

European Network of Healthcare Chaplaincy, 8th Consultation,
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Growing together in our pain. Differences and tensions in healthcare chaplaincy in Europe. Ecumenical level

Introduction to discussion, presented by Rune Forsbeck, 2 September 2004

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people, Matthew 4,23 (King James Version).

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people, Matthew 9,35 (King James Version).

He went round the whole of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and curing whatever illness or infirmity there was among the people, Matthew 4,23 (The New English Bible).

So Jesus went round all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, announcing the good news of the Kingdom, and curing every kind of ailment and disease, Matthew 9,35 (The New English Bible).

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people, Matthew 4,23 (The New International Version).

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness, Matthew 9,35 (The New International Version).

And Jesus stood still, and called them and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? Matthew 20,32 (King James Version).

And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? Luke 18,40-41a (King James Version).

Jesus stopped and called the men. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked, Matthew 20,32 (The New English Bible).

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came up he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Luke 18,40-41a (The New English Bible).

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Let me, first of all, give you my starting-points:

1. By "ecumenical" and "ecumenical level" I understand the endeavour among and between churches and Christian communions to come closer to one another in order to give a common witness in word and deed. This endeavour is basically rooted in the prayer of Jesus that all of his disciples may be one so that the entire world may believe that his Father has sent him to the world (John 17). To a large extent the endeavour is performed through ecumenical organisations on different levels - local, regional and international.
2. I have no ambition at all to do what is impossible: give a full and comprehensive account in ten minutes of differences and tensions in healthcare chaplaincy in Europe. I can just state or

acknowledge that **there are** differences and tensions. And **together** we can help one another to see what the differences and tensions are and ask the very important question how to tackle them in the best way. My contribution is an introduction to a common reflection, nothing else. We have to engage ourselves in talks, discussions and sharing of experiences - a process that must go on as long as there is any form of healthcare chaplaincy.

3. My perspective is Swedish. It is not, however, **the** Swedish perspective. Also in my country there are different out-looks. Today the Church of Sweden is no longer **the** church in Sweden. The traditional "free churches" play an important role, too, as well as the increasing numbers of Roman Catholics and Orthodox. The Christian Council of Sweden is composed of four "church families" - the Lutheran, the Free Church, the Catholic and the Orthodox family - and they are all, in one way or another, engaged in healthcare chaplaincy.
4. We can learn a lot from others and from one another. However, first of all we have to learn from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Let me then say something in connection with each of these starting-points.

1. The two big ecumenical organisations (located) in Europe are The World Council of Churches and The Conference of European Churches. None of them has - and, as far as I understand, never had - a department, desk or position dealing with healthcare chaplaincy. As I see it, this is a scandal. I think we should ask ourselves: What are we going to do about it?
2. In different traditions in Europe - Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical - we find various views and attitudes with regard to healthcare chaplaincy. What are the main differences? I think we have to help one another to answer that question, but as far as I understand our answers diverge already when it comes to the question **why**, on the whole, we are engaged in healthcare chaplaincy. Do we see

our work and witness in hospitals and other caring contexts as mission or not? Are we there to evangelise? Are we there for the sake of all at the institution or just for our own members? (Before we start answering these questions we should make clear what we mean by mission and evangelising.)

What should our basic ambition be in our ecumenical work? Not to sharpen or overemphasise the differences that are at hand but recollect that we all have one and the same Lord and therefore have one and the same belief and one and the same task to fulfil.

(I see one major danger or threat - or should I say enemy? - to our work and our ecumenical understanding of it. And that is the fundamentalism. I just mention it, if somebody wants to pick the thread up.)

3. In Sweden we have found that the training we give to everyone engaged in healthcare chaplaincy is fundamental to the ecumenical process. Healthcare chaplaincy in our country operates at the front line of the ecumenical development. I think this is thanks to two circumstances: In the health care service you have - and are expected - to present the Gospel as "naked" and pure as you can. And the common training of all has made it clear: at the same time as you are a representative of your own church you act and speak on behalf of the one and only church. You are there as a servant of Jesus Christ.

Right now we face a difficulty: How do we handle the fact that Catholic and Orthodox believers are not allowed to receive the Holy Communion from the hands of others than thereto authorised in their own church?

4. Why is Matthew 4,23 repeated in Matthew 9,35? Because the two verses contain a summary of Jesus' work and teaching and form an "inclusio" round examples of his teaching (Matthew 5-7) and his healing of people (Matthew 8-9). The task of Jesus was double: preach the good news of the kingdom; heal every disease and sickness among the people. He gave the same double mission further to his disciples:

Matthew 10,7-8. We can draw a parallel to the health care chaplaincy - even if we have handed over the curing of the sick to the (secular) society.

How do we make both our colleagues and ourselves chaplains who meet people in their actual situation? A good answer - from many points of view - is that we should look at Jesus and learn from him. He began with the question "What do you want me to do for you?" The answer is good not only for professional and psychological reasons. It is also, to its very nature, an ecumenical answer.

What does it mean that we grow together? In Swedish - and I guess also in English - it can mean two different things: We can grow simultaneously but independent from each other. But we can also grow together in connection and solidarity, in sharing of experiences and insights, in mutual help and encouragement.

How can we grow? We can grow individually, as human beings, - that is physical, mental and spiritual growth - and as chaplains - that is the same thing but also growth as professionals. Further, we can grow as a network, as a spiritual and professional community. And we improve and develop our network not just for our own sake but for the sake of all those whose servants we are called to be.

There have always been differences and tensions among the disciples of Jesus (Acts 15, Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 11). They must not prevent us from seeing that we are one, united in the same mission.