

Pastoral

The advent of low fee Anglican schools over the past ten years has provided, I believe, an opportunity to develop a model of Anglican schooling independent of the GPS model of the past. The Diocese of Grafton, which stretches from Tweed Heads to Port Macquarie has engaged in the development of Anglican schools which serve the not just the Anglicans of the diocese but the community at large. That community is rural but is undergoing a process of rapid urbanisation on the coastal fringe attracting many who have left Sydney and Melbourne seeking a lifestyle change. They are both retirees and families with young children. Regardless of age, because of the nature of the property markets in the cities they are cashed up and are rapidly pushing up property prices to the extent that towns further inland are experiencing a resurgence .

The school community reflects the diverse composition of the community at large and unlike the catholic system the term Anglican seems to represent a generalist approach to the Christian ethic which isn't Catholic. Yet the Diocese of Grafton although like most anglican diocese manifestts the full spectrum of evangelical, charismatic, middle and high church traditions, its character over all places emphasis on sacramental worship and strong regard for sound scriptural teaching. What to many outside the church must appear to be a lack of any specific ethos Anglicanism's diversity makes it ideally suited to form the foundational spirituality of a school.

It has been my experience that parents enrolling their children in our school are seeking just such a style of religious influence, which is not the proscriptive model offered by the Catholic school system nor the radical fundamentalist Christian community schools. Inevitably, some will happily use the term 'Anglican' in order to find a niche in the education market where students are seen as the cash crop. Undoubtedly the marketing value of Anglican has been tarnished by recent events in the church.

The underlying raison d'etre for schools termed 'Anglican' is more than a marketing ploy. As schools they are by definition places of

learning where individuals acquire not just academic skills, but strategies that will equip them to deal with the variations of life. The threefold foundation of Anglicanism of Scripture, tradition and reason again is ideally suited to 'school or faith community'. For a community to commune there needs to be focal point, a reason for gathering which is not just for academic pursuits. The liturgical coathanger provided by the Anglican church is diverse, flexible and abounding in wisdom. The liturgy explained, understood and practised becomes comfortable and engaging. For children, adolescents, staff and parents, churched and unchurched the liturgical celebration of life events simply brings the community together and the opportunity to use the wide variety of liturgically formatted celebrations within a school setting is educationally sound.

The opportunity to teach students, staff and parents who are encouraged to engage not only with their minds, but their spirits and souls as well represents a style of teaching that is interactive and holistic. From the blessing of rowing skulls, imposition of ashes, manufacture of palm crosses to the solemn observances of Anzac Day, induction of school leaders set in the Eucharist, which provides the wonderful model of Jesus' servant leadership to the celebration of the major feasts of the church calendar and the marking of rites of passage such as baptism, first communion, marriage and funerals each liturgical activity touches different sections of the school community. An interesting pattern has emerged with marriages being celebrated primarily amongst the staff, funerals have very much focussed on the deaths of parents and grandparents and baptisms have focussed on the children of staff, students and younger siblings from K - yr11 and parents. Again, the eucharist at school on the first and second Sundays brings staff, parents and both former and present students together. The Anglican liturgies at our disposal are to me impressive teaching aids which can engage all the senses and interpretation can be left to the individual. How else can such a diverse community be ministered to which honours scripture, tradition and reason.

The school community presents many progressive milestones in the lives of students which automatically engage those of other generations. From the liturgical celebration of grandparents for the stage 1 students to the blessing of the yr12 students at their graduation formal the 'Anglican' in the school name speaks more than a marketing tag. It is unlikely to flood the Australian society with Anglicans as was probably one of the hopes of the congregation which launched into the daunting task of establishing a school. Yet it would be true to say that far more lives have been ministered to than would have been possible for a parish based ministry.

For the chaplain the school community differs from parish ministry in that belief conformity is not a condition for membership of that community. Indeed the role of the chaplain or any teacher for that matter is not to attempt to develop belief conformity but rather to provide a safe haven for the developing, testing, rejecting and acquiring and honouring of a spectrum of beliefs and for each individual to have ownership of a part of that spectrum.

Welfare

The term welfare may be taken to refer to the pastoral care of parents, staff and students at points in their lives when stress, distress, or the pressures of life result in some dysfunctional behaviour. The dysfunction may manifest in the form of behaviour shift, application to work and academic achievement, relationships with peers and staff or colleagues and many other indicators which will prompt a response from the carers of the community.

It is in this area that a spirit of antidisestablishmentarianism needs to abound.

