

The Chester Experience

Chester FC was formed out of the ashes of Chester City FC in 2010. Our motto is "Our City, Our Community, Our Club" and supporters own 100% of the business.

We reach out to all members of our community and our philosophy is to be completely "inclusive". We could not survive without the help and goodwill of the local community and the army of volunteers that work tirelessly for the good of our football club. At the heart of this drive to enhance our community effort was to form the Chester FC Community Trust.

After a player suffered a bereavement, the Trustees of our Community Trust recognised that we needed help at times with pastoral and spiritual care. The fact was that whilst we had many willing and able volunteers, we lacked the skills to truly manage the spiritual and emotional welfare of our players, coaches, staff and supporters. Simply put, we had no one to talk to!!

Guy Lister was appointed to be our Club Chaplain in October 2013. We were supported by Sports Chaplaincy UK during the whole process.



The benefits of this appointment have been immediate. His relaxed style and sensitivity encourages people of all ages and religious denominations to engage with him. He is there for people of 'faith', and of 'no faith'. He works with all the various supporter sections to explain his role and there is now an understanding across the club that he is there when needed and not just when things are going wrong. We have fun with our chaplain too!

His regular visits to the training ground are welcomed and encouraged by our manager, staff and coaches, although it is not thought that he will be offered a playing contract just yet!

To summarise, our Club Chaplain makes a huge difference to our family orientated football club. It feels right to have a good man with a discerning and calm personality looking after us. This has been one of the best signings we have made.

Richard Lynes

Supporter, Governance Lead & Advisor to Chester Football Club

To find more about Sports Chaplaincy please contact Ian Nicholson on ian.nicholson@sportschaplaincy.org.uk or 07976351891.

Further information is available at www.sportschaplaincy.org.uk

Sports Chaplaincy UK is a charity committed to supporting the development of Sports Chaplaincy in the world of sport. It is a UK Charity registered in England and Wales.

SPORTS CHAPLAINCY UK LOWER LEAGUE REVIEW 2015

Welcome to our third annual review focusing on the development of chaplaincy in Lower League football. There are now over 350 chaplains in all sports nationally and the main factors in this growth have been word of mouth recommendation and a positive reputation. We are particularly grateful to the Vanarama Conference Board for their support and further down the pyramid there are now signs of encouraging growth in the regional and county leagues; demand is certainly outstripping resource!

It is often hard to define chaplaincy but the best chaplains serve the character and needs of their club and adjust to make the best use of their own personality and gifting. It means being available, building relationships and giving confidential and patient care to all within the club. While a chaplain is motivated and energized by faith this care is given equally to all - with no strings attached.

This can mean being a 'listening ear' for players coming to terms with the transition from a League Academy, facing retirement or coping with long-term injury. Beyond that chaplains give support to club staff and fans and can help build links into schools, churches and the local community. There are chaplains who do the matchday PA, help supporter's trusts, write for the programme, perform funerals and serve as community directors. One chaplain has been both bar manager and kit man at one time while another stood in as the club mascot - so anything is possible! The role is voluntary which means that the chaplain is unpaid by the club - it is a service.

Sports Chaplaincy UK helps connect potential chaplains with clubs and provides training and advice. We then support the chaplains through regional meetings, ongoing training and an annual conference. It can sometimes take a while to find the best match but we find that patience pays off.

We hope you enjoy reading the profiles in this short review. If you would like more information about chaplaincy at a club please contact ian.nicholson@sportschaplaincy.org.uk or 07976351891.

Thanks for your interest and support.

Ian Nicholson
Pastoral Director



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Havant & Waterlooville

Andy Wilson



I've been a follower of lower league football since the 1980s so when, in 2007, I was appointed as Vicar of Christ Church Portsdown, I immediately sought out my local team, Havant, to go and watch; I've been a supporter ever since.

Six years later, while listening to the BBC Non-league show, I heard Colin Peake speaking on behalf of the Conference about the value of Club Chaplains. I knew that I should respond but am not usually one to push myself forward. I therefore waited a couple of months before contacting the club and offering to help in any way that they thought appropriate. The reply was enthusiastic and I was appointed Chaplain just before the start of the 2014-15 season.

