

The Chaplaincy... HOW DO YOU WORK THERE?

Bette Cooper, Executive Director

Editor's Note:

Throughout 2007, the Board of Directors, Management Team, 100+ employees and 300+ volunteers, created and embraced the mission, vision and values for The Chaplaincy. Bette Cooper shared the results in this speech at the December 5, 2007 "Lighting the Path" breakfast.

Good Morning! My name is Bette Cooper and it is my privilege, as Executive Director, to represent the board, volunteers and staff of The Chaplaincy. As I look out, I see many faces that I know and some that I do not know, but all of you have one thing in common...you are an answer to my prayers. Beginning with the first "Lighting the Path" breakfast in 2001, I have had the same prayer and it is this... that each person who is here is chosen to be here...that somehow God will use the time you spend here this morning to add meaning to your life.

As I thought about our time together, and wondered about the message I would bring, a question came to my mind...it is THE question that everyone who has ever worked for The Chaplaincy has been asked...

"HOW DO YOU WORK THERE?"

ISN'T IT JUST SO SAD AND DEPRESSING?"

The question is often followed by the statement...

"I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU PEOPLE DO IT!"

I thought, I would simply attempt to answer that question for you.

Each of us at The Chaplaincy has our own reason for why we are there. Mark, who does maintenance, had a brother who died in our Hospice House in 2000. Each day, Mark cares for the very room in which his brother died; and Mark cares for the patient who is now in that room. Colleen, a social worker, came because she says God tugged at her. She feels her whole life, including the death of her 18 year-old son, and her own life threatening illness have prepared her for being with those she serves. Jackie, our receptionist, knows her work is her calling...so much more than answering the phone and greeting people, her role is often, among other things, to provide the first compassionate voice of hospitality to those who call The Chaplaincy. So each of us comes with our own personal story about why we serve at The Chaplaincy and the common thread is that the work we do carries meaning and purpose for our lives.

But the question, "HOW do we work at The Chaplaincy?" has a larger context and one that we defined for ourselves more than a year ago. We took time to ask ourselves the very question that all of you have been asking us for years. "How do we work at The Chaplaincy?" "What does it require of us to do this precious work.... work that we believe is sacred?" "What does it require of each of us to fulfill **our mission: *Serving others with impeccable spiritual, emotional, and physical care?***"

The ancient Christian Celtic tradition had a phrase that describes the context of our work. They would say that we who work at The Chaplaincy work in "thin places." Thin places, vulnerable, yet powerful places, where there is daily confrontation with pain, suffering and death. Thin places of confronting one's own mortality, thin places of being present to a child's grief and the healing resources of love; and thin places of companionship others through their last days here on earth and then gently handing them over to God. Being present to these thin places is a gift...for those who are cared for and for those who are providing the care. They simply make us more human, more soulful with a deep understanding that life is both wonderful and fragile. The **VALUES** we have defined for ourselves, as a staff, answer the question of how we are able to do this work, how we are able to embrace the privilege of working in "thin places."

The first value that we name for ourselves is ***passion for the work***. Passion for the work is a gut understanding that the work we do is part of something far greater than ourselves. We can't describe in words the passion that is felt in caring for children at Cork's Place who have lost a loved one, or sitting with a patient whose life has been changed forever with a diagnosis of cancer, or accompanying a precious soul in their final days. Passion for the work cannot be expressed in words, it can only be felt in the heart and seen in actions of those who serve.

The second value we name is ***humility***. Humility is essential in our work. It's the quality that allows our hospice team to serve in the most humble of surroundings. I'd like to tell you that every patient we serve lives in a clean well-kept home with a loving family, but they don't. It is the humility in the hearts of the hospice team that takes them where most of us would rather not go. Nevertheless they go with the same compassion that is afforded all families. At times, their work takes them beyond offering pain and symptom management to advocating for a patient's safety... keeping them safe, sheltered from the chaos that surrounds them, doing whatever they can to ease the way. Their reward comes from the patient who says, "In my whole life, I have never been taken care of like this."

Humility allows our Chaplains at the Benton County jail to look beyond the actions that led to the incarceration of those that are there to the soul of the person. To be present to their stories of pain and brokenness and help them find forgiveness for themselves, find meaning in the experience of incarceration, and find hope for a different future. This requires Chaplains who companion others not with judgment but with humility.

Our next value is ***YOU... our community***. We value you who participate in this work with us, whose collective spirit has been the foundation of the work of The Chaplaincy for 36 years. Our work cannot be separated from you. The Chaplaincy is part of each one of you just as you are part of us. We know that you support us, count on us and have immeasurable devotion to the work of The Chaplaincy. The devotion you gift to us is humbling and fuels our passion for the work in the community we create together.

We value a ***supportive work environment***. The work of The Chaplaincy requires that we have compassion for each other as we work, just as we have compassion for those we serve. This work is equally about our personhood and our professional skills. It is the human being that fills the role that we support by the environment we create. I have never received a thank you from a family receiving care that spoke of their gratitude for the great medications the nurse brought or the bountiful art supplies for children at Cork's Place. I do receive notes about the souls of the people who serve them: their kindness, their presence, and their steadfastness. When we support our employees, we support those we serve.

We value ***personal and spiritual growth***. Our staff can only support, care for, and companion people on their journeys to the extent that we ourselves are making that journey. We can only light the path that we ourselves are walking. We have dedicated staff and we seek to support their desire and need to continue their growth as vibrant, caring, and compassionate people. We know the quality of care they provide arises from the deepest part of their being. The Chaplaincy originated from and was nourished by Spirit: by God. It was and is at the core of all our care.

If we take all of these together, we reach for ***impeccable client care***. This means we bring the best of who we are and seek the best for those we serve. It means we bring all of ourselves: all of our skills, all of our compassion, all of our strength, all of our courage, and all of our faith in service of those in our care. We strive for *impeccable* because we know in our work we do not often get second chances. We get just this one chance to serve a young man in jail; one chance to serve this grieving child; or one chance to serve your loved one at the end of their journey. We get one chance.... so we strive, in that one opportunity, to provide impeccable care. When we are asked how we do this work, our reply is usually, "It's a privilege to do this work." It is a privilege to serve you, your co-workers, your friends and your loved ones. How do we do our work? We do our work with passion and humility, with you standing beside us, by caring for each other as we care for others, and by the deepening of our ability to serve through our own personal and spiritual growth. We do this work with the deepest of gratitude as we fulfill Our Mission...

Serving others with impeccable spiritual, emotional, and physical care.

The Chaplaincy

Our Values

