

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO



SPIRITUAL CARE



CHAPLAINCY
Innovation Lab

Introduction

This eBook is designed for people considering work as spiritual care providers. Often called chaplains, spiritual care providers work in healthcare, the military, prisons, higher education, community settings, some workplaces, and a range of other spaces.

There is no single definition of a chaplain or spiritual care provider and no single path for entering the work. This guide is intended to suggest places to start and to guide you. This eBook also suggests questions and possible paths forward.

If you are not sure where to begin, consider whether you would rather start with book learning or more experiential approaches.

If a classroom setting seems best, look for a seminary, theological, rabbinical, or professional religious school near you that allows community members to take classes as non-degree students.

Look for a class in chaplaincy, spiritual care, or pastoral care and counseling and try it. Sometimes a college degree is required to enroll. If you do not have a college degree, look for classes in counseling or religious studies at a local community college.

If an experiential approach better suits, look for a local hospital that offers extended units of clinical pastoral education (CPE) and consider starting there. CPE is a reflective model, a kind of hands-on clinical training in healthcare or another setting through which you learn to do this work by practicing it with a group of other students.



Most CPE takes place in multi-faith groups and includes interactions with patients and staff as well as other CPE students.

What is a chaplain or spiritual care provider?

Chaplains in the United States today range from volunteers who may or may not have some formal training to highly trained professionals with multiple degrees. The federal government uses a specific definition of chaplain to hire individuals with graduate

theological education and the endorsement or support of their religious organizations into positions in the [Veterans Administration](#), [federal prisons](#), and the [Air Force](#), [Army](#) and [Navy](#).

People called chaplains work in [NASCAR pits](#), the [National Science Foundation’s base in Antarctica](#), and the [Olympics](#). In healthcare, most people called chaplains have a graduate degree, completed clinical education, and (as in the federal government) are endorsed by their religious organizations. At their best, chaplains offer compassion real to people in vulnerable moments of their lives.

Dictionary definitions help with the history of the term chaplain but do not begin to address the wide variation in how it is used today. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines chaplain along very narrow, historical lines, calling a chaplain first “the priest, clergyman [sic] or minister of a chapel” and then:

Clergyman [sic] who conducts religious services in the private chapel of a sovereign, lord or high official, of a castle, garrison, embassy, college, school, workhouse, prison, cemetery, or other institution, or in the household of a person of rank of quality in a legislative chamber, regime, ship, etc.

More chaplains today are calling themselves or being called spiritual care providers in an effort to be more inclusive and move away from the Christian origins of the term chaplain. People from all religious and spiritual backgrounds work as spiritual care providers.

Where do spiritual care providers and chaplains work?

Chaplains work in the military, healthcare, prisons, higher education, airports, seaports, police and fire departments, government settings, disaster zones, with sports teams, in social movements, and in a range of community organizations.

SECTORS TO CONSIDER

Click any sector you’re interested below for more detailed information on our website:

Airports	Higher Education	Seaports
Corrections	Military	Social Justice
Crises	Municipal	Tele-chaplaincy
Government	Palliative Care	Workplace
Healthcare	Recreation	More

Some chaplains lead local congregations and volunteer as chaplains on the side while others work more full-time as chaplains. Full-time positions for spiritual care providers are largely available in healthcare, the military, prisons, and higher education.

Read more about current chaplains in our [This is What a Chaplain Looks Like](#) project and read about their current work through the Lab's [multimedia](#) resources or [news](#).

What is the daily work of a chaplain like?

