

**“To see our patients having to go through this unthinkable ordeal is heart-br**

Dublin Hospital Chaplains share their experience from the front line.

Throughout this pandemic, priests and lay chaplains have continued to minister to the sick and the bereaved. In the Archdiocese of Dublin, 36 ordained and 40 lay chaplains provide this essential service across a wide range of hospitals.

Three of the group, Shauna Sweeney, Fr. Damian O’ Reilly and Fr. John Kelly, have taken time out from their busy schedules to give us a glimpse of what life is like for them and their colleagues as they continue to serve in exceptional times.

### **Shauna Sweeny, Chaplain, Tallaght University Hospital.**

“This new strange way of life in the hospital is something that every healthcare professional is learning to adapt to. To see patients go through this unthinkable ordeal is heart-breaking. Patients have not seen their family in weeks and feel isolated at home waiting to hear from the hospital and feel helpless. Staff are dealing with extremely stressful situations every day.

As a chaplain in such an unusual time, it is my role to try and support patients and staff in the hospital and to address their fears. It is extremely harrowing to see what patients and families are going through with this pandemic. They visit their loved ones morning, noon and night but that cannot be the case now.

A young man with a young family was dying yesterday. His wife and brother came in to say their last goodbye to him, they had 15 minutes to see him and say goodbye as they would never see him again. They were surrounded by plexiglass and hair nets, and no faces to see. This alone put so much fear with them and they too were instructed to wear their masks. The reality of the current situation feels inhumane and not what we as carers are used to.

Staff and volunteers in the hospital have crocheted pairs of love hearts that fit in the palm of the hand - one for the brother of this patient, I gave them one love heart to put into his hand, knowing that he would have some form of a matching heart, to always have to show their son and to know that he was not alone.

Patients are our priority and an initiative that the hospital set up is that every ward has access to iPads that allow them to see their families. If patients are too unwell the Chaplain calls the family after visiting and lets the family know that the chaplain has an opportunity to connect in with the family and see how they are doing as well.” *(Shauna Sweeney)*

### **Fr. Damian O Reilly, St. Vincent’s Hospital**

“Working as a Priest Chaplain in St. Vincent’s University Hospital at this time of the Covid19 pandemic is one of the most amazing experiences of my priestly life. To be working alongside health care professionals and all the staff of the hospital is a privilege and a joy.”

humbling experience – one of care, kindness and compassion from all the staff and departments who are working to ensure that the best possible patient care of the highest standard is provided to each patient. Every patient receives loving care. The demands on the staff and on the hospital are way beyond what anyone of us could ever have imagined. The administration is doing everything possible to ensure the safety of all the patients their families and staff by ensuring that the PPE that are required especially PPE are made available. I feel that in this crisis every one of us are being protected.

As a hospital chaplaincy team made up of two ordained chaplains and four lay chaplains we provide a 24/7 service to our patients, their families and to staff. We provide the chaplaincy service within the guidelines and restrictions of the HSE. We are trained in all Health and Safety procedures and in infection control procedures that are required especially for those who are either suspected or confirmed with Covid19.

Trained for the use of PPE we attend to the pastoral and Sacramental needs of each patient when requested by a member of the family or next of kin. We are available to support the families for whom this a particularly difficult time, restrictions, families are unable to be with their loved ones and this is particularly difficult if the loved one is in hospital. Support especially to the family is vital.

Chaplaincy duties have changed somewhat in that we are restricted from being able to do our normal pastoral and Liturgical services are restricted in that we celebrate Mass behind locked doors and Prayer services in the Meeting Rooms in line of the HSE. We provide the chaplaincy services on request from the patients or their families we are always available to those who make contact with us on the phone. Patients are anointed and prayed with as requested.

We engage with the various multidisciplinary teams such as the Palliative Care Team, the Medical Social Work Team, and the Bereavement Team as a link in the care of the patient and their families.

Like all who are working on the front line at this time the support and the prayers of the public is very much appreciated. The support and prayers of the Archbishop the priest and religious and lay faithful of the Diocese is a great source of support. I would simply say a very sincere “THANK YOU”. Please continue to pray for all of us and especially for our families and all staff at the front line at this time. This virus can come to anyone of us for that reason let us keep supporting each other with the spirit of the healing Christ in our hearts who loves us and cares for us.

Please everyone keep safe and observes the guidelines and restrictions that are in place.

God Bless.” *Fr. Damian O Reilly*

#### **Fr. John Kelly, Chaplain, Tallaght University Hospital**

“The work of healthcare chaplains is face-to-face - listening compassionately, connecting immediately and lovingly. It has been challenged and changed the way we provide this pastoral care. Wherever chaplains are, whether at the bedside or on camera, it is about connecting people.

On Holy Thursday I visited a 91 year old patient named Ann with confirmed coronavirus. A beautiful person and in a pastoral conversation we prayed together, celebrated the sacrament of the sick and she received Holy Communion. She has only one brother since she was hospitalised. I connected Ann to her brother and they had a conversation which was peaceful and ended peacefully a short time later.

On Good Friday, I visited Mary a patient I had met on many occasions during her treatment for cancer. She was wearing a protective mask and goggles. Having listened to her fears and sense of isolation I was able to connect her with her sons. This was the last time they were able to see and hear their Mother's voice. After her death the nurse held her in her hand as we prayed for her.

In these times you often only have one pastoral encounter and these are 'never to be forgotten'.

I am also developing *Keepsake Hearts*. A pair of small matching handcrafted hearts are respectfully offered to the family on the death of their loved one. One Keepsake Heart is placed with the remains of their loved one while the other is given to the bereaved family. The handcrafted hearts are made by a group of Volunteers." *Fr. John Kelly*

Paying tribute to all who are working in Chaplaincy services in the Archdiocese at this time, Archbishop Diarmuid said he would pray for all those who are ill, those who have died and families and friends who have been bereaved. He added that he would pray for those who have come here from abroad and who celebrate Easter far from their home and their traditions. "We are the backbone of our carers and health care workers. We must reach out to them and their families at this time"

He reiterated his call first made on St. Patrick's Day as the country undertook measures necessary to preserve the current situation and one that will not see its end for some time. We are being asked to take very restrictive measures and to exercise a sense of personal responsibility and civic duty. Our sacrifices are overshadowed when we think of the great services, especially our nurses, doctors, public health officials and carers. We owe them all a debt of gratitude and we must continue to minister to the sick, the troubled and the bereaved. Generosity and creativity are being combined with prayer above all a call to solidarity, a call to care for one another."

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