

Faith and Light international

Note on Chaplains in Faith and Light

(Although the chaplain of a community can be a woman, the masculine form has been used in this document to ease reading)

Preface

1. Our Charter confirms our conviction that the people who are at the heart of our communities play an essential role in the human community, society and the Churches. In order to put their gifts into practice and to grow as person, they need to be completely integrated, take part and belong to society and to the Churches and to have the opportunity to give and to receive.¹
2. Over the years, the Faith and Light communities have borne witness to this, mainly in their parish or in the local church of their members and a chaplain (a priest, a pastor or a spiritual guide) has traditionally played an important role in this process. Indeed, our Charter requires each community to be guided by a chaplain.
3. The chaplain represents Jesus who guides the community to the light of the Gospel. His presence confirms that Faith and Light wants to be part of the Christian community where it meets. He can help the community to welcome those with an intellectual disability so that the latter can find a place there, which is theirs.

The testimony of the chaplain

4. The presence of the chaplain with the people with an intellectual disability, their families and their friends is that of a friend and a brother of each member of the community. He is at the service of the community. It is expected that he not only talks about Jesus but also shows him to us. The main thing is for him to be really present.
5. It is through what he is that he proclaims the message of the Gospel and the evangelical values at the heart of Faith and Light. He is a friend like Jesus is a friend, particularly for the little ones, those who are rejected and all those who are suffering. He testifies that each human being can have a real relationship with God and grow spiritually in his own way. He helps, according to circumstances, to bring reconciliation and peace.

¹ *It is the mission of Faith and Light communities to create, for the person with an intellectual disability and his family, a friendship network so that they are respected and loved and that they can in turn share their gifts and wealth. Saint Paul said that the poorest person is called in a special way by God: "But God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1,27). In order to complete this mission, it is important that those with a calling to lead the people of God know all the treasures of grace that are given to a person with an intellectual disability and that are in them. Indeed, it is vital that they are allowed to discover how much the words of Saint Paul are greatly fulfilled in the Church today.*

The Community Chaplain

Community Chaplain statute

6. He is a full member of the community and the Coordinating Team; he supports the community coordinator.
7. The chaplain takes part in the community Coordinating Team meetings. He especially makes sure that the projects and decisions are illuminated by the Gospel.
8. The main role of the chaplain differs from that of the coordinator (whose role is to coordinate). It is very important that the coordinator and the chaplain work closely together whilst respecting each other's specific responsibilities (coordinator: leader, guide... Chaplain: spiritual life).
9. The mandate of the chaplain is for three years and is renewable.

The choice of Community Chaplain

10. The majority of chaplains are proposed by the Coordinating Team or the community itself. Following an appropriate discernment, and in agreement with the Vice-Provincial Coordinator, the Coordinating Team approach the nominated person.
11. If he accepts this appointment, a confirmation will be requested from the relevant ecclesiastical authority named by the chaplain.
12. So that the communities are better integrated into the parish, the choice of chaplain should be made, if possible, in discussion with the priest responsible for the parish/local church.
13. The appointment procedure will be the same for a priest, a deacon or an ordained minister or possibly a member of a religious community or a layperson.
14. In the Catholic Church, a deacon is an ordained minister. He can be nominated chaplain but cannot be the community coordinator. The coordinators are always lay people.
15. Members of a religious order or a congregation who are not priests or deacons can possibly be coordinators if need be but they would be better placed in the role of friend or chaplain if need be.
16. A layperson can be proposed as chaplain on condition that he already carries out a pastoral job recognised by his Church. He can be appointed to hold the office of chaplain to Faith and Light.
17. The community chaplain receives the help and support of the Provincial Chaplain. He will also find support in his contact with other chaplains, in particular within the framework of his attendance at provincial meetings.

Role and mission of the community chaplain

18. The role of chaplain to the whole community and particularly to those members who are the most severely disabled is to help each person to meet Jesus, to live his Gospel and to integrate into his Church.
19. The chaplain is usually the one who presides over the liturgical celebrations and prayers during Faith and Light meetings. He is the link with the Church and the Churches.