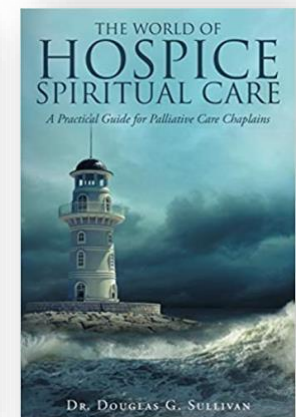
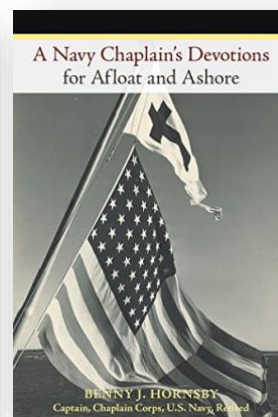
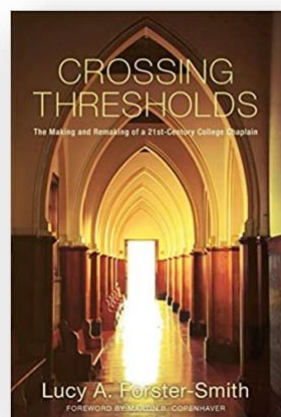
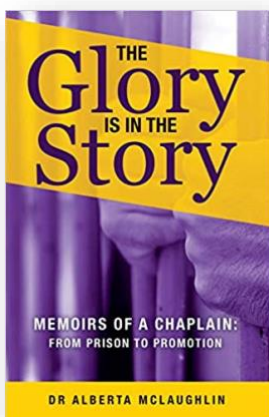
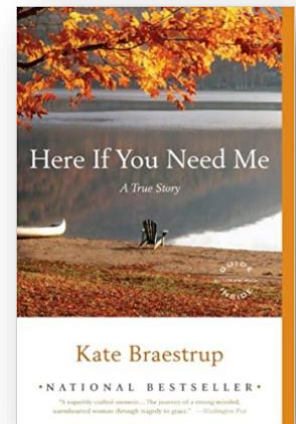
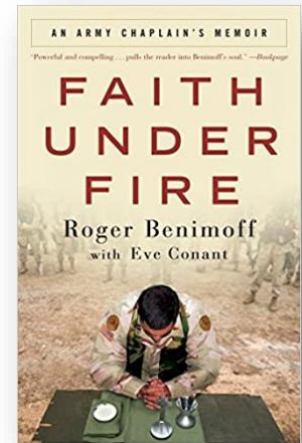
First and foremost, chaplains provide compassionate presence to vulnerable people in need of spiritual care. That said, the work varies significantly by the setting in which chaplains work. Watch the documentary film [CHAPLAINS](#) for an overview and review Lab webinars in which chaplains from different backgrounds talk about their work:

- [Trauma Chaplaincy](#)
- [Healthcare Chaplaincy](#)
- [Higher Education Chaplaincy](#)
- [Hospice Chaplaincy](#)
- [From Education to Employment: The Demand Side of Spiritual Care](#)
- [Black Wellness in Higher Education](#)
- [Contemporary Muslim Chaplaincy](#)
- [Spiritual Care with LGBT Older Adults](#)

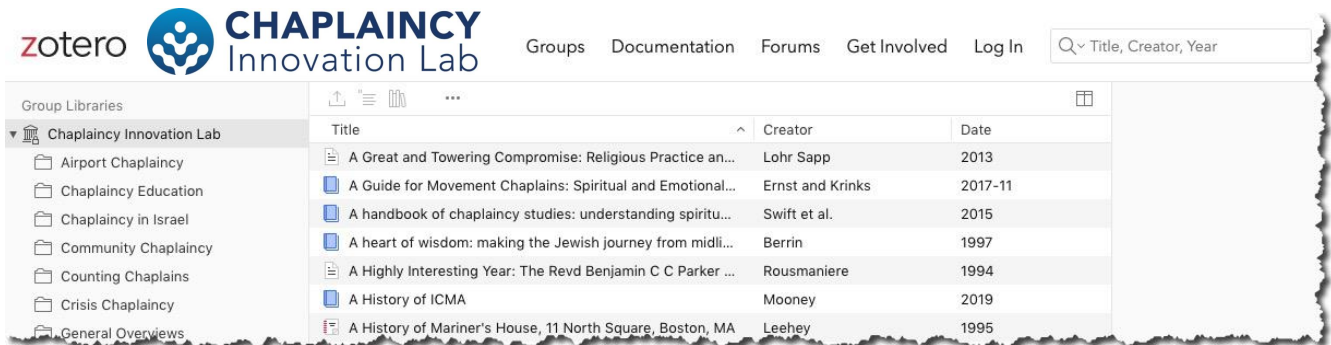


Consider reading first person accounts by chaplains including:

