

Dr Mansur Ali & Khadija Sulaiman

Shepherding the Police: The Journey of a Female Muslim Chaplain to Multifaith Police Chaplaincy Lead

This presentation examines the professional trajectory of a British Muslim woman who became a Multifaith Police Chaplaincy Lead, focusing specifically on the spiritual care dimensions of her work and the challenges encountered across NHS, prison, and police settings. Through a qualitative narrative interview, the study traces how her early experiences as a hospital chaplain—caring for critically ill children, supporting bereaved families, and practising non-directive pastoral presence—formed the core of her spiritual care ethos. These foundational encounters, often emotionally taxing and shaped by her own identity as a mother, reveal how chaplains negotiate the porous boundaries between personal and professional emotion in contexts of suffering and death.

As she transitioned into police chaplaincy, the participant confronted a distinct landscape in which spiritual care is both highly sought and systematically obscured. Police officers overwhelmingly preferred pastoral support over religious instruction, yet organisational stigma surrounding mental health rendered chaplaincy support simultaneously essential, confidential, and difficult to quantify. Her account highlights the structural challenge of delivering spiritual care in environments where wellbeing needs are acute but must remain anonymous, raising questions about how chaplaincy is evaluated and legitimised within public institutions.

Layered onto these organisational dynamics are intersectional challenges: gendered exclusion, theological gatekeeping by male Muslim colleagues, and racialised expectations within a predominantly Christian chaplaincy culture. These experiences shaped both her professional identity and her commitment to creating a genuinely multifaith, spiritually inclusive chaplaincy model.

By centring spiritual care and the complex barriers surrounding it, the paper contributes to wider debates on chaplaincy work, minority religious leadership, and the emotional and institutional labour required to sustain pastoral presence in contemporary public services.



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Dr Mansur Ali is a Senior lecturer in Islamic studies at Cardiff University where he teaches Islam and ethics, and Islam in Britain. He has multiple research interests including Hadith studies, Islamic legal theory, Muslim chaplaincy, and Islam and bioethics. Currently he is writing a book on Islam and organ transplantation. In addition to his post at the University, he is also an Imam in the local mosque.



Khadija Sulaiman

Police Chaplaincy UK

Khadija Sulaiman is the Multi-Faith Lead Chaplain for West Midlands Police and the first Muslim to lead a chaplaincy team for a police force in the country. She provides pastoral support, ethical guidance and strategic leadership across one of the most diverse forces in the UK.

She has produced the Force's first multifaith strategy - strengthening trust between police and the communities whilst supporting officers to bring their whole selves to work. With a background in interfaith engagement and community cohesion, she has provided consultation to other organisations to enhance their diversity and inclusion strategies.