

I joined the University Chaplaincy Program staff, after leaving CARP UK Team

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Some of the chaplains at the March event

I joined the University Chaplaincy Program staff team, last Summer, after leaving the Collegiate Association for the Research of the Principle UK Team (CARP UK Team). That Summer, I was considering what the next year of CARP could look like, following a particularly unsuccessful year of activities. After 2 years of involvement in CARP, it became clear to me that there was not a convincing enough interest amongst a large enough group of young people, in more traditional witnessing. (We employed different methods in our CARP team, newer methods actually, but still essentially introduced the Divine Principle to strangers on the street – albeit within university campuses).

During that time, there was endless discussion on the future of both the High-School Association for the research for the Principle (HARP) and CARP in the UK amongst a small

group of us interested in heading up activities for the next academic year. I have leaned towards supporting the university student age group for a few years now, and just found that CARP wasn't working. I love the idea of introducing new people to the Divine Principle and a Blessed Family lifestyle, but I didn't feel there were many others interested in this to make active witnessing within my age-group feasible. To leave in a meaningful way, I decided to co-organise a workshop for youth within the university student-age group themed "Companions of Faith" for September 2018.

Meanwhile, there had been a survey for Young Adult within our faith community circulated, asking what would be good to do for this age group. One idea given that stuck with me as something doable, was a mentoring program akin to what is now the University Chaplaincy Program. This was suggested around December 2017, and as I was focussing on university and CARP, I didn't think too much of it, just that it would be good if someone could do it.

Later on in the year of 2018, William Haines (Education Department) and Simon Cooper (Youth Liaison) explained to me the chaplaincy program that used to run in the UK to support students, and the pieces started fitting together for me to get involved.

If I speak truthfully, I do not consider myself someone who has much interest in fields that have any emphasis on taking care of people. However, at the time, I recognised I was someone who was in a good position to run such a program, since I was ending one of my main volunteering commitments, coming into a second year of university having already organised several activities for the target age group and possessing a reasonably broad knowledge of youth in the community. I felt somewhat daunted to work with so many 30 year olds, but knew that ultimately, the program would help my friends.

At the crux of it, this program for me is a guaranteed way to support the student age group in their lives of faith as well as potentially emotionally, mentally and intellectually. All in all, increasing a sense of shared responsibility within our community to care for each other, and see others as younger and older siblings.

In short, the program asks a committed "chaplain" (a blessed second generation member who has significantly moved on from university life), to meet with an agreed group of students in their local vicinity, once a semester. These activities can extend to more frequent meetings, one-on-one meetings, calls and general support; if wanted even beyond the time period set by the program. All of these meetups are then reimbursed through our budget for the year.

Many of the chaplains and in fact students this year have expressed how they have wanted to do this anyway, but that this program has given them the needed boost and facilitated that desire to meet, as well as provided the sense that this is a community effort in the knowledge they are not the only one looking out for a younger person.

As this program only started in September 2018, this year has also been a big learning process in finding the best way to organise things, as well as unfortunately acknowledging a gap in care that has been in our community for a while. Some chaplains have known their students for a long time, making it more of a natural process to get involved. For others, knowing someone already is actually a barrier to being able to go deeper. There are also some chaplains who did not previously know their students existed. Nevertheless, I am impressed and grateful for the efforts made by this year's thirteen chaplains, who trusted the vision behind this initiative and made the (maybe awkward) first contact to their students and continued to support them.

We currently run on an opt out basis, and are trying to hit all areas of the UK, in order to provide all students with an opportunity to access this service. We have faced some challenges in smaller communities in finding available elders to contribute, but I hope that as we develop we can find solutions to this.

We held one event in March to thank our amazing chaplains and discuss progress so far. For me as a 22 year old, I still feel taken aback seeing more than four second generation members over the age of 27 in one place, so the fact this program is even running with all of these people involved inspires me in itself. It definitely helps that this program is running alongside the restart of regular Sunday Services for the broader young adult age group, weekend workshops like "Going Deeper" and "Mind the Gap" in Livingstone House and now even a retreat in the Isle of Wight. It helps to reinforce the culture of care and consistency within our community.

In the coming academic year, we hope to organise a few more events to welcome new students, celebrate graduates and support the chaplains. We are grateful for the funding provided by HQ and feedback from those involved.

Every year we look for new chaplains, so if you have read this and feel interested, please contact us at universitychp@gmail.com, for further details and options. If you know of any students coming to the UK from abroad or in your community, please feel free to let me know as it means I can include more people.

To contact Carmel, please email: universitychp@gmail.com