

## Croydon's senior hospital chaplain departs on a high note

Senior Chaplain Revd Hilary Fife has retired from Croydon University Hospital after 27 years of remarkable service - the first five as a newly ordained chaplaincy volunteer.

Hilary has helped thousands of patients and families find peace and perspective during their most difficult times, as well as bringing joy to the Hospital and community.

A lively leaving event, including singing, tributes and a service, was held at the Hospital's St Barnabas Chapel on 30 May 2018.

During the ceremony the Bishop of Southwark, The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, ceremonially received the keys of St Barnabas Chapel from Hilary. He also awarded Hilary the Lancelot Andrewes Medal which recognises 'her Godly Service and Zeal for the Gospel in this Our Diocese'. He said:

*"With standing room only in the Chapel, the Service was itself a tribute to Hilary's quiet, purposeful and utterly dedicated ministry to the whole hospital community over many years. In developing effective multi-faith chaplaincy Hilary has ensured that needs are met holistically - body, mind and spirit. May we all receive from God the necessary gifts of love and patience to serve likewise."*

**As the Hospital's Senior Chaplain, Hilary's remarkable leadership and achievements include:**

- With the Chaplaincy team, developing many new services including Bereavement Support Services.
- Officiating at hundreds of funerals and extending this spiritual support to when babies have tragically passed away in the very early stages of pregnancy.
- Leading the transformation of the Hospital Chaplaincy from a Christian team into a very diverse one, with around 20 active faith community representatives from across all local faiths.
- Providing trained counselling and spiritual support to thousands of patients who requested it.

- A decade ago, she raised more than £60k towards an appeal to fully refurbish the Hospital's St Barnabas Chapel, including installing heating and restoring the stained glass windows. All faiths use the chapel and also its Garden of Healing and Wholeness.
- Developing a team of more than 90 trained volunteers focused on helping patients, families and staff with their emotional, pastoral and spiritual needs.
- Running concerts, giving talks at local churches, producing homemade Chapel Chutney, teaching and other activities that also raise funds that make the large Chaplaincy self-funding apart from two salaries.

**Commenting on her departure, Hilary said:**

*"My decades here have been incredibly powerful and emotional. There is a profoundly deep bond between faith, healthcare and community.*

*"Life can be difficult and we all need continuity in our lives. Some 20 years ago I baptised twins and, sadly, one later lost his life. Now his twin is a talented football coach for a national team and is still in touch with me. It is a total privilege to be part of other people's lives from one generation to the next.*

*"One remarkable moment was when the fiancé of a patient sought our urgent help. It was a tragic situation because her partner had only hours to live – weeks before their wedding date. Hospital colleagues were so amazing that, together, we were able to officially marry the couple within 2.5 hours. Her fiancé recovered consciousness during the ceremony and he lived for one more week. It was a tremendous comfort for them and I will never forget it.*

*"I'm also very proud that our Chaplaincy provides a much wider range of support than ever before. For example in past decades there was no ceremony or spiritual service for parents who lost their child in the earlier stages of pregnancy. Now they will always receive a full cremation and ceremony, which makes a huge difference to parents and gives them a location and an event to remember.*

*"I owe so much to our vital network of faith community leaders throughout Croydon, who ensure we support people of all faiths. Croydon's diversity enriches all of us and it has definitely made our Chaplaincy stronger.*

*"I also owe a huge debt to Revd Ian Woodroffe, who was Senior Chaplain when I first came here in 1991. Ladies couldn't be ordained priests back then, but Ian encouraged me with growing responsibilities from the moment I was ordained. Later he suggested I become a full Chaplain. He always saw my potential, despite my fears that I was too squeamish and inexperienced to handle difficult events in healthcare!*

*“Although I’m leaving Croydon University Hospital I am not leaving ministry and look forward to whatever happens next. I hope that there will be many other ways in the future I can offer pastoral and spiritual care within my community and to people I’ve met during my time here. I will forever be grateful for the amazing colleagues I have worked with, the wonderful people I have been privileged to minister to and all they have shared with me and taught me.”*

**Speakers at the event included:**

- Dr Satkurunathan Maheshwaran (Consultant Radiologist) representing the Hindu community.
- Mr Shuaib Yusaf (Trustee of Croydon Mosque & Islamic Centre and CEO of the Al-Khair Foundation) representing the Muslim community.
- Sr Sheila Moloney (Volunteer) representing the Roman Catholic community.
- Mr Nirmal Singh Kalsi (Volunteer) representing the Sikh community.
- Mr John Goulston (Chief Executive of the Trust).
- Revd Andy Dovey (Ecumenical Chaplain of the Trust).

Hilary’s successor will be decided later this year.