20. Depending on his availability, he is invited to visit members of the community.

Leader of prayer

21. The chaplain leads the prayer and, if he is an ordained minister, he is called to preside over the liturgy, be that a Eucharist celebration, a penance ceremony, a liturgy of the word or any other form of celebration. This aspect of community life most particularly comes under his responsibility, although the Coordinating Team are also invited to take an active part. It is important that the disabled people also take part as well as other members of the community.
22. When a liturgical celebration is not planned for the meeting, it is the chaplain's job to ensure that the time of prayer has its place. It is particularly true of Coordinating Team meetings where the community meetings are planned using the Guidelines.

Times of reflection

23. He can also lead the times of reflection and retreats for the whole community or for a particular group of members, families, friends, disabled people, young people or even the Coordinating Team.

Link with the parish and the Church

24. So as to be witnesses of our unique gifts, it is important that our communities make the most of the various events to take part in the life of local churches and society (communal prayers, spiritual formation activities, service to others, community celebrations and pilgrimages, leisure activities...).
25. The community chaplain plays an important role in helping all members to settle in and belong to their own parish and Church.
26. Taking into account his place in the Church, he is called to make Faith and Light and its aims known to the bishop², the clergy and other ecclesiastical authorities.

Ecumenism

27. When the members of a same community come from different parishes or local churches, it helps them to integrate better. Likewise, when the members belong to different Christian faiths, he helps them to deepen their belonging to their own ecclesiastical community.

² *For Faith and Light communities of the Catholic faith, the bishop is the sign and guarantee of the authenticity of their action in the mission of the Church. So that Faith and Light remains faithful to its mission and finds its place in the local Church, it is important that the Faith and Light communities of the diocese see in this pastor, a father who supports them, guides them, illuminates them, confirms them and talks to them.*

Besides the links with the diocesan bishops, for the unity of Faith and Light, it is desirable that amongst the members of the episcopacy of a country, a bishop accepts being the reference bishop of the Faith and Light communities in the country. The movement is linked to the Pontifical Council for the Laity at the Vatican.

The Provincial Chaplain

His statute

28. It is essential that he is a member of a Faith and Light community, be it as a chaplain or as a friend. He takes part in Provincial Team meetings, of which he is a full member with the right to vote.
29. He is either a priest, minister, deacon, religious man/woman or, if necessary, a layman with a pastoral mandate specific to his own Church.
30. The mandate is for four years and is renewable twice.

Nomination

31. When a province is recognised and the Provincial Coordinator elected, a Provincial Chaplain can be officially nominated.³
32. The Vice-International Coordinator writes to the members of the Provincial Team, the community coordinators and the chaplains to ask them to indicate two or three names of people possessing the qualities required to be a Provincial Chaplain.
33. Most often, the Provincial Chaplain is a member of the Church that represents the majority of members. However, in countries where there are a significant number of members belonging to different Churches, it may be preferable, from a pastoral point of view, to name two or more Provincial Chaplains. In some countries, particular adjustments will be necessary.
34. Normally, the Provincial Team, after careful discernment, choose a chaplain and solicit his agreement. Then, if the Provincial Team deem it appropriate, the Provincial Coordinator (or his delegate) contact the relevant ecclesiastical authority that make the decision on his official appointment.

35. Availability

- Attendance at Provincial Team meetings (usually twice a year).
- Attendance at Provincial meetings (at least once every two years or every year if possible).
- Attendance at the Provincial Assembly (every four years).

Role and mission

36. His role is to promote the spirituality of Faith and Light both within the country, to the Provincial Team, chaplains, and communities and in the links with the Churches in his province and abroad, through his commitment to the international movement.

Vis-à-vis the Provincial Team

37. During meetings of the Provincial Team, his role is to be a guide in the prayer and spiritual reflection and he is a support for each of the members. If he is a priest or an ordained minister, he presides, where necessary, over the liturgy.
38. Depending on his available time and his gifts, the Provincial Team can ask him to lead retreats, speak at the formation sessions and create pilgrimages.

³ In a certain number of countries, the nomination of a Provincial Chaplain can prove to be difficult. In this case, it seems more realistic to ask for the appointment of a chaplain to the Provincial Team. His essential role will be to attend Provincial Team meetings and the Provincial Assembly.

Vis-à-vis the Provincial Coordinator

39. He is the spiritual support of the Provincial Coordinator, helping him especially in difficult situations and praying over concerns.

