

Chaplaincies offer valuable support to staff and students

IF you're a staff member or a student at our university, there is a team of chaplains who can help you with personal, spiritual or practical issues.

The chaplaincy space is a quiet area of the Nuffield Building, with comfy sofas, soothing music, and twinkling lights. You can play board games, make jigsaws, read books or spend time reflecting.

And if you're trying to cope with academic, relationship, financial or personal issues, one of the chaplains is always available to listen and suggest practical ways forward.

Led by the Church of England chaplain, the Rev Connie Sherman, the team includes Baptist, Roman Catholic and Islamic chaplains.

Connie said: "Students might be struggling with their relationships, or what their parents think, or how their housemates behave. We can help, or signpost them to others who can help."

"When people are away from home for the first time, or in a new country, there's always lots to deal with. People have lots of questions about faith as well, especially connected to lifestyle, and being in a different culture to the norm."

"I've been doing this



Chaplain the Rev Ashley Lovett with fashion and textiles student Sophie Davage in the University of Portsmouth chaplaincy, based in the Nuffield Building

for three years and I love it. The best bit is seeing students graduate, after you've walked alongside them for a while, and feeling proud of them.

"We hope to contribute to the whole university community's learning experience by creating a safe, non-judgemental space to explore their faith, concerns, questions of life, or next steps."

Much of the chaplaincy work involves confidential one-to-one sessions, which took place largely over Zoom during the pandemic. This term, the chaplaincy has returned to some in-person sessions. It has also organised some physical events, such as painting mugs during Freshers' Week, and a Christmas carol service.

One student said: "Chaplaincy is a great place, where staff are willing to give time, energy, love and support for whatever your needs are."

The chaplaincy also liaises with local churches and university societies that cater for those of different faith backgrounds. See www.port.ac.uk/chaplaincy.

There is also a chaplaincy based at the City of Portsmouth College - formerly Highbury College and Portsmouth College.

There's a long-established counselling service based at the Tangier Road campus, which has been needed by students throughout the pandemic. A second location for this service in the Highbury campus

is now being established, meaning that the chaplaincy can support the mental health of more students and can train more youth counsellors.

The Rev Sam Duddles, FE chaplain for Portsmouth deanery, is now visiting the Highbury campus once a week, making herself available in the college and canteen for staff and students to talk to.

She said: "Members of staff often stop and eat their lunch with me. Slowly the new intake of students are noticing that I'm around to chat to. We look forward to seeing how God uses us through the next weeks and months as we continue to pioneer this vital work supporting the FE college in the city."

videos," he said. "What I love is the relatability. There are people like me at the front and in the band, and I can bring friends here and not feel embarrassed. Whenever I've brought friends, they've always come back again. It's also great that you're given a role quickly, because it gives you that sense of purpose."

Harbour is not the only church offering specific evening services for students and young people.

St Jude's Church, Southsea, launched its service - the Seven - at the start of this term. Teenagers, students and young professionals are attracted to the mix of pre-service pizza, lively worship, young leaders and relevant teaching.

The church also offers a discipleship course, mentoring and a chance for church families to 'adopt' a student. Its commitment has been shown by the employment of Davita Vrolijk as a specialist student and young adult worker. The church is also currently hosting meetings of the university Christian Union on a Monday nights.

Isaac Macheri, 25, is a second-year computer animation and visual effects student, who came to Portsmouth from Uganda. He said: "I still worship with my church from home on the mornings, via the livestream. I come here in the evenings because it's good to meet people after the lockdowns. It feels supportive."

And Naneh Ghazarians, 19, a second-year architecture student, who is also worship co-ordinator for the university Christian Union, felt called to St Jude's. "I went around lots of churches, but this instantly felt right," she said.

"The evening service feels more intimate and personal. I also go to the Living Free course midweek, and the once-a-month social gathering."



Top: students chat at 'the Seven' - the evening service at St Jude's, Southsea; below: students from 'Identity', based at St Luke's, Southsea

Meanwhile, **St Luke's Church, Southsea,** which is surrounded by newly-built student accommodation, has traditionally welcomed freshers as they move in, often with barbecues that introduce them to church and community members.

Fusion, the Christian student movement, is now based at the Host Company, the co-working space inside St Luke's. The church has a good relationship with Unite Students, the local accommodation providers, and can offer students support in mental health and wellbeing.

It has also offered project

placements at St Luke's for those studying interior design, architecture, graphic design and business.

'Identity' is the name given to the group of students who meet at 7pm each Sunday for Bible study, worship, practical action such as litter-picking, or social evenings.

A team of students help vulnerable young adults via the church's Bridgeway project. This offers one-to-one support for young people aged between 14-22 years who are dealing with issues of mental and emotional wellbeing. Students can volunteer to act as mentors for those young people. For details, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/students.