



## An Unprecedented Experience

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*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*

~ Romans 8:35 NIV ~

In 2020, the whole world was on “fire”. A Chinese proverb says, “Real gold is not afraid of red fire.” No one would have anticipated that our lives would be turned upside down by an “invisible” virus. A principle from Evolution Theory, “survival of the fittest”, was vividly demonstrated in many aspects of our lives. In Hong Kong, the impact of the pandemic added extra fuel on top of continuing social turbulence. As a result, our hospital chaplaincy and pastoral education ministries experienced the toughest challenge in over 35 years.

### To Communicate and to Comply

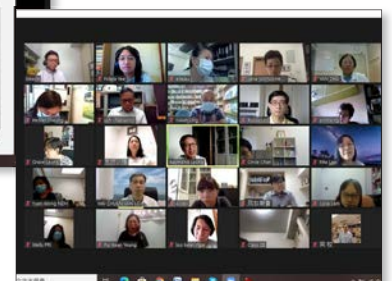
In January 2020, the Hong Kong Government raised the response level to “Emergency”. Regular visitations including chaplaincy visits and pastoral educational programs (internship) in all public hospitals were suspended. The Association, representing the community of Christian Chaplaincy promptly initiated genuine communications with the Hospital Authority (HA) to advocate the emergent and essential spiritual care needs for patients, family and staff. We were thankful that an internal guideline was made and executed flexibly according to individual hospital context. However, in general, the approval for chaplaincy clinical visits was still very strict. Many chaplaincy teams started to develop different forms of tele-chaplaincy. This experience urged us to reflect on how medical management as well as chaplains would see the value, nature and practice of spiritual care. To seek a balance between “to conform and to transform” became a year-long agenda among our teams. For this purpose, we hosted extra chaplain-in-charge sharing rounds and completed a survey to study the impact of suspension on our ministry outcomes. Although some of our teammates had gone through epidemic experiences such as SARS, Ebola, H5N1, H7N9, etc. in the past, the extent and complexity of the challenges were not the same with COVID-19.



IC meeting in January



Virtual IC sharing meeting in August



### To Limit Gathering but not Learning

While a few seminars and events were cancelled and postponed, similar to school sectors, many chaplain continuing education (CCE) programs were held online. For the activities that needed to be done in person, we ensured participants complied with appropriate precautionary measures. Gratefully, it turned out that the attendance of online events such as live webinars was affirmative. We were first encouraged to learn to adopt using online platform, then to further equip ourselves for this new normal in the foreseeable future.

Month	CCE Programs / Seminars	Counts
March	Chaplain Webinar: Redemption by Love – reflection on redemption theology and its implication to pastoral care at the times of death and dying	89
May	Chaplain Webinar: Survival in Adversity – understanding logo-therapy and spiritual care	113
May	Tutorial Classes for Chaplains on “Chaplaincy in the Time of COVID-19” (3 classes)	130
June	16th Chaplains’ Day: Give Me Oil in My Lamp	130
Sept	Chaplain Webinar: Hard to Say No and Yes – identifying emotional blackmail in physician-client and pastoral relationship	118
Nov	Chaplain Webinar: Boiling Frog – identifying chaplain’s own spiritual crisis	114
Nov	Case Study for Shatin Chaplaincy Team	15



Chaplain webinars



16th Chaplains' Day in June



Tutorial classes for Chaplains in May



Case study for Shatin Chaplaincy Team in Nov

Although hospital visitations were restricted, four chaplains indicated their interest in preparing themselves for chaplain certification. Two tutorial groups formed and lasted for about half a year. Finally, four applications were submitted and three of them were granted. Since 2012, a total of 29 local chaplains completed the certification process. The passing rate is about 90%.



