

The Road to Chaplaincy at the Unification Theological Seminary

Kate Pugnoli
September 18, 2018



This article is the first in a short series that will explore the field of chaplaincy, introducing UTS alumni who are now working as chaplains.

During the first two decades after the [Unification Theological Seminary](#) (UTS) was founded (1975) it was attended primarily by students with a background in the Unification Movement, usually at the direct request of the founder, [Rev. Sun Myung Moon](#). Those early students responded faithfully to God's call, and while many UTS graduates filled pastoral positions post-graduation, other alumni used their education at UTS as a springboard to pursue diverse careers including nursing, teaching, the law, historic preservation, journalism, and working with non-profit organizations to name just a few. As UTS has evolved, students from other Christian faiths and religious backgrounds have enrolled with

the specific intent to minister to their particular church or faith community.

But what additional career pursuits are open to someone who attends UTS? Regardless of how idealistic or spiritual one might be, unless one is independently wealthy, an [MA in Religious Studies](#), a [Master of Religious Education](#) or a [Master of Divinity](#) degree needs to eventually translate into a living wage. "The Ministry in Many Forms" series reinforces the value of a seminary education where the curriculum gives students an opportunity to develop skills which can be applied in multiple fields. One career path for which education at UTS provides a strong foundation is chaplaincy. Several UTS graduates have found their studies at UTS have led them to careers in chaplaincy in a variety of work places. [A recent UTS article](#) featured class of '04, Chris J. Antal, who served as a chaplain in the military for a number of years and continues to work as a chaplain in the [Veterans Administration](#).

If one chooses to pursue a career in chaplaincy the [median salary is reported to be approx. \\$50,000 per year](#). The work of a chaplain is varied; chaplains may provide religious services as well as spiritual and moral guidance and much of their work may involve counseling people in crisis and supporting family members who are grieving. It is often necessary that a chaplain have the capacity to transcend the realm of their own faith in order to provide care for people who may hold a wide variety of other beliefs. This is a field where religious pluralism and diversity abounds.

A chaplain may find employment in a wide variety of places including military installations, hospitals, prisons, hospices, businesses, even [on a cruise ship](#) -although there is a lot of competition for those positions and they tend to be working vacations.

Traditionally when one thinks of chaplains it is in the context of the Christian faith, but today it is not unusual for a chaplain to be associated with other religious and spiritual traditions. Many who become chaplains have already spent years pastoring faith communities and are ordained ministers, but one doesn't have to be ordained to work as a chaplain.

Depending on where you seek employment a chaplain may be required to obtain a graduate degree in religion or theology as well as an endorsement from their faith group. Endorsements are granted after satisfying specific education and training objectives outlined by an authority in one's church or faith community. Training programs for chaplains can be found at seminaries, colleges and universities; many of these programs are master's degree programs which specifically train a person to work in businesses,

crisis centers, hospices and schools. Courses may include counseling theory, theology, and the officiating of religious ceremonies. Working in a hospital will certainly require certification including a required number of units in [Clinical Pastoral Education](#) (CPE). One organization in the New York area where CPE units are offered can be found is the [Health Care Chaplaincy Network](#).



Advanced Practice Chaplain Karen Pugliese explains in this brief video how a chaplain is a healer who cares for the human spirit for those in spiritual pain regardless of one's religion or beliefs.

Requirements to become a chaplain may vary. For those who chose to serve in a branch of the armed forces a military chaplain requires a master's degree with a minimum of 72 hours in theology and ministry. According to the [National Association of Catholic Chaplains](#) an entry-level chaplain may only require a bachelor's degree. There are many professional chaplaincy organizations that offer certification for chaplains, the largest of which is the [Association of Professional Chaplains](#)(APC) -originally called the Association of Protestant Hospital Chaplains. The APC's Board Certified Chaplain program provides the opportunity to become a certified or provisionally certified chaplain or an associate certified chaplain. Graduate-level coursework in theology and pastoral care is needed for these certifications. Some employers won't require certification, but being certified demonstrates that you have education, training and experience in chaplaincy. Other chaplaincy organizations include the [Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains](#), and the [Canadian Association for Spiritual Care](#).

It is not only religious workers who may pursue training as a chaplain; some organizations will certify chaplains without a graduate degree in theology or religious studies. Social workers, nurses and other health care professionals may pursue certification with associations like the [Spiritual Care Association](#) which has a rigorous training program for chaplaincy.

This article just skims the surface of what chaplaincy is about; pursuing a career path as a chaplain can be very rewarding, but it can also be extremely challenging. Our next articles will feature several UTS alumni who have been or are currently chaplains with a view to give the reader a sense of what the life of a chaplain might look like.