

## **A Day in the Life of a Volunteer Retail Chaplain.**

**“I expect surprises...”**

I expect surprises during my visits to city centre retail staff on Monday mornings. I walk through the arcade, pop into the shops that don't look too busy and introduce myself to the staff. Most are very happy to chatter. I never know what I am going to encounter as I begin my visiting.

Challenging and unexpected questions have set the grey matter of this senior citizen working furiously, to find an appropriate and sensitive way of answering, not to forget a quick prayer for the right words.

I have learned so much from my visits, especially how welcoming and responsive most people have been. There are sadder moments, such as discovering that yet another retail outlet has closed, often at short notice. Those I had chatted to and built a relationship with have disappeared, and could now be unemployed.

As outlets re-open, or new staff are taken on in established shops, there are new people to get to know. Most react positively, often with amazement, when I say I am there to offer support if and when they need it, as outlined in our Chaplaincy leaflet.

A huge variety of topics have been discussed over two years, from guinea pigs to driving lessons, the voluntary work people do, family concerns and many more. The uncertainties of retail work and several instances of shop-lifting have also been raised.

I have not visited in my own strength. Prayer has been a vital element, and much support from our team, my family and church fellowship. Since attending the Chaplaincy Training Course in autumn 2011 and starting retail chaplaincy in April 2012, I have felt really blessed by opportunities to chat to people of all ages whom I may not otherwise have met.

It is a privilege, and so humbling, to be able to offer to pray at home for those with problems. It is even more touching when someone wants you to pray for them but says, 'I am not a believer'. That convinces me that there is a great need for Christians to be out in the community, planting seeds.

[Another account:]

**“I just come alive..!”**

I have learnt such a lot about shop work since I have been a chaplain. When I go in to the shops, the Lord never lets me down. The staff work very hard. I go into the stores in a large shopping centre. I do 2 floors in there. The places that I visit are shoe shops, clothing shops, and also jewellery shops; there are some cafes as well.

I had one girl in one of the shops the other week: she told me she was

leaving and she was so glad to see me before she left as she could say good bye to me. I even had a hug from her which was very nice: to think I must be doing something right! I feel so encouraged when that happens.

I go once a week on a Wednesday morning. I find that Wednesday is good as they are not very busy and that gives me a good opportunity to talk to the assistants. I get on very well with most of them.

I feel very sorry for some of them in the shops as they are under so much pressure from management if they don't meet their targets. It is times like that when I know I am there for a reason: I can be a listening ear and I can pray for them.

I would encourage any one that is able to be a chaplain; but not to go in on our own strength but to trust in the Lord. When I go in some weeks, I don't feel very confident. But as I pray, the Lord does something to me and I just come alive! It's something I can't explain: its better felt than told!

The Lord is so good. I thank Him every day for the strength He gives me; and as I have said I am so blessed to serve Him in this way. Amen.