Vis-à-vis Community Chaplains

40. He meets them from time to time (perhaps once a year) for a time of prayer, sharing and deepening of the spirituality of Faith and Light. It is a time of friendship and fraternal support.

41. The Provincial Chaplain is encouraged to use circular letters, telephone calls or visits to maintain links and strengthen the commitment of each person.

Vis-à-vis the Churches in his country

42. If Faith and Light is to make the most of the support of one (or more) reference bishop(s) or reference ministers, the Provincial Chaplain is in contact with them and facilitates the relationship with the Provincial Team.

43. He also keeps in contact with the ecclesiastical authorities of the various Christian denominations present in the communities.

44. He is working for the integration of the Faith and Light communities into the parishes or Local Churches, the dioceses and the national ecclesiastical structures, in accordance with the various Christian faiths. With the Provincial Coordinator, he is fully committed to the development of the ecumenical spirit. All Christians, without exception, are called to realise the call of Jesus: *“That all of them may be one, Father... that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* (Jn 17: 21-23)

Vis-à-vis the international movement

45. If need be, he solicits the help of the International Chaplain to promote the spirituality of Faith and Light.

46. He keeps up to date with the reflection and the priorities of the International Coordinating Team and the Board of Directors of Faith and Light so as to be able to fully participate in the general assembly, every five years, if he is part of his province delegation.

The International Chaplain

47. Availability

1) *At least*

Taking part (and preparing/leading certain areas of the programme) in the following meetings:

1. Four days (plus travelling time) for Board of Directors meetings (twice a year).
2. Four days (plus travelling time) for Coordinating Team meetings (twice a year).

The International Chaplain will especially be approached for one or more speeches, times of prayer and celebration, (as a team), as well as being invited to actively take part in the reflection of the Board and the Team on all broached subjects.

3. Five yearly International Meeting: spiritual deepening of the theme.
4. Meeting with Church Delegates.

2) *Desired collaboration between Board and Team meetings*

- Team work is most often carried out via email with one or more members of the International Coordinating Team or possibly other coordinators or contacts: the commitment of time is difficult to plan but obviously Faith and Light is ready to adapt to the actual availability of the chaplain and anything he gives in the way of time, gifts and abilities will be received as a gift and not a right!
- Revision or opinion on draft memos and documents prepared by the ICT,
- Participation in the preparation and drafting team for the annual Guidelines; (one meeting of a day and half, then by other means such as Skype...)
- Guidance/formation of Provincial Chaplains (letter to chaplains once a year).

3) *Depending on the calls and the needs in the various provinces and his personal availability*

- Meetings with the Provincial Chaplains ...
- Leading of retreats...
- Attendance at formation sessions ...
- Any initiative that seems useful to the International Chaplain and the International Coordinating Team so that the Faith and Light communities become more and more alive and committed to their mission throughout the world!

His statute

48. He is a full member of the Board of Directors and the Coordinating Team, taking part in its reflections and decisions with the right to vote.

49. The mandate is for a duration of five years, renewable once.

50. He is asked to be

- A spiritual guide for the Board of Directors and the Team, by helping them to always be focussed on the Gospel and to deepen their love for Jesus and the spirituality of Faith and Light.
- A witness who invites all the members of Faith and Light to deepen their Christian identity and their faithfulness to the Gospel.
- A reference and a support for questions of a spiritual and theological nature
- A promoter of the ecumenical dimension of Faith and Light and a guide for any questions relating to this subject.

- A link, with the International Coordinator, to the religious authorities of the various Christian Churches;
- A member of a Faith and Light community either as a chaplain or as a friend.

51. Nomination

- Six months before the election of the International Chaplain, the consultation team is put together by the Board of Directors.
- This team writes to all the Provincial Coordinators and chaplains to ask them to reflect on people suitable to fulfil this mission. The coordinators, after consulting their council, and the chaplains will send the names of the three people chosen by them and the reasons for their choices back to the team.
- At the Board of Directors meeting that follows, it carries out the discernment in accordance with the usual Faith and Light procedures.
- The agreement of the chaplain whose name has been retained is requested. If his response is positive, confirmation is solicited from the appropriate ecclesiastical authority. The names of two other candidates are kept in the discernment in case the candidate does not accept his nomination or the relevant authority does not grant its approval.
- His reference person is the International Coordinator.