- [Faith Under Fire: An Army Chaplain's Memoir](#) by Roger Benimoff
- [Here If You Need Me: A True Story](#) by Kate Braestrup
- [On Living](#) by Kerry Egan
- [Crossing Thresholds: The Making and Remaking of a 21st-Century College Chaplain](#) by Lucy Forster-Smith
- [A Navy Chaplain's Devotions for Afloat and Ashore](#) by Benny J. Hornsby
- [The Glory Is In The Story: Memoirs of a Chaplain: From Prison to Promotion](#) by Alberta McLaughlin
- [Within These Walls: Memoirs of a Death House Chaplain](#) by Carroll Pickett
- [The World of Hospice Spiritual Care: A Practical Guide for Palliative Care Chaplains](#) by Douglas G Sullivan



More resources for and about chaplains are available through the Lab's [research bibliography](#).



What training is required to become a chaplain?

Training requirements vary based on where you want to work. Positions as chaplains with the federal government - in the military, federal prisons, and the veterans administration - require a graduate theological degree, the endorsement of a religious organization (described below), some work experience, and to pass age and physical fitness tests as outlined [here](#).

Most positions in healthcare - in hospitals, hospice and palliative care, retirement and nursing facilities - require a graduate theological degree and one or more units of clinical training through the [Association for Clinical Pastoral Education](#) or a [similar organization](#).



Some hospitals now prefer chaplains to be [board certified](#), which requires a graduate theological degree, four units of clinical pastoral education, work experience, and an application and approval process.

In higher education, a graduate theological degree is usually required but not clinical training. In most other settings, the training requirements are more flexible and locally determined. In addition to degrees offered by seminaries and theological schools, there are a range of online and virtual training options for spiritual care and chaplaincy. Before you invest in any training, we

encourage you to talk to current chaplains in the settings where you might want to work or volunteer to learn more about the qualifications required to work there. We can help connect you to such chaplains through the [Chaplaincy Innovation Lab](#).

Job and Career Prospects

Where are there full-time jobs for chaplains and where are their part-time jobs?

If you aim to make a living as a chaplain, we encourage you to focus on sectors where there are full-time jobs for chaplains. These include the military, federal prisons, some state prisons, the Veterans Administration, healthcare including hospitals, hospices, and retirement and nursing facilities and higher education.

There are some full-time positions in other settings but these are fewer and further between. Check out [current job listings](#) to get a sense of the kinds of positions available and their geographic locations. In urban areas with graduates looking for chaplaincy positions, positions in hospice are often most plentiful. There are part-time positions in many sectors though in some - notably municipal and social movements - many chaplains are volunteers. It is common for chaplains to combine part-time paid or volunteer work in spiritual care with paid full- or part-time positions in other settings.

Where can I look to see about job openings for chaplains?

Check out [current job listings](#) to get a sense of the kinds of positions available and their geographic locations.

Job Search Resources

Begin Your Job Search Here!

This is a job-resource list that includes job boards and listings on various websites. These websites range from chaplain-specific job boards to more general job boards. Chaplain-oriented websites are linked to their home page. More generalized job boards include a link to the chaplains' section of that site.

How to use: These *are not* individual job postings, but are links to resources of where to begin your job search. They are sorted alphabetically by category and then individual site. These links are updated often and we recommend using these resources as a master list for beginning your job search.

CLICK THE PLUS SIGN (+) TO SEE DETAILS

Corporate

✦ Corporate Chaplains of America

Education

✦ Association for Christian Student Development



How much money do chaplains make?

We are working to gather that information now and will update the answer here as soon as we have it. Until then, consider checking [Glassdoor](#) or other online resources and putting in your geographic location. You should feel comfortable asking about general salary expectations if you participate in our [pilot mentor program](#).

More on Training and Certification

What is Clinical Training / CPE?

In some settings, clinical training is required for work as a chaplain or spiritual care provider. There are several clinical training organizations in the United States with different approaches to training and certifications, including from the U.S. Department of Education. Each is described [here](#).

[ACPE](#): the Standard for Spiritual Care Education is the largest and oldest accredited clinical training organization. ACPE Educators offer clinical pastoral education (CPE) at more than 450 locations across the United States, many of which combine onsite and online learning opportunities.



