

SPORTS CHAPLAINCY

South Wales Baptist Association

I have been the minister of Aïnon Baptist Church, Bryncoch, Neath for 12 years. Seven years ago I was approached by the professional rugby team the Ospreys to serve as a volunteer chaplain with their Academy. This role has involved:

- » Pastoral and spiritual care for the Under 16years (U16s), U18s and U20s players, their families, coaches and backroom staff.
- » Input into the Ospreys Academy's formal training programme where I lead on the delivery of subjects concerning life skills and holistic development (the development of these young men as people and not just as players).



Serving sport through excellence in chaplaincy - supported by Home Mission

The chaplaincy has been well received and has increasingly led to requests and opportunities to develop similar arrangements at other sports clubs by introducing them to other pastorally-gifted church leaders interested in exploring sports chaplaincy as mission. Over the past number of years one issue stood out over and over again - effective development of this kind of incarnational mission in the sporting world was impossible to do in the one day a week that my church was graciously releasing me for and in my spare time. There were, and still are, simply too many opportunities presenting themselves for development.

Additionally, having served as one of the sports chaplains at the Paralympic Games in London 2012, this subsequently led on to a growing number of requests from the disabled sporting world in Wales to consider developing sports chaplaincy support to disabled and special-needs sport. The Christian Charity Sports Chaplaincy UK (formerly SCORE) asked me two years ago to formally take on a part-time development role in Wales in order to further this form of Christian mission. And so, with the prayerful support of my



church and of the charity, I reduced my hours with the church down to a part-time role and now give two days a week to sports chaplaincy development.

To date, sports chaplaincy in Wales is more developed in rugby than in football, with only a handful of chaplains currently serving in Welsh Football. It is hoped that the next 12 months will see a redressing of this imbalance. In December 2013 I was invited by the Welsh Premier League to address a meeting in Newtown, mid Wales, of all the chairmen of



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Welsh Premier football clubs on the subject of sports chaplaincy. As a result of my presentation to that meeting, the league administrators have now commended chaplaincy to all their constituent clubs and we hope to see a number of new appointments in 2015. The BUGB Home Mission grant enables me to make journeys such as the above to Newtown and even further north in Wales (Wrexham, Colwyn Bay, Caernarfon) to further this type of incarnational Christian mission in Wales for the glory of God.

As a result of a number of such journeys I was able last year to introduce the Revd Rhun Murphy to the Directors of Wrexham FC in February of this year and he is now all set to take up a volunteer sports chaplaincy role with their Academy set-up in the town. Further new chaplaincies have been brokered at Newport RFC, Cardiff RFC, Newport Gwent Dragons RFC and the acadmies at Llanelli Scarlets and Cardiff City FC.



Rhun Murphy

Please pray:

- » For Steve and the growing number of sports chaplains serving sports clubs in Wales
- » Give thanks for the spiritual, pastoral and linguistic support which can be given at international sporting events
- » For the development of chaplaincy to women's sports



Other areas identified for priority development in the next year are:

- » chaplaincy to women's sports (at the moment we have only one female sports chaplain in Wales). I have been working to raise awareness of this type of ministry amongst Welsh churches, and have spoken at a number of different forums, trying to develop this type of ministry across denominational boundaries and to foster partnership working.
- » a growth in the number of Club Christmas carol services facilitated by club chaplains. Christmas 2014 saw 3,500 people gather for a Carol Service at the Liberty Stadium, Swansea where the Christmas story was read from the Bible by players and club adminstrators, with the chaplains leading in prayer and a Christmas reflection. This event is now set to become an annual one.
- » chaplaincy to the disabled sporting world. The second half of 2013 saw the signing of a formal engagement agreement between Sports Chaplaincy UK and Disability Sport Wales (DSW), the lead organisation in Wales for the development of sport for disabled people.

For more Club Christmas carol services in 2015

- » For the support which chaplains can offer to sports people with disabilities
- » For the ministers in training who have an interest in sports chaplaincy, and for opportunities for them to explore this calling through placements

This has led to two new chaplaincies which now provide volunteer chaplaincy support to the athletes in their Academy and High Performance departments. The Revd Dave Hibbin of Ararat Baptist Church and Heather Lewis of Highfields Church, Cardiff both give a day a week of their time to support the Wales's disabled sports people, and it is hoped that this model can replicated elsewhere.

Building on my experience of serving at the London 2012 Paralympics, I served in July 2013 as a Chaplain and Interpreter at the International Paralympic Committee's World Athletics Championships in Lyon, France I was asked to dedicate his time to providing spiritual, pastoral and linguistic support to Team GB.

I also formed part of the Swansea Organising Committee charged with the planning and delivery of the International Paralympic Committee's European Athletics Championships that took place from 17 - 24 August 2014. This resulted in a team providing a comprehensive sports chaplaincy service to athletes, coaches, and their families. Included in the team were a number of 'trainee' sports chaplains - ministers in training / ordinands who have expressed an interest in sports chaplaincy and whose training institutes agreed for their summer placements to be on secondment to the chapaincy team at these major athletics championships.

I have been greatly encouraged by the number of doors that the Lord has opened over the past two years, with a growing number of pastoral and mission opportunities to myself and the other chaplains that I am encouraging. May his kingdom come in the sporting world of Wales. the UK and of all his world.

Steve Jones
Chaplaincy Support Director for
Welsh Sport