

## **Wetherby Racecourse Chaplaincy - a letter to the churches.**

The introduction of chaplaincy at Wetherby racecourse began with various informal discussions, led by the York racecourse and Ryedale horseracing chaplains, with Churches Together in Wetherby and with Jonjo Sanderson the Chief Executive of Wetherby racecourse. Each of the latter have expressed their support and it is hoped that individual members of Wetherby's churches will take the opportunity to consider the ministry that chaplaincy offers in public spaces and at sporting events.

The Racecourse Chaplaincy at York Racecourse is perhaps the first and only (so far) of its kind, which in 2015 covered all 17 days of racing. It is truly unique in its provision to both sport and event chaplaincy and involves lay and ordained members from different churches. Some, including the team leader John Mook, are members of *sportschaplaincyuk* and have a working relationship with the national racing chaplain Simon Bailey, who is based in Newmarket.

When Royal Ascot Week was held on York's Knavesmire course in 2010, it was the Street Angels who provided people with space, support and a friendly ear. But in August of 2015 it was a team of six chaplains who were on duty on each of the four days of the Ebor festival with crowds of 22,000 spectators and over 2,000 racecourse employees. On occasions the crowds grew to 35,000 people.

The team of chaplains is drawn from the City of York and the Churches Together in Southern Ryedale. For the latter, the Chaplaincy Everywhere course was an integral part of their preparation, with each chaplain involved in serving the racing industry throughout the year: on the gallops, in the stables and at numerous other events in Malton and North Yorks.

Peter Clark, one of the racecourse chaplains who also visits the racing stables and yards in Malton, believes that Chaplaincy is about making sure that people have access to pastoral and spiritual support if they need it. It's about making sure the church connects with people where they are at and not just within a church building.

The Chaplaincy Everywhere material provides an ideal opportunity for people who are considering chaplaincy and their own ministry to discern its place as part of God's mission. It is this study material that has informed and supported the work of the Racing Chaplains. If the opportunity to work alongside experienced chaplains at Wetherby racecourse interests you please get in touch with your pastor, minister, priest or church leader and begin a conversation on a very special 'open air' ministry.

It is envisaged that the Chaplaincy team would attempt to be present at all the race meetings at Wetherby and that there would always be at least two people on any one day. There is already a core of chaplains involved and whilst continuity is valuable it is recognised that not everyone can be ever present. Having a presence from Wetherby churches is invaluable, as it affirms the importance of racing to the local communities economy in which some 30 different companies are involved in any one day of racing.

We look forward to sharing in this very significant work with members of the Wetherby churches in the very near future.

John Mook and Peter Clark.