Classes - called units - of clinical pastoral education are experiential, typically taking place in healthcare and other settings where students interact with patients and clients as part of their training. Students learn in small groups with other students and an educator. The training includes a combination of group work, individual conversation, and time spent with patients and clients.

Most CPE is interfaith, bringing theological students and leaders of all faiths into supervised encounters with persons in crisis. Out of an intense involvement with persons in need, and the feedback from peers and teachers, students develop new awareness of themselves as persons and of the needs of those to whom they minister.

From theological reflection on specific human situations, they gain a new understanding of ministry. Within the interdisciplinary team process of helping persons, they develop skills in interpersonal and interprofessional relationships.

Most units average 400 hours - 300 in experiential caregiving and 100 in process and content learning. Some settings offer residencies, which are 3-4 consecutive units that take place over a calendar year in a full-time work/training context. Each CPE training center reviews and admits its own students. Guidelines for finding a center and applying are [here](#). Each center sets its own fees and timelines for applications and units.

CPE training is divided into Level 1, Level 2, and Educator CPE. Students must complete the learning objectives at each level before advancing to the next. These objectives are evaluated by Educators and / or Committees. We encourage students considering CPE to talk with current CPE students at the centers they are considering, to learn more about the approach of the Educator and whether their skills and approach would be a good match.

Chaplaincy jobs require between zero and four units of CPE. Check listings for the kinds of positions you are interested in when deciding how much CPE to do.

What is Endorsement?

Some jobs in chaplaincy and spiritual care require the endorsement of a religious or spiritual organization. Stated most simply, endorsement is a stamp of approval that you are in an accountable relationship with a spiritual or religious organization.

Endorsement typically implies that you are fully qualified as a religious leader in the tradition you claim.

Different sectors have different rules about who can endorse those they employ as chaplains. Positions in the military, federal prisons, and the Veterans Administration require endorsement. Chaplaincy and spiritual care positions in most other settings often do not. Some - like in higher education - may require candidates to be ordained but this tends to be institution specific.



To work as a military chaplain, you must be endorsed by a religious group recognized by the [Armed Forces Chaplains Board](#). This Board recognizes about 200 [endorsing organizations](#). While the majority of them are Christian, endorsers from other religious traditions are included. If you are not recognized by one of these endorsing organizations, you will not be eligible to become a military chaplain. Conversations between several groups excluded from this list and the Department of Defense are ongoing.

To work as a chaplain in a federal prison, you also have to be endorsed by a religious group. There is no standard list of endorsers for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, as explained [here](#). For the most part the same person or office handles all federal endorsements in most traditions. If you are having difficulty identifying the endorser in your tradition for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, try contacting the military or VA endorser.

The Veterans Administration (VA) also requires candidates for their chaplaincy position be endorsed by a recognized VA endorser, listed [here](#). Federal prisons and the VA recognize a wider range of endorsers than does the military.

Increasingly spiritual care and chaplaincy positions in healthcare organizations require people to be [board certified chaplains](#). To become board certified, you must have a master's degree with graduate-level theological education, clinical pastoral education, endorsement/support from a recognized faith group and demonstrated competency in functioning as a chaplain. This is detailed in the document [Qualifications for Board Certified and Associate Certified Chaplains](#).

A [wide range of spiritual and religious groups](#) are recognized as endorsers for healthcare chaplains. In recent years, endorsement has been extended to more Buddhist and humanist organizations. The [Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministry](#) has also recently been recognized as an endorser for healthcare chaplains.

What is certification?

As noted above, increasingly spiritual care and chaplaincy positions in healthcare organizations require people to be [board certified chaplains](#). To become board certified, you must have a master's degree with graduate-level theological education, clinical pastoral education, endorsement/support from a recognized faith group and demonstrated competency in functioning as a chaplain.

This is detailed in the document, [Qualifications for Board Certified and Associate Certified Chaplains](#). A [wide range of spiritual and religious groups](#) are recognized as endorsers for healthcare chaplains (see above).

[Specialty certifications](#) are also now available in hospice and palliative care and chaplaincy military.



