

# Strengthening The Church Chaplain Relationship

Sports Chaplaincy Australia (SCA) and various chaplaincy organisations have recently experienced a rapid growth in chaplaincy numbers. This is in part due to a significant move towards an “urban” volunteer chaplaincy model away from the conventional paid “professional” chaplaincy ministry model.

This urban model expressly and purposely operates out of the local church. SCA both recognises and encourages the important relationship between our chaplains and their local church.

In light of this emerging chaplaincy model and the significant growth expected in the coming years there are a number of practical ways both churches and chaplains can strengthen their ministry relationship.

Let's first understand the stakeholders in the life of a chaplain.

## The Stakeholders in A Chaplains Life

1. The local church
2. The chaplaincy association
3. The chaplain

**The Local Church** – is central in the life and ministry of our sports chaplains. It is where they and their family are shepherded; loved, encouraged, trained and disciplined. The local church is the primary care giver of all our chaplains and their families. We believe this to be the New Testament model.

When it comes to accreditation our chaplains are recommended and endorsed by their local church. Therefore any need for ministry accountability and guidance comes primarily from their local church pastoral leadership.

**The Chaplaincy Association** - Sports Chaplaincy Australia is a non-denominational 'network' of sports chaplains and not an employer of any ministry personnel. We exist to grow sports chaplaincy to every sports community in Australia in partnership with the local church.

Our responsibility is to prepare and empower our chaplains in their specialised area of ministry to sports. To provide accreditation, to help guide them in their role and provide a second tier of ministry accountability and support after the local church.

SCA is the conduit and interface between the Australian church and Australian sports community. We strongly value serving the Body of Christ to become effective in engaging and influencing our nation and sports communities as a whole.

**The Chaplain** – Our chaplains are personally responsible for their life and ministry conduct in all areas. They are responsible for their church attendance, their personal development (PD) and the health of their spiritual walk and wellbeing of their family life.

We strongly encourage our chaplains to retain a healthy relationship with their local church and church leadership. **In almost all situations it is necessary for the chaplain to make the initiative in developing this relationship.**

However, for the chaplain to be most effective in their ministry role they require the conscientious support of their church family and the chaplaincy organisation.

## Support for Chaplains

In general, we have come to discover that a chaplain essentially needs ‘moral’ support from their local church and ministry support from their chaplaincy association.

So what does support mean for a chaplain? Cam Butler, the National Director of Sports Chaplaincy Australia was asked for his understanding of support. Below is his response.

“Often, the No. 1 support that our chaplains typically require is ‘moral’ support – they want to feel that their church takes an interest in their mission to sports. Usually this isn’t expecting much, maybe just the ability to update their pastor about their ministry, and an opportunity to share this with their church family would be sufficient. This might be 5 minutes at church, or AGM or missions day once a year.

I regularly encourage our chaplains to be proactive on this matter as our churches can quickly forget about their chaplain, not intentionally, but because they [the chaplain] operate outside the normal day-to-day machinations of church activity.

Of course, greater church support in the way of some financial, prayer and recognition would be great, but once again I encourage our chaplains not to burden their churches with more demands for funding. Rather, for them to seek partners (some even outside of church circles) to empower their chaplaincy. This usually happens after several years when friends and non-Christian people see the significant work they’re doing and become willing to ‘invest’ in both prayer and finances.

We’ve come to discover the smallest amount of intentional concern and interest often goes a long way for our chaplains.”

## Strengthening The Relationship

### Churches

So, what are some of the practical ways in which the church can help strengthen this relationship?

Please note: not every activity listed below may be relevant for you or your church but may serve to help you in some small way support your chaplain and make them feel they have your support.

Some practical ways churches can help strengthen the relationship	Action we can do
1. conduct a commissioning or deputation at a church service or leaders/council meeting	
2. provide the occasional opportunity to profile the chaplains ministry during a church service. A great opportunity to encourage and model to others how to impact their community for Christ	
3. use chaplain to provide a story/testimony during the pastors sermon	
4. assist in up-skilling your chaplain in ministry	
5. meet for coffee with the chaplain for their ministry update (can be done annually or quarterly)	
6. pay the chaplains annual accreditation dues – this can actually serve as a simple reminder to the pastor to meet with the chaplain (even if the chaplain pays the monies to the church then the church takes responsibility to pay on their behalf)	
7. offer to ‘debrief/defuse’ during or after a major traumatic event (our chaplains can help you understand the need for this role)	
8. go with the chaplain to their mission field – game, race, event, etc.	
9. see the chaplain as part of your church’s ministry team. Invite them to team meetings, leadership training, etc (please understand our chaplains are usually involved in community activities & events and may find it difficult to attend your ‘team’ meetings regularly. But, please don’t give up on inviting them, ever!)	
10. pray for the chaplain, privately and publicly	
11. include the chaplain in any ‘missions’ day event or promotion	
12. on some occasions some of our chaplains may need specialised help in the way of billeting, for families during carnivals, or use of facilities for sports meetings, etc	
13.	
14.	
15.	

One effective task is to simply ask your chaplain, “How can we provide you with the support needed for your ministry?” Don’t fear the response. Let them know what you

## Strengthening The Church Chaplain Relationship

can or are limited to provide. This ‘understanding’ goes a long way in ensuring a healthy relationship between church and chaplain.

### Chaplains

So, what are some of the practical ways in which the chaplain can help strengthen the relationship?

<b>Some practical ways chaplains can help strengthen the relationship</b>	<b>Action we can do</b>
1. Pursue regular contact, i.e. monthly contact with a pastor, elder, key leader	
2. Help your pastor understand your need and provision for ‘debriefing/defusing’ for your chaplaincy	
3. Convey what you ‘need’ as a chaplain – this may be different for each chaplain. Needs may include, family care when travelling, occasional face to face meetings, time to be asked how we are travelling, debriefing, occasional testimony at church, involvement in church pastoral/leadership development activities/training, etc	
4. Assist the pastor/representative understand the ‘outside-in’ nature of chaplaincy	
5. Provide a monthly update to your pastor/team of your chaplaincy events, and prayer needs	
6. Develop a group of people specifically praying for your ministry	
7. Commit to a small group in your church to fulfil your need for connectedness, support and encouragement	
8. Involve your sports contacts and community in church activities	
9. Involve your club in mission. For example, one football club saw what their chaplain’s church was doing taking teams to South Africa with World Vision. The club showed interest in sending some boys along for leadership development so the chaplain helped facilitate the process. This empowered the chaplain in the eyes of his club and his church.	
10. Invite some of your key church leaders/pastors to be chaplains	
11. Invite your senior pastor to come along with you to see you in action and met the people you serve	
12. Ask your church to help serve you and the club/community during events	
13.	
14.	
15.	

It is essential to SCA that our chaplains remain healthy and strengthened in their service to Christ. As we said earlier, we encourage our chaplains to be assertive in their relationship with their church and church leadership. And for our churches to remain

## Strengthening The Church Chaplain Relationship

mindful and show interest in their chaplain's mission. This will lead to healthy church chaplain relationships and the effective impact of the Gospel in our communities.

We sincerely appreciate the focus our churches and chaplains are giving to developing these healthy and supportive relationships.

**Please take time to identify which items in the list above you can address by ticking the action box on the right. Or add items of your own.**

**For further information please contact:**



Sports Chaplaincy Australia  
PO Box 219 Burwood VIC 3125  
03-9808-1369  
[team@sportschaplaincy.com.au](mailto:team@sportschaplaincy.com.au)  
[www.sportschaplaincy.com.au](http://www.sportschaplaincy.com.au)