What Does a Chaplain Do?

Chaplains witness, walk, weep, wait and celebrate....not always in this order.

Much like firefighters, chaplains run *towards* the fire. Or in our case, we run toward reality. There are days this means the reality of suffering. Isolation compounds suffering. Suffering alone, holding onto agony without someone at your side to give **witness** to your pain deepens the agony. Chaplains are there to give witness, to agree with people that, "yes, this is a very difficult place, an awful place."

Chaplains **walk** into this space, stride alongside to help carry the load, if only for a few moments. When medicine can do no more, we journey and sometimes stagger with people into the chaos that disease and death bring. We walk and **weep**. Our tears give evidence that suffering can be shared, that it *needs* to be shared.

Chaplains **wait**. We wait for the moment when we can gently speak the truth that suffering is not abnormal, it is a space we all visit. We wait to tell again that the chaos of suffering does not have the final word, *life* does - a truth beautifully told in the book of Genesis. In the beginning there is chaos, "a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness." God breathed on the chaos and brought forth life, very good life. Chaos was not the end, it was only the beginning. Chaplains bear witness that suffering can be entered into, felt, grieved, shared and mourned, but suffering does not have the power to destroy us. We **celebrate** this truth.

Chaplains celebrate the reality of good news. We celebrate the successful surgery, the negative test result, the birth of a new life. Chaplains give witness to "Yes! This is great!" Good news shared tastes all the better. We cheer because good news deserves a party and people deserve to be celebrated.

Witness – walk – weep – wait – and celebrate. That's what chaplains do.

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