I'm getting overwhelmed with the details, particularly of the training process, which sounds really bureaucratic. Can you lay it out step by step?

Yes!

- We recommend that you start by taking a class in: Spiritual care, Chaplaincy, Pastoral care, Counseling as a non-degree student at a local theological school, OR by enrolling in a single unit of clinical pastoral education (CPE), perhaps part time - which is called an “extended unit”
- If these experiences lead you to want to continue training to become a chaplain, consider the kinds of settings you might want to work in and look closely at the requirements for employment there.
- If you will be seeking full-time employment, make sure that is an option in the setting where you want to work.
- If you do not have a graduate theological degree (typically a Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in one of several fields, or a master’s degree from a rabbinical school) consider how you might earn one.
- In some settings, like hospice, a related master’s degree might allow you to get a job; read job ads and talk to current chaplains in that setting. If the setting where you want to work requires clinical pastoral education (CPE), consider how you will get that training and support yourself financially in the process.
- If you hope to work in the military, federal prisons, the Veterans Administration or healthcare, also make a plan for being endorsed and - in healthcare - certified. All of this training will take many years - we encourage you to plan accordingly.

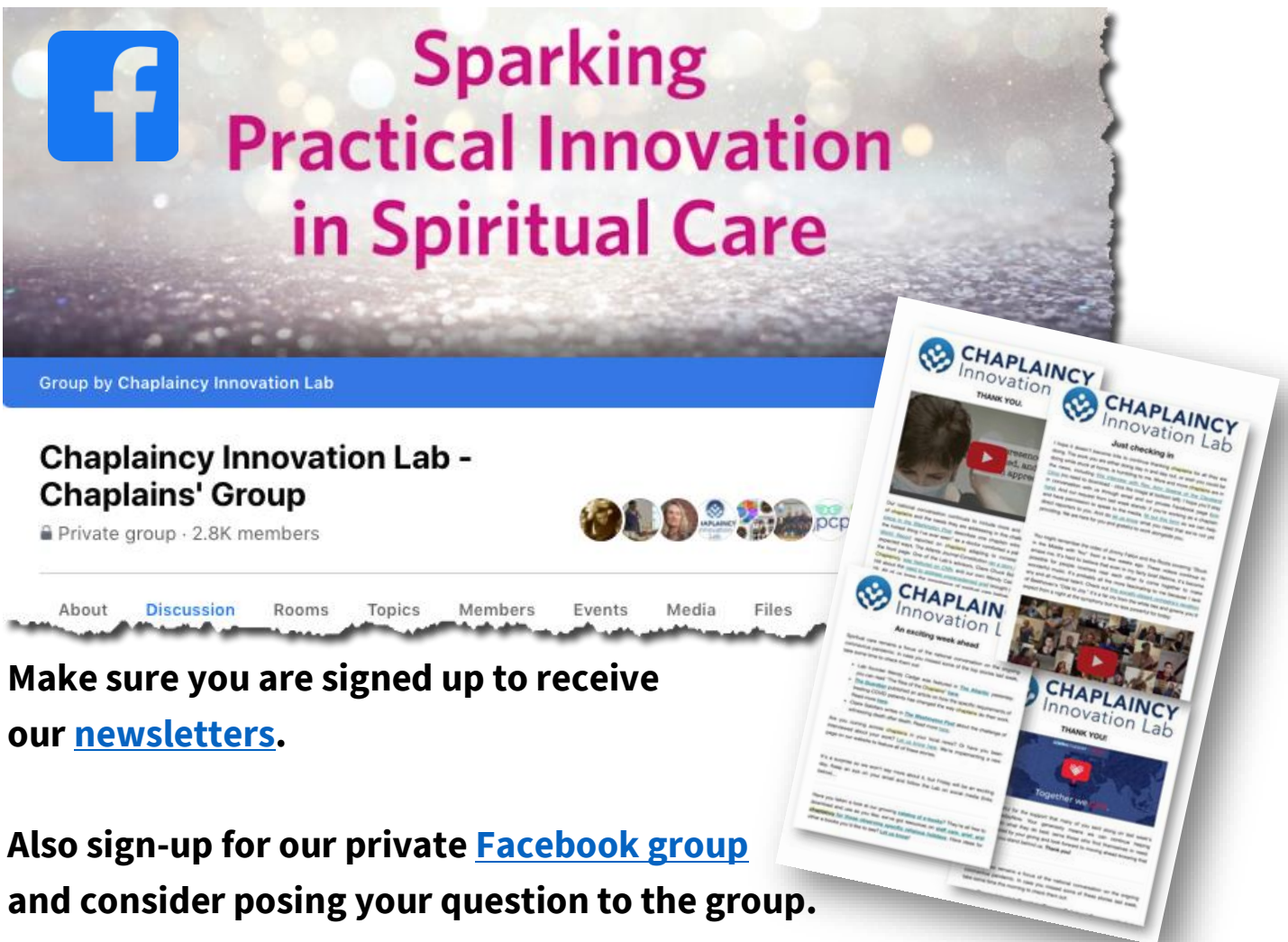
Remember there are ways to do some of the work of chaplaincy and spiritual care without such a long training process, particularly given your past experiences. Consider options with local religious organizations, social service organizations and / or hospital/hospice volunteer programs if they might meet your needs just as well.