Pastoral care and intervention is the mission of the church and very much part of the ethos of an Anglican community as exemplified throughout the Gospels by Jesus. And as Jesus gathered a group or team to minister to the needs of those around, so too the school community in all its diversity needs a team approach from PC teachers

and subject teachers to the heads of school, principal, chaplain and psychologists both cognitive and behavioural all engaged in various levels of counselling. All staff and students are encouraged to see that peer support, awareness of need in others and an appropriate procedure to address those concerns is an imperative not only from the point of a caring community but also because it is a corporate imperative governed by law. When we talk of a school which is a safe and caring community we tend to shift into a different mindset which sees the creation of policies in order to deal with all the contingences of the social interactions of a diverse community of human beings. The impetus for that concern is not driven by the Anglican ethos but by satisfying state and federal legislation concerning the school's duty of care. It is an ideal opportunity for the nurture and outreach of the church's role in society to be encased in a set of procedures and protocols that satisfy the legal sensitivities of our present society.

It may have been easier for the chaplaincy of the school to separate, at this point, welfare and pastoral care, placing the deeper issues of welfare solely under the responsibility of school counsellors and/or psychologists, and government departments and the chaplaincy maintain what I believe to be a rather superficial warm fuzzy approach to pastoral care which can end up in muddy waters.

Rather, I would suggest that an all encompassing approach which dealt with welfare issues by well defined procedures which protect all involved and which makes use of a variety of specialist expertise in a team approach is more effective.

At this point in time student welfare and learning support are monitored by staff and relevant referrals made. Generally behavioural issues are dealt with by a welfare team comprising of the chaplain, the heads of school and a behavioural manager. Academic concerns are referred to learning support but are monitored because often there is an overlap with welfare. All referrals from staff are in writing, parents are informed throughout the process of assessment and recommendations are made to parents by phone/interview and

confirmed in writing. If ongoing counselling is recommended, this process is outsourced.

It is clearly a function of pastoral care and careful stewardship in our increasingly litigious society to engage in processes that are accountable, transparent and protect all parties involved.

I am mindful that the Greek word psyche which forms the root of psychology is the word for soul. The chaplain's role in the 'cure of souls' must surely be reflected by a proactive team approach to the complexities presented by welfare which cannot be dealt with adequately by one individual whether they be the chaplain, school counsellor or head of school. The challenges of the school as a corporation need not exclude the spiritual response which may also be encased in corporate language and yet still effectively minister to the community as a whole.

A similar response to staff welfare is also needed as the pressures and vulnerability of staff continue to increase.

Teaching/curriculum

The function of chaplaincy must ultimately revolve around teaching the 'story' creatively and effectively. If as Anglican schools we are to strive to encourage our students to be life long learners the onus of any religious education must be to unapologetically present Anglican spirituality in a positive light whilst simultaneously honouring other systems of spirituality both within the Christian tradition and those of other religious traditions.

The foundation of effective teaching is based on relationship and respect and this particularly refers to the perceived status of the study of religion amongst the students. There can be no question that the requirements of the senior Studies of Religion HSC are placed on the same level as any other HSC subject. As with all other subjects the teacher must possess expertise and passion for the subject and the

approach both objective and clinical. For the chaplain to engage in this style of teaching may call for an approach similar to that of welfare where a different language and process is employed but display an intellectual honesty as religious traditions and beliefs are seen to be common to all humanity.

Similarly, the study other religious traditions, which is both respectful and honouring, can only encourage our students to see the search for meaning, like learning, as a life long endeavour. After all, as educators it is our great responsibility is to create in the minds of our students the concept that the more we know, the more we don't know. The presentation of spirituality in fundamentalist formulas and non negotiable doctrines which discourage further exploration simply does not fit with the style of teaching in other subject areas. We, as Anglican schools can only be encouraged that as the current issues of gender and sexual preference are addressed openly within the church we need to acknowledge that at least within our church risks are taken, dissention is a fact of life and acceptance of others one of the hardest demands the gospels make of us.

Chaplains need to be effective teachers who form healthy relationships with students in the pursuit of knowing: who form healthy relationships with their colleagues who pursue the subject with academic credibility: with parents in a partnership of embuing values and behaviours that will equip their children with the strategies to cope with life and find meaning.

The curriculum needs to reflect the nature of honouring rather than critiquing other Christian denominations and other religious traditions. By year 10 our students have received a comprehensive grounding not only in the Christian story but also the other four major religious traditions, aboriginal spirituality, ethics and aspects of human behaviour and personality.

