

## **King's College London Chaplaincy – statement on confidentiality**

Members of the King's College London Chaplaincy team come from a variety of traditions within the Christian Church, and a variety of backgrounds, but agree that the issue of confidentiality is defined more by the context of the situation than by the personal background of the Chaplain involved. The nature of Chaplaincy work results in a variety of contexts, and it is worth noting that this variety can occur within a single meeting or encounter.

We have therefore defined four contexts where understanding of the degree of confidentiality may vary:

1. *Sacramental Confession*: a one-on-one encounter with a Chaplain for the purpose of making Confession and seeking Absolution, often in a particular time and place (but not always). In this situation there is an absolute guarantee that what is divulged under the seal of the confession will not be breached in any circumstances, to the extent that the Chaplain will not mention it to the person concerned in future conversations. (It is worth noting that Absolution can be withheld if, for example, it becomes obvious that someone is not addressing and correcting what is being Confessed.)
2. *Pastoral care 'contracts'*: an agreement to meet with a Chaplain on one or more occasions for conversation, support and/or advice. These conversations normally remain private and confidential, unless in extreme circumstances the person concerned seems to be a serious danger to themselves or to others, in which case external advice is sought, preferably – although not necessarily – with the consent of the person. (As with the withholding of Absolution, support can be withdrawn if the person meeting with the Chaplain refuses to follow recommendations of other or further help, and the feeling is that the Chaplain is being used or threatened with consequences if meetings do not continue.)
3. *Spiritual direction*: this incorporates elements of the first two contexts; there is no absolute guarantee of confidentiality, as with Confession, but the presumption is that the Chaplain will keep the discussion confidential. Clarification of the context as understood by both parties during the conversation is encouraged in this situation.
4. *Informal general conversations*: these quite often take place away from the Chaplain's office (particularly in corridors, in passing). Information revealed in such conversations is generally treated with respect for privacy, but with the recognition that the conversation may be taking place in a public space. A chance meeting can potentially lead to one or more of the contexts listed above; in all cases care is taken to clarify understanding according to context.

When it is necessary to consider breaking confidentiality, it is worth noting that Chaplains have no need, legal or otherwise, to refer people further. If such referral is made, it is done from pastoral concern for the person involved.

In addition, a Chaplain's professional relationship with a particular person can change over time; as the nature of ministry differs from the work of GPs or academic tutors (for example), Chaplains often continue to offer support pastoral or otherwise once students have become alumni, and are technically out of the College's field of responsibility. In all cases, clarification of the context being understood by both sides is of great importance.