We encourage you to talk with current chaplains and educators as you work through the process of becoming a chaplain. We can introduce you to some through the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab's [pilot mentoring program](#). This program will connect mentors and mentees for three conversations of 45-60 minutes via phone or Zoom. To learn more, email Michael Skaggs, Director of Programs [email](#) or sign up using [this form](#).

[Other FAQs](#)

Is there someone I can talk with if I'd like more information?

Yes, email [Michael Skaggs](#), Director of Programs with your question and he will connect you to someone who can help. If you are interested in work in a particular kind of setting, consider contacting the [relevant professional association](#).



The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook group page for 'Chaplaincy Innovation Lab - Chaplains' Group'. The page header features a blue Facebook logo and the text 'Sparking Practical Innovation in Spiritual Care'. Below the header, it says 'Group by Chaplaincy Innovation Lab'. The group name is 'Chaplaincy Innovation Lab - Chaplains' Group' and it is a 'Private group' with '2.8K members'. Navigation tabs include 'About', 'Discussion', 'Rooms', 'Topics', 'Members', 'Events', 'Media', and 'Files'. To the right, there is a collage of several newsletters from 'CHAPLAINCY Innovation Lab' with titles like 'THANK YOU!', 'Just checking in', 'An exciting week ahead', and 'Together we...'. The newsletters contain text, photos, and video thumbnails.

Make sure you are signed up to receive our [newsletters](#).

Also sign-up for our private [Facebook group](#) and consider posing your question to the group.

What if I don't belong to a religious or spiritual group?

Good question! Only chaplaincy positions in some sectors / institutions require membership in a religious or spiritual group. Consider joining the Lab's private [Facebook group](#) for chaplains to seek support or ask for advice from people in situations like yours that have navigated these paths before. For example, the Humanist Society is an organization for many who self-define as spiritual but not religious have found as helpful.

What if my religious or spiritual group does not offer endorsement?

If you want to work in a position that requires endorsement, you will not be able to do so unless you can be endorsed. For some, endorsement is as simple as a letter from a predetermined authority, sometimes even the head of a local congregation or religious group. Some people have switched religious or spiritual groups in order for this to be possible. Send us an email with your question / situation and we will try to connect you with someone who also faced this challenge recently. Also sign up for our private [Facebook group](#) and consider posing your question to the group.

What kind of courses/what kinds of things I should learn to be prepared?

We suggest courses in pastoral care and counseling, trauma, psychology, organizational systems and group dynamics, and world religions. Courses in leadership, social psychology and cultural theory are also helpful.

What school would be the best for jumping into becoming a chaplain?

More and more theological schools are starting degree programs for people interested in working in spiritual care and chaplaincy.

A complete list of degree programs is [here](#). Write to Michael Skaggs, Director of Programs or ask in the private [Facebook group](#) for alums of particular programs of interest and ask people about their experiences.