As the players at the club are part-time almost all of my involvement has been on match days. For home matches I arrive at the ground a couple of hours before kick-off and chat with the manager and other staff. After the team talk the players have the opportunity of a short prayer time. I now lead these and there are nearly always takers for a few minutes of calm. I then wander around chatting with turnstile operators, programme sellers, catering staff, club officials, journalists and, of course, the fans. Talk is usually about football, often about what's happening in people's lives, and occasionally about much deeper things.

I think that the fact that I was already a supporter and season ticket holder has helped me to be welcomed at the club, particularly by other supporters. I have made attending matches a priority and have travelled to more away games than I have before; that has really helped to build trust and relationships.

Getting to know the players at a part-time club has proved harder. I already have a full diary and getting to evening training sessions is difficult. However, one season in, I am grateful for the welcome received at the club and the progress made so far.

Farnborough

Mark McGowan



I am the Farnborough football chaplain but also head up the Community side of things at the club. I first got involved around 4 years ago and, being a full time Minister and also a huge football fan, a role in football chaplaincy is a perfect combination for me.

Lots of people ask what a chaplain does and over those years I have carried out dedications of children, regularly visit local schools to explain the role of a chaplain and make myself available for supporters if they require a listening ear. It also helps to raise the profile of the Football Club in the local area.

The Community side of the role is expanding rapidly and, from having a very small scheme, we now have several initiatives running; we deliver some very valuable projects to 8 local primary and secondary schools. Other schemes include a completely FREE community football league for children of the ages 5-10. This started on a field with just 21 and now has graduated to a 3G pitch with over 80 children registered.

These few years, both as a chaplain and community director, have been one of the most rewarding things I have done. I see it as a big privilege to be able to perform both roles with Farnborough Football Club and love the connection between football and the community.



Altrincham

Andy Barclay - Watt



I had been leading a church in Sale for a few years when I was approached by John Boyers (chaplain at Manchester United) to ask if I might be interested in serving as chaplain at Altrincham FC. He introduced me to some of the directors, staff and volunteers and I immediately felt welcomed and able to support the values of the club. In particular I loved their desire to express value to every person, whatever their connection to Altrincham FC. I also appreciated the desire to build community across the club and serve the wider community.

I have now had the privilege of being chaplain at Altrincham for the last 8 years. Throughout that time I have tried to be a "friendly face", a "listening ear" and an "encouraging voice" to players, fans, staff and volunteers alike. Much of the time that is purely social, but on occasions people want to talk much more deeply. I have loved being part of the football club community and getting involved in people's lives. As a part-time club there are limited opportunities to engage with the players (I try to go down before training begins on an evening) and many move on fairly quickly, however I have particularly appreciated the respect and trust that grows with those who have stayed around for longer.

I have also enjoyed writing my monthly ("Chaplain's Chat") notes in the programme and organising club carol services. It has been a privilege to conduct funerals and support many people connected with the club who have suffered a bereavement. I am sure I could be doing a whole lot more, but I hope I am playing a small part in supporting individuals pastorally, reflecting a faith perspective, and encouraging those involved in running and representing the club. I count it a real privilege to be involved!

Barrow

David Opie



I have been a Baptist minister since 1982 and Chaplain at Barrow FC since the start of the 2013-2014 season. I am a member of Sports Chaplaincy UK, which provides support and training and has a helpful code of conduct. This provides a threefold understanding between the club, the Chaplaincy and Sports Chaplaincy.

In the two years I have been at Barrow the club has been through various changes. Initially we were struggling in the Conference North and then a very good run saw us finish mid-table. This season we won the league and thus gained promotion. The players kept the fans on the edge of the seats as the result was not decided until the final whistle. Next came the saga of an offer to buy the members club, which was finally ratified near the end of the season. Paul Casson the new owner has big plans for the club with promotion just being the first step.

As the chaplain I have been invited in on a voluntary basis. I am here for anyone connected with the club no matter what their role is - including the spectators. As a minister I have a conviction that everyone is equally valuable and my role is to provide pastoral and welfare support. My prime duty is to serve and the heart of my position is the building of relationships and trust.

I have sought to build friendships with various groups of people connected with the club. On match days I arrive at the ground early and move around. I usually attend the briefing of the stewards and spend time both before and after the match in the players lounge. I have no fixed routine as you never know what will happen and I appreciate I am present as a guest. I pray for people of good will to be supportive as well as praying for opportunities to be of help.