Certification Interviews in Sept - Oct

## What COVID-19 Tells Us about Professional Chaplaincy

Last year, our chaplaincy teams were scheduled to further elaborate, discuss and implement a set of 26 outcomes of Professional Development Directives (2.0) initially formulated in 2018. With the impact of COVID-19, the focus was immediately shifted to “survival”. In the Hospital Authority of Hong Kong, chaplaincy ministry is still considered a voluntary service provided by non-government organizations (NGOs). During Emergency Level, all voluntary services in clinical areas are suspended. Chaplaincy is no exception. Some chaplains and committees were upset and disappointed. They queried what has been meant by professional development in the last ten years? How are “professional” chaplains perceived in the eyes of hospital administration? If chaplains are essential members of medical teams, how can they continue their clinical practice at the time of pandemic and hospital crises? On the other hand, chaplains and their committees are also challenged to reflect on “are we all-ready” to practice in clinical wards or even to join “dirty teams”?



Visit with Chaplaincy Team



Visit with Chaplaincy Team

There is no easy answer to any of these questions. This kind of discussion and reflection should happen in many chaplaincy ministry contexts. Another Chinese idiom says, “To sing one’s own praises” reminds us that we need to be competent enough in order to advocate for chaplaincy. How can chaplains show that the essential spiritual care needs of patients, families, and staff can only be appropriately responded by professional spiritual caregivers? There is a lot of research to be done, a lot of pastoral stories to be shared, a lot of knowledge to be learned, and a lot of effort to be put in.

In such a challenging year, it was gracious that prayer and financial supports from churches and individuals did not diminish very much. So far, we did not see a need to cut any position or lay off any staff. Among 126 eligible applicants, 96 staff chaplains have registered with the Association. There are 35 Certified Chaplains, 36 Registered Chaplain I, 22 Registered Chaplain II, and 3 Auxiliary Chaplains. The participation rate is 76%.

## To Treasure Every Opportunity for Pastoral Education

People learn to treasure life when they become aware that it should never be taken for granted. During the pandemic, many scheduled educational events such as classes, seminars, workshops, conferences, symposiums, and even regular CPE programs needed to be cancelled, postponed, or held online. Interpersonal interaction may have decreased but the need for learning pastoral care was never less than before. The Association took every opportunity seriously to respond to such needs among seminarians, pastors, congregations, and the general public.



Chaplaincy Volunteer Training



Class for CGST's Seminarians



Workshop for Medical Staff

Month	Events / Programs	Counts
Jan	Class for CGST's Seminarian: becoming an emotionally healthy pastoral caregiver	25
Jan	Chaplaincy Volunteer Training: understanding spiritual assessment	27
Jan	Workshop for Funeral Professionals: introduction to pastoral care and self-care in serving families who have lost their love one	10
April	Workshop for Medical Staff: a board overview of spiritual care and it's practice in healthcare	35
June	Seminars for Pastors: Pastoral Care at the time of Sickness	22
June	Seminars for Pastors: ministry of empathic listening	30
Sept-Nov	Online Course for Pastors: pastoral care to people at the times of sickness (8 lessons)	117
Nov	Live Webinar for Medical Staff: Psychological and spiritual needs of a dying client and his/her significant others; and the supports and care to these needs	50
Dec	Online Pastoral Education Program for Seminarians of ABS (3 lessons)	40



Seminar for Pastors in June



Online course for Pastors in Sept-Nov



Online program for Seminarians of ABS in DEC

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 battle is lasting longer than anyone wants. The world has lost a lot, but hopefully it has learnt more. Professional chaplains and CPE interns are still waiting patiently for the hospital doors to reopen. While everyone is lifting their eyes to the COVID-19 vaccines, as Christian chaplains we may further anchor our theological reflection on "I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." God is the One who holds the future. That is called faith, hope and love.

*"The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." ~ Psalm 121:8 NIV ~*

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### Corporate Honorary Overseas Consultants:

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Association of Professional Chaplains, Inc. (APC) & its subsidiary Board of Chaplaincy Certification, Inc. (BCCI)

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