The screenshot shows the 'Education / Degree Programs' page on the CHAPLAINCY Innovation Lab website. The page features a search bar and a table with columns for Name, Tradition (Broad), Tradition (Specific), City, State, and Type of program. The table lists several programs, including those from Abilene Christian University, Academy for Jewish Religion, Acadia Divinity College, and Ambrose Seminary of Ambrose University.

Name	Tradition (Broad)	Tradition (Specific)	City	State	Type of program
Abilene Christian University	Christian	Churches of Christ	Abilene	TX	MDiv with chaplaincy concentration
Academy for Jewish Religion	Jewish	Interdenominational Jewish	Los Angeles	CA	Master of Jewish Studies
Academy for Jewish Religion - CA	Jewish	Interdenominational Jewish	Los Angeles	CA	MDiv or equivalent with chaplaincy specialization (N) Clinical Training Center
Acadia Divinity College	Christian	Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada	Wolfville	NS	MDiv with chaplaincy concentration
Ambrose Seminary of Ambrose University	Christian	Christian and Missionary Alliance	Calgary	AB	MA with chaplaincy concentration

Also consider taking a [unit of CPE](#) before you jump into a degree program to see if your perspective changes once you start to get your feet wet, so to speak.

What role does technology play in the work of spiritual care and chaplaincy especially in response to COVID-19?

Many degree programs, CPE programs and chaplains pivoted to working remotely with the COVID-19 pandemic and there are many resources about tele-chaplaincy on the Lab's website. Whether and how this will continue to be part of the work of chaplain's is an open question.

- [Tele-chaplaincy Webinar](#)
- [Prayers for those affected by Covid-19](#)
- [Spiritual Practices for the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)
- [Supportive Care Coalition's COVID-19 Resources](#)

How do you handle being a pioneer when starting off in a position of marginality?

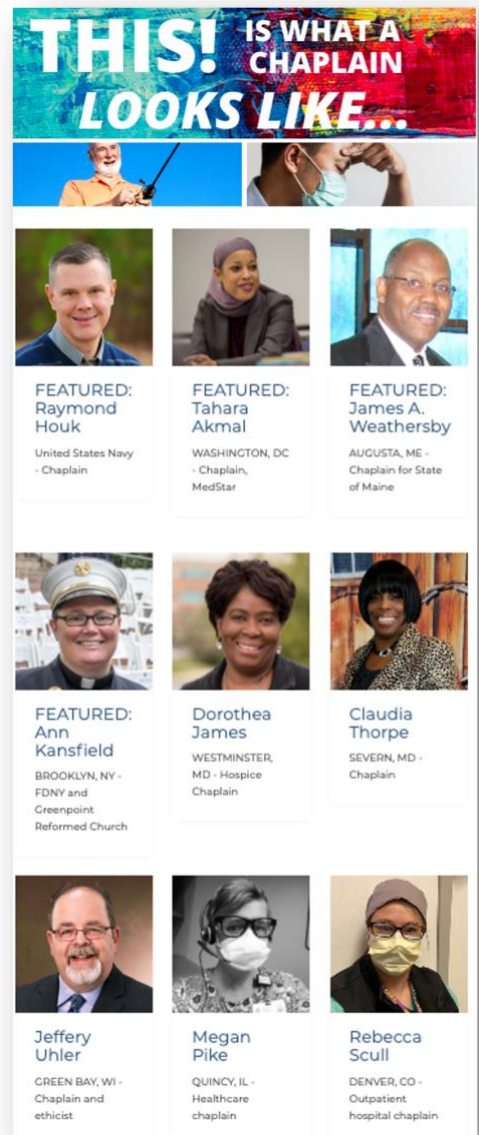
Experienced chaplains answer this question by encouraging you to be yourself and to know your own strengths and weaknesses.

Look for a [mentor](#) or sponsor. There are a very broad range of people who do the work of chaplaincy and we believe there is space for all who want to join the field.

How do you advise exploring different sectors in which I might want to work as a chaplain?

Review the Lab's [past webinars](#) and listen to how chaplains in different settings work. Also learn from and about the [professional organizations](#) in different settings.

You can also connect with people in those settings through the Lab's [private Facebook group](#).





ChaplaincyInnovation.org

Please visit us [on Facebook, LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

