can blend in and not be seen if they want. Many thought leaders who ponder church life naturally end up championing massive institutions and denigrating (inadvertently, to be sure) the healing of hurting

souls. And this in a community whose theology is supposedly grounded in the universal and cosmic love of God who gives attention to each of us as individuals.

There may be something else going on as well. A chaplain is a minister in the service of another. A chaplain at a hospital or in the military is clearly not the highest ranking member of the institution, clearly not the person in charge of running things. The chaplain's job is defined by service—service to the institution's needs and goals, service to the individuals who come for spiritual help.

The chaplain prays for people in distress, administers sacraments to those in need, leads worship for those desperate for God. In short, the chaplain is at the beck and call of those who are hurting for God. He's not his own man. She is not her own woman.

There's no mistaking a chaplain for an entrepreneurial leader, a catalyst for growth. No, the chaplain is unmistakably a servant.

# What Is the Difference Between a Chaplain & a Pastor?

by Jeffrey Joyner, Demand Media



Chaplains have long been associated with battlefield ministries.

- **Chaplain Vs. Pastor**

Pastors and chaplains are similar in many respects. Both provide counseling and spiritual ministry to those in need. However, differences exist between the two occupations. Pastors typically are associated with a specific church or parish, while chaplains generally are associated with a specific employer or agency. The primary differences between pastors and chaplains lie in where, how and to whom they offer counseling and care.

**Personal Faith**

The title of pastor is bestowed on religious leaders in Protestant churches, for example, but a pastor also may be a rabbi, priest or imam. Pastors focus on ministering to those of their own faith or those who wish to convert. Chaplains may be of any faith and typically do not discuss their personal faiths with those to whom they are ministering unless they are asked.

**Place of Ministry**

Although pastors may visit members of their congregation at home, in the hospital or at a nursing home, most activities are church-based. Chaplains perform their duties beyond church walls. Hospital chaplains comfort patients in their rooms or minister to the families of patients. Military chaplains may hold services in chapels while stateside or in tents when deployed to a combat zone. Prison chaplains counsel inmates and staff, but they also act as a liaison between the prison and external churches.

### **Nature of Ministry**

Comparing a pastor and a chaplain involves comparing a religious leader and a spiritual leader. Religious leaders deal with the doctrines, rituals, beliefs and morality specific to their religion.

- (a) Chaplains respect the right of all people to follow any religion or no religion at all. Rather than focus on religious morality,
- (b) chaplains deal with the question of ethical behavior.
- (c) Chaplains may counsel forgiveness as being in the person's best interests rather than because it is a religious tenet.

### **Constitutional Protection**

Although the U.S. Constitution provides for the freedom of religion, it also orders the separation of church and state. The Supreme Court has ruled that chaplains do not violate that separation if the purpose of the chaplaincy is secular, such as crisis intervention, the chaplaincy remains neutral on the subject of specific religions and the chaplaincy is open to members of all religious beliefs.

### **Other Differences**

Chaplains are more likely to deal with those in immediate crisis or who have experienced a recent trauma.

Many chaplains are trained in crime scene and trauma scene protocols so they can venture into settings that might be off-limits to pastors.

Because pastors are paid by their churches, they must satisfy the demands of their congregations; chaplains are employees of a company or agency and must satisfy the demands of their employers, which may include maintaining a low public profile or maintaining a politically correct appearance.