



A Helping Hand at the Heart of University Life

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Sr Anouska, fcJ is Catholic Chaplain at Goldsmiths University, University of London and London South Bank University, based at [St Hilda's Catholic Chaplaincy House](#) in New Cross. In this article, first appeared in [The Pilgrim](#), newspaper of the Archdiocese of Southwark, she explains more about her role as university chaplain.

Dear Fresher and University Students,

Congratulations! You've got your results, or passed last year's exams and now the new academic year is approaching.

It's certainly exciting times for all those heading off to university for the first time, or perhaps returning to their second and third year.

I love this time of the year; welcoming the new arrivals, re-connecting with students and colleagues from last year and dreaming dreams of what the new year will be like. Who will be around, how will the community grow, what will we do?

And the exciting thing is, if you get involved, you become part of that change.

I remember when I first arrived at the University of Stirling, many years ago (to study History and Religious Studies) I knew I wanted to connect to the chaplaincy team – not because I knew then that I wanted to be a religious sister/nun, or even because I was super holy, I really wasn't.

Rather, I knew I wasn't one for heading out on the town and didn't really want to be. I wanted to connect with other people who like me had a sense that their faith was important even if they understand or interact with it differently.

Once I found the chaplaincy, and it took time, as well as like minded people, I found there was free tea and coffee and comfy chairs. So that was also a bonus and I became a regular visitor; often hanging out there between lectures and attending events there with friends from across the different years.

I was lucky enough to have Mass on campus. For some of you students at university today, this may still be possible, but for others you will need to get out there and find your local Catholic parish. Your chaplain, may have a leaflet explaining where the different churches are and www.rcaosuniversities.org.uk will help with this too.

I always try on that first Sunday to go to the local Mass, gathering up students who want to go along, so keep your eyes open and get in touch.

New parishes might seem daunting particularly if you are new to the place. People might not talk to you, but it's alright, don't be shy, take a risk and go along. Do you always recognise the new person in the congregation in your home parish and say hello? If not, don't be surprised if others don't either. In addition, there may be other students there who would love to meet you so, like St. Peter in the Gospel, step out of that boat and go and meet Jesus.

Most universities have some form of chaplaincy provision, and more than likely there will be a Catholic Chaplain or faith contact you can get in touch with. Fresher's and professional services fairs, may not seem exciting, but you meet other people.

You can feel very lonely in London or any city, especially if you are new. So step out of your room and come and say hello. Alongside the chaplains you'll get to meet fellow students who are in the Catholic Society (CathSoc) and many other groups, and if there is not a society that interests you, take the initiative and set it up. Your students union will help you with the 'how'.

At the various fairs and events, before lectures begin, you will meet the different people and services that make the university run, above and beyond your amazing lecturers and academics.

So, get out of bed, or leave the house, commute and come along. You might not feel there is a lot to learn, especially if you are a returning student, but if you don't come, you will never know.

Whether you are a part time or full time, international or a home student, around for a year or more there is a space for you. For postgraduate students, your witness to life beyond undergraduate studies is an absolute gift to the rest of the community and as a masters' student myself I know the pressures of the work, but also know the gift of the Chaplain in my institution helping me along the way.

However, enough about freshers. What else do I do and more importantly what else can you get involved in? Working with the wider university chaplaincy team, one of my regular activities is cooking and serving a chaplaincy lunch in the chaplaincy house in New Cross.

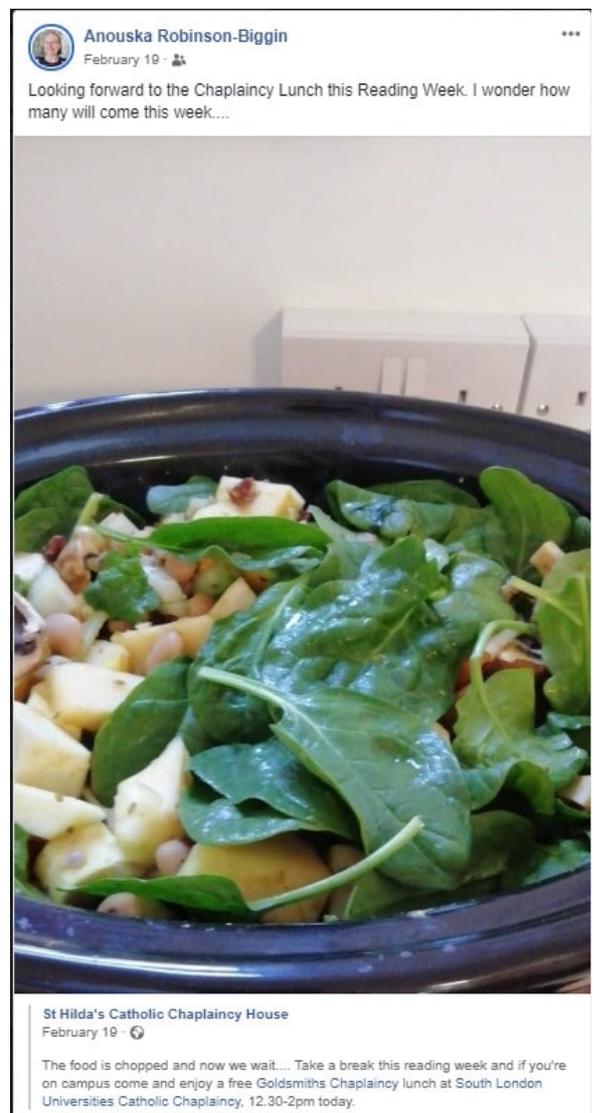
I do this to gather people together and we generally feed 30 people each week. It is a great way to ensure students eat good, wholesome vegetarian food and meet other people. And it also gives them a chance to arrange to see me if they wish. For those with culinary flair and time on their hands you can always come and lend a hand.

The lure of food is often one of many factors that draws people to chaplaincy. In exam time, I can also be found in the library giving out hot chocolate in the evenings. There is nothing better than seeing someone so touched by a very simple act of love, and time and again I am surprised by how much a small cup of hot chocolate helps.

Each week I try and arrange Mass on campus or attend one near to campus when I can. I meet the Catholic students one evening weekly over food, usually pizza, for a discussion, a film about faith and just general time to gather as a Catholic community. We also offer regular times of prayer at the chaplaincy house and other events on campus as part of the multi-faith chaplaincy team.

As a Chaplain I have accompanied students who have asked to be confirmed and this was a particular joy, walking with someone as they commit on a more personal level to their faith.

I love the time I get to meet and walk with students as they journey through their time at university. Whether you want specific guidance on your faith or just someone to talk to when things seem a little more challenging, I and the other chaplains are there.



In addition there are pilgrimages to attend, retreats to take part in and volunteering opportunities too, maybe just on your campus and sometimes with students from across different universities, so don't miss out.



I want to welcome you and walk with you on your journey through university and in time, rejoice with you at your graduation. At one graduation a student who had faithfully come to the chaplaincy for three years, introduced me to his parents on his graduation and said 'and this is Sr. Anouska' and his parents seemed genuinely pleased to see me. I suppose at that moment I was like many parents/carers will feel at this time, I suddenly felt like one of my 'little ones' was growing up and leaving the nest, and so he was. But that is the wonder of my job: to welcome, accompany and watch you then fly onwards and I love the chance to do it.

So don't be a stranger: when you arrive, get in touch with your chaplain and let's walk with each other on the journey.



“ What zest life acquires when we allow ourselves to be filled by the love of God! ”

Pope Francis

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