

Spiritual support for Pompey team

SHE loves Jesus, she loves people and she loves football – so it's the ideal job for Debs Smart.

Debs is the chaplain for Portsmouth FC Women, attending training sessions and match days to support players, staff and even the team's supporters. She's followed their progress in the Women's Championship in the past season, after they won the Southern Premier Division the previous year.

She's been volunteering in this role for the past four years, during which time the women's team has turned professional. Her role comes under the umbrella of Sports Chaplaincy UK.

"We moved to Southsea seven years ago, and I was involved with a group praying for Pompey each week," she said. "We started to talk about Pompey's women's team having a chaplain and I was interviewed for the job. I had my training online during the pandemic and was introduced to the club in March 2021.

"The club were very positive about me being there, but of course it takes years to build up relationships. It's a minimum of half a day a week.

"I'm there for training, making myself useful by putting out

Debs Smart at Westleigh Park before a Pompey Women's match
(Photo: Jason Brown)

cones or collecting balls. I'll be loitering with intent, talking to injured players or chatting in the changing room.

"On a matchday I'm there when they do their warm-up, and walk around the pitch talking to fans and first-aiders. I may sit with injured players to watch the match. I don't just talk about football, as part of my role is to see the players and staff as humans with specific needs.

"As a player, your skill on the pitch may be judged all the time, so I don't want to be judgemental at all. If someone is injured or hasn't made it into the squad, they may be lacking confidence, or may not feel valued.

"Some of the players may have issues relating to what they eat or worries about how they keep mentally healthy during rehab following injury. Or it might be about their living arrangements because they are away from home for the first time, and need advice about normal household things. Or it might be about bereavement. I



can offer to pray for them, and to show that someone cares.

"One player fell during training and I could hear her screaming as her knee popped. The physio examined her and said it was probably an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, which would have ended her season.

"I asked if I could pray for healing right there, and I carried on praying at home. On the Monday, the physio said her MRI scan was clear, and the knee was fine. I'd never had that kind of prayer answered, and members of staff were saying they thought it was a miracle.

"I do love it, as I'm spending time with people who don't yet know Jesus, and those are the people I feel called to. I hope I can show them that Christians are normal people.

"And it's using all the skills I've built up from the past, including listening, mentoring, youthwork

and spiritual direction. The ethos of the club is really positive anyway – there is generally no falling out within the team or with the manager and staff – so it's great to be involved."

Portsmouth Women, who used to be known as Portsmouth Ladies, usually play their home matches at Westleigh Park, the home of Havant and Waterlooville FC. But they have played a few matches at Fratton Park too.

Clergy in our diocese have served as voluntary chaplains for the men's team in the past – the Rev Andy Rimmer and the Rev Jonathan Jeffery have both held that role, but there is no Anglican chaplain for the men's team at present.

And the Rev Andy Wilson, vicar of Portsdown and Purbrook, has been chaplain of Havant and Waterlooville FC for the past 11 years and is just handing over that role to the Rev Polly Honeychurch.

chaplain at the **University of Portsmouth**. Its chaplaincy centre and prayer rooms are based on St Paul's Road and are open to all staff and students.

Chaplains can offer support on pastoral issues, queries about faith and even financial or academic concerns. They also offer social events throughout the year to help those of different faiths and cultures to understand each other.

For more details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/chaplains

rest is raised through fundraising by committed supporters, staff and volunteers. Mountbatten ensures that all funds raised on the island remain with its hospice. Details are on www.mountbatten.org.uk

There is also a chaplaincy team based at **St Mary's Hospital** in Newport on the Isle of Wight. They offer prayer, spiritual guidance and advice on end-of-life issues. The hospital chapel runs services on the first and last Thursdays of each month, as well as on Christmas Day and Good Friday.

The team is led by the Rev Dozie Moneme, who is also vicar of St Paul's, Barton, and includes a Roman Catholic priest and two Free Church ministers. They visit patients on the wards and also operate in the community and with the ambulance service.

The chaplaincy team at **the Queen Alexandra Hospital** in Portsmouth is led by the Rev Connie Sherman. The team of four are supported by eight volunteers serving 1,200 beds and nearly 9,000 staff.

They offer pastoral, spiritual and religious support to patients, relatives and staff, having contact with 1,000 patients and relatives each month through bedside visits, end-of-life rituals, funerals and memorial services. Staff are supported by pastoral sessions, sports groups and workshops.

They are on site weekdays between 8.30am and 5pm, and are on call outside these hours. Contact them via 023-92286 408.

Connie used to be the Anglican



The Rev Judith Swaine at HMP Isle of Wight

Prison chaplaincy can be a godsend

CHAPLAINS can be a godsend for those who end up in prison – helping them both spiritually and emotionally.

The chaplaincy team at HM Prison Isle of Wight offer regular Sunday services, pastoral care, Bible studies and help with bereavement issues, as well as helping to find prison visitors and pen pals.

Every Sunday there is a Eucharistic service in both chapels, on the Parkhurst site and on the Albany site, led by one of the two Anglican chaplains on site. Around 30 inmates attend each.

The prison chapels hold special services on Good Friday, Easter Sunday and around Christmas, and Bishop Jonathan is a regular visitor, especially around the major Christian festivals.

Along with colleagues from other denominations and other faiths, the chaplains can also provide support for prisoners with sick relatives, or on the day of a funeral of a loved one. And when prisoners die in prison, they can lead the funeral at the crematorium.

HMP Isle of Wight is one of the largest prisons in the country, with around 1,000 inmates overall. The Rev Judith Swaine has been a prison

chaplain there for 11 years, having enjoyed a placement at Kingston Prison in Portsmouth when she was a curate at All Saints Church, Portsmouth.

"Chapel isn't compulsory," she said. "Those who come are those who want to come. Some of those in prison already had faith before arriving, some develop faith while they are here. People sometimes think that people in prison need faith more than those on the outside, but actually we all do.

"I enjoy it because every day is different. I've also always supported the 'underdog' in all sorts of situations, and I can see that prisoners aren't all bad – there is some good in them. They often have compassion and understanding, and look out for each other.

"Prisons do need more money spent on them, but it's rarely popular to say so. In fact, helping to rehabilitate prisoners is one of the most important ways to ensure there are fewer victims of crime in future."

The chaplaincy team currently consists of one full-time imam, the two Anglican chaplains, and volunteers from other denominations and faiths. HMP Isle of Wight is still looking for a managing chaplain to take overall charge of the team.