



How I train people to become sports chaplains

At the start of its 25th year, Sports Chaplaincy UK is stepping up its efforts to serve the world of sport. CEO **Warren Evans** spoke to iBelieve

Stereotypes may picture chaplains as old vicars, but weighing in at 18 stone and in excess of six foot, Warren Evans certainly doesn't fit that mould.

As Sports Chaplaincy UK celebrates a landmark quarter of a century and continues moving forward, Bradford-based Warren insists God is not in need of people with certificates to reach the sporting community.

"We have been doing a lot of work under the radar, predominantly with elite clubs, and predominantly with ordained ministers and vicars," Warren tells iBelieve.

"But in the last three or four years we have said that we cannot rely on ordained staff – we need to train and equip more people in the field of chaplaincy.

"We have a vision to see a chaplain in every sports club in the UK, both professional and amateur. The second part of our mission is to challenge, equip and engage the Church with a community called sport.

"Sport is not just a club in competition with another; there are 151,000 registered sports clubs in the UK – you have a community of many millions of people.

"Estimates say the Church community in Britain is four million. Now I don't see how a community can reject another that is much bigger in size just because they meet at a similar time.

"If you tell a child, choose God or sport and they choose to play sport, you have inexplicably told them that God has therefore rejected them.

"Most boys stop playing sport at 14 and girls at 12, but if you have already made them choose and given that inference that God has rejected them, when they're in those emotionally formative years, do you think they're going to be coming running to the Church?

"If we can impact the community called sport we can impact our wider community and the nation."

Prior to becoming a church pastor, Warren worked in the textiles industry as well as spending time as a



Warren Evans is Chief Executive of Sports Chaplaincy UK

bouncer before becoming a chaplain at rugby league club the Bradford Bulls.

"I guess I broke the mould," he reflects. "I'm guessing most people think of an old guy in a grey suit with a dog collar. I wasn't old, I certainly wasn't wearing a suit with a dog collar, and I am a big guy.

"I think my size and physicality do help in going into a hyper-masculine world.

"Sport has been very good in recent years at acknowledging and trying to understand mental health and depression, where I'm not sure wider society has as much. If people are needing to quantify the need and role of chaplains in sport, there you have it. We've seen a number of unfortunate high-profile cases which have led to suicide, but the role of chaplains is to be there for people, to listen and be there as a sounding board.

"What it's all about is building relationships so people trust you and you are then able to speak with them and speak into their lives.

"We often talk about organisations, but people talk about friendships and relationships. Presence, excellence, confidentiality and humility are the core values of chaplaincy in sport."

Such has been the success of Sports Chaplaincy UK, managers and coaches from various sports have stood up and taken note.

"Chaplaincy brings a personal touch; people feel they can be listened to as individuals," says rugby coach Sir Ian McGeechan OBE. "If chaplaincy was established in every

club, I believe it would be of huge benefit to the game as a whole."

One of the most revered men in professional football leadership is Sir Alex Ferguson, who also sees great benefit in the role of Sports Chaplaincy UK.

"Chaplains can be of help to all sorts of people involved with sport, when crisis, need or difficulty comes," Sir Alex says. "I commend the idea of sports chaplaincy and the work of Sports Chaplaincy UK."

Warren sees chaplaincy as simply being able to offer a practical demonstration of love and support to everyone.

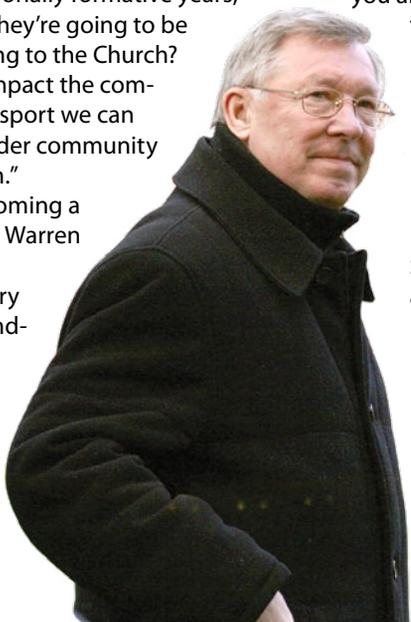
"One story which for me really is the heart behind what we do as chaplains came one Friday morning," he recalls.

"I was due to be at an event, but I really had this feeling I needed to go into the club – call it what you like, gut feeling, Spirit led, ate cheese the night before – I knew I had to go.

"I really didn't have the time, but as it turned out, there were three particular issues that day; one lady had discovered her husband was having an affair, someone had been diagnosed with cancer and the other found out her husband had left her the night before. It was a true privilege and honour to be able to minister to people in their workplace.

"In the Bible we read of the Spirit leaving Samson, but actually I think for us the converse is often true. God's Spirit is at work in and through us, but we don't always realise it – people will tell me I am always positive and encouraging. I don't feel like I am, but that doesn't mean God is not working through me."

'Presence, excellence, confidentiality and humility are the core values of chaplaincy in sport'



Sir Alex Ferguson supports chaplains