



My name is Sr. Jean Searson and I am part of the Hospital Chaplaincy Team at Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford. I have had the privilege of being able to minister for over 20 years.

My first major calling or journey - I left Dublin aged 18 to enter into religious life on 8th September 1971 with the Sisters of Charity of St Paul the Apostle in Selly Park in Birmingham, our motherhouse. I came to Birmingham knowing no one, "but I felt I had come home: I had seen an advert in a magazine for the Sisters of Charity of St Paul- I wrote to them in January and I was with them by September. About 20 years later I was told by our archivist, Sr Anne, that since 1874 there has been a member of the Searson family in this Congregation – God's Call.

I believe my second calling to hospital chaplaincy began in an indirect way. In June 1987 I was in Kilfinane, Limerick, working in a Boarding School when I was called to Selly Park, Birmingham to say goodbye to my cousin, Sr Anna Mara Searson. I had the honour of sitting, watching and praying with my cousin on her last journey. I stayed with her for over a week as she slowly got weaker and frailer. I was with her when she died. It was a shock but a privilege. I had forgotten about this experience until recently when I was reflecting on my call to hospital chaplaincy ministry.

In 1989 in the Archdiocese of Glasgow I was involved with the Beginning Experience for divorced, separated and widowed - a ministry concerned with loss and bereavement. This was a very powerful and healing ministry. I was part of the Team who journeyed with these people. This special ministry helped me in my Hospital Chaplaincy.

When I left my ministry in Glasgow I was offered the Chaplaincy post in Mildmay Mission Hospital, London in January 1994. I joined the team with the understanding that I would be trained as a Chaplain by them. It was a very challenging ministry as I was working alongside people who are living with HIV & AIDS. Many of these were young men and women and mothers with babies. I was so overwhelmed by the sadness that I needed to let go of this amazing ministry by the end of December 1994. I left with great sadness and a feeling of failure as I believed I had been called me to Hospital Ministry.

I returned to our motherhouse in Selly Park, Birmingham. I struggled and was confused. What was God calling me to now? For the next 18 months I worked in a day-care centre for the homeless. It was a very challenging ministry to journey with so many different people from different walks of life.

I kept discerning where God was calling me. I found a Chaplaincy Course in Milltown Institute, Dublin run by Jesuits. The course covered everything I had hoped for. It fitted like a glove. I applied and was accepted "I was coming home again"

In September 1996 I started the course. I was able to take the ministry a lot slower but under better supervision. In the Meath Hospital Dublin Sister Carmel Dodd, a St. Louis Sister, was my mentor. I had two days a week of intense visiting with supervision and had lectures the other days -it was all coming together now. Carmel encouraged, supported and inspired me.

The following year 1997 I did an internship in St Vincent's Hospital Dublin and qualified as Hospital Chaplain.



In January 1999 I joined the Chaplaincy Team at Broomfield Hospital with Rev Eric Britt as the lead Chaplain. I was joining an ecumenical team. A coming home again.

It has been a joy and privilege to journey with so many patients, relatives and staff.

To have time to be with - sit with - watch with - and listen deeply to those who are facing difficult situations - hearing of diagnosis of cancer or major surgery and being able to give some support to them is a great honour; it is sacred ground .

Our Spiritual Care & Chaplaincy Team offer support and care to all - with faith or none. We will ask: what inspires you? What gives you hope? What keeps you going through this difficult time?

Each patient tells a different story – What gives hope and support can be their belief & trust in God - or support from their Church family - or their own family. I believe each story I hear is precious.

Most of my ministry has been listening to patients with compassion, sensitivity and openness about their concerns, fears, and their worries: about their family, their future, how they will cope with illness, loss of independence, loss of mobility, having to change their care support and to rely on others. It is a time when they can be open and honest and begin to come to terms with the next stage of their journey.



It is a joy to bring Holy Communion to patients. It is different in the hospital at the bedside because privacy is limited and often there can be interruptions. It is so good to be able to share the Word of God and Holy Communion.



Each day is different in Chaplaincy ministry, so it can be demanding and challenging. One can be supporting young parents with a baby born early or praying with a patient before major surgery, or accompanying a patient on their final journey to death, or supporting a family in A/E.

We offer support 24 hours a day 7 seven days a week. I am part of the on call team - we do from midnight - midnight and can be called out to any emergency within the hospital.

In the last few years I have had the privilege of being with patients and their family on the final journey. It is precious time. We stand on holy ground. I am aware it is so important to give plenty of time to the patient and their family: to offer reassurance at this difficult time, to hold a hand, to hear about their fears, to sit in the silence and just be a gentle quiet presence - to hold the sacred space.

It can be a time to reminisce or to say to their loved one "I love you", "I am sorry", "I forgive you" or "thank you".

It may be an opportunity to give family space to say their farewell, to ask for forgiveness and give a blessing or to offer special prayer for the dying, it is a sacred time.

We will always ask the patient or family - what are their wishes? Do they need a Catholic Priest, Church of England Chaplain, a Rabbi or Imam? , whatever is required etc. The priority is always the patient's wish.

I have journeyed with so many patients, each is unique, special and such a privilege. It is a demanding time but I am so grateful to be able to accompany a patient who is dying. One relative said to me "it is so good to have people like you around"

Yes I have come home - it is difficult to describe this amazing ministry.

It is sacred – holy - a privilege. One walks on Holy Ground.

I am so aware this is God's ministry and without prayer and reflection time I could not be part of this special ministry. I am so grateful for all who support me but especially my first mentor Carmel who is now with God but I know gives me guidance.

Our Team gives support at Broomfield Hospital, St Peter's Maldon, Braintree Community Hospital and Halsted Hospital. We have over 25 Ward Chaplain's volunteers who visit weekly and try to support as many patients as possible.



We have a group of 25 Eucharistic Ministers from Catholic, C of E and Free Churches who bring Holy Communion each Sunday Morning, - a wonderful ministry. We are supported by our Catholic Priests from the Chelmsford Deanery. Fr Paul Cracknell from Blessed Sacrament Parish visits every Friday and offers emergency support day or night. The Chelmsford Priests offer amazing support too.

I finish with a few words from one my favourite Irish authors John O' Donohue: A Blessing for ministry

May the dawn find hope in your heart
Approaching your new day with dreams
Possibilities and promises
May evening find you gracious and fulfilled
May you go to the night blessed
Sheltered and protected
May your soul calm, console, and renew you.

