**The story of Anna Chaplaincy**

Under the banner of the Greater Alton Project, GAP, the Anglican churches in and around Alton, which formed a single Parish of the Resurrection, signed a Covenant in 2009 with Alton Methodist Church in order to collaborate more closely in various areas of ministry. Working together, they recognised that more should be done for older people and therefore the Greater Alton Project appointed Debbie Thrower as the first such chaplain in January 2010.

Since January 2014, we have developed strong links with Bible Reading Fellowship, B.R.F. Debbie remains a licensed lay minister in Alton while also leading Anna Chaplaincy’s national profile at BRF. The vision of this BRF ministry is: “to promote standards of excellence in spiritual care for older people, and to see the pastoral needs of older people given much greater recognition nationally and locally;”.

The name “Anna” was chosen for its echoes of the widow of that name in St Luke’s gospel who appears with Simeon – both of them role models of faithful older people who believed God’s promises. The Anna title resonates with the fact that much of the work is with those who have suffered various losses, and bereavement.

Anna Chaplaincy seeks to accompany older people at this age and stage of their lives. It is an ecumenical, community-based, chaplaincy promoting the spiritual welfare of older people. Anna Chaplaincy is a person-centred and non-judgemental ministry for people of strong, little or no faith at all.

Such a focus on spiritual care may express itself in helping people to reflect on their life’s journey – both the joys and the sorrows – and, where appropriate, enabling the healing of memories and the celebration of life experiences to foster more hope and resilience.

An Anna Chaplain also has a wider role within the community as an advocate and a champion of the contribution older people make to society. They may enable cross-generational encounters in the church and wider community for the benefit of people of all ages.

Spiritual support provided in a gentle and loving way brings comfort and succour to people who may be at a low point in their lives. It enables older people to live with greater meaning and purpose. Finding some peace in their later years, they may be better prepared to face the end of their earthly lives.

Anna Chaplancy involves visiting older people wherever they may be living, whether in residential and nursing homes, sheltered housing, retirement complexes or other private homes. The emphasis is on spiritual support but, clearly, people’s emotional and practical struggles will also play a part in their overall well-being. In our 2021 post-pandemic world it has become apparent that many older people have felt socially isolated and many opportunities exist now to broaden the scope of this work. A feature of the work locally has been its links with many of the clubs in Alton where older people gather and offering practical support and encouragement to enable those who may be more isolated to attend.

Alton’s current Anna Chaplain has expressed the wish to retire at the beginning of December 2021. In November an Open Forum was held to consult more widely on the future development of the role and an invitation was given to local churches, care homes and those older people who have received support from Alton’s Anna Chaplains to express their views. Much support was received and the work of the Anna Chaplain was clearly valued within the churches and the community

The increasing development of housing for older people in the Alton area, and the success of previous postholders in developing strong links within the community, has led to a realization of the need to train and enable volunteers to support this work. The successful applicant will therefore be able to build, lead and develop a team of volunteers to support them in this ministry. Part of the role will also be to promote this ministry to potential supporters and advocates. There is an expectation that the Anna Chaplain will keep up to date with current research and literature relevant to the post and use this to contribute to the training of others.

The role is funded by charitable giving and in order to be successful in our applications it is vital that the work of the Anna Chaplain and friends maintains a high profile within the churches, local community and in the wider media. Articles for press and local magazines will be expected as a part of the role.

The GAP Ministry teams are excited to be recruiting another Anna Chaplain under the banner of the Greater Alton Project to continue the excellent work of the chaplains who have developed this ministry over the last 11 years. Post pandemic there will no doubt be new challenges, new opportunities and new ways of working and we look forward to seeing this work develop both locally and in tandem with the work nationally. There are now 185 Anna Chaplains and similar ministries nationally forming a mutually supportive network supported by BRF who offer training and resources.

To gain a fuller picture of the variety of work Anna Chaplains are undertaking please see [www.annachaplaincy,org.uk](http://www.annachaplaincy,org.uk) ,the Alton Methodist Church website [www.altonmethodist.org.uk](http://www.altonmethodist.org.uk) and the Parish of the Resurrection website [www.potr-alton.co.uk](http://www.potr-alton.co.uk)