

The Encyclical

The Newsletter of the School Chaplains Conference



Michaelmas 08: Encyclical 84

From the Editor: Confirmation

A question much on the minds of school chaplains is “what do we do with our Confirmation candidates?” How do we engage minds and hearts which are often fixed on almost anything (rugby, exams, clubs, school, trips, the weekend...) rather than on becoming adult members of the Church. This encyclical contains a taste of what goes on in some of our schools, with some reassuring reflections from chaplains who feel keenly the frustrations of timetabling the timeless. It must have been simpler in the olden days when being in the Lower Fifth was reason enough to be confirmed, unless one could produce a watertight excuse why one should not be. I must say that in our school (founded on Christian principles, but not Church-affiliated). I have the greatest respect for the handful of girls who present themselves for Confirmation, often explaining that, although their families are not church-goers, they themselves feel moved to make this commitment. I rejoice rather less in those who answer the question “why do you want to be confirmed” with the response ‘Mum thought it would be a good idea’. Indeed, at times, I find myself actively dissuading pupils who show no interest whatsoever in becoming part of the Church. Now what was that bit about making disciples of all nations? Did He really mean to include even reluctant adolescents?

Message from Bishop Lindsay Urwin OGS,

Archbishops Advisor on School Ministry.

I was delighted when Archbishop Rowan asked me to become the President of the School Chaplains’ Conference, though I must admit I didn’t know what it entailed or to be honest, that it existed! What I did know, and know, is that I have a passion for work with young people and a high regard for those who with a genuine desire for their good, give themselves to the work of forming the young. I have often said in Sussex, where for nine years I was chairman of our Diocesan Board of Education that there is perhaps no more important or noble task that the education of those who will make or break our society in the future.

A couple of years ago I gave up the Chairmanship of the Board and at about the same time became the Provost of the Southern Region of the Woodard Corporation of schools, putting me in touch with both the independent and maintained sectors. Soon we hope to have three Woodard Academies in the region for which I will have spiritual oversight.

It is just so important that Christians stay in there in the world of education even if at times the desire for our presence is a touch ambiguous. We are not the only ones who are passionate about the care and nurture of the young, but we do have a particular perspective of what it means to be a human being fully alive, and therefore an important contribution to make to the world of education. Indeed, I would argue that unless you have a coherent ‘doctrine of Man’ it is hard to see how you could develop a coherent ‘doctrine’ or strategy for education, which may be one of the reasons why the whole educational process seems to lurch from initiative to initiative with little to show for it!

For those of you who are chaplains, be assured of prayers and support as you persevere in a task that is both difficult and rewarding. Not least is the challenge of introducing young people to the joy and fulfilment that can come from worshipping and adoring God.

It seems to me, especially in those places where worship is compulsory that every act of worship is an act of evangelistic persuasion. This is costly and demanding, and can lead the chaplain to more wondering in the ‘is it all worth it’ sense than Wondering in the awe and wonder sense! Of course we know that all we can do is invite people to worship. I am 52 so my own Australian public school days are long past but I well remember how little an impact school worship had on me, despite the best efforts of the chaplain, and how peer pressure wouldn’t allow me to enjoy it or join in even if I was tempted, though through it all I was a secret Sunday choirboy!

Last year, because of particular circumstances I found myself preparing the candidates I was going to confirm at one of the Woodard schools in Sussex. There was something of a back to the coalface feel about it, and I must say I found the whole experience great fun, especially once I had convinced the teenagers that they didn’t have to give me the answers they thought I wanted to hear! They were witty and thoughtful and infuriating at times, especially when other activities seemed to be more important to some of them (and to some of the staff!) but I was genuinely moved by their desire to know, and to pray, and their willingness to swim against the tide, for as you will know better than I do, climbing over your peers to come forward to receive the Sacraments takes some courage, even in a school with a Christian foundation.

Confirmation is a Sacrament to which I am wholly committed as a place of divine encounter. While I know there are some who suggest it’s a Rite looking for a theology, and has only been perpetuated so that bishops can keep themselves busy (!) to me it is a ritual full of the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit! How can we imagine that the Father will be deaf to our plea when we ask him to confirm, that is, guarantee, the presence of his Spirit in the life of the candidate. I always encourage testimonies during Confirmations but I smart a little if the candidate speaks of their own confirming of their faith as of primary significance. This is a rather self centred approach to the event not untypical of our human condition! It is *God* who is

doing the confirming and it is only that reality that makes the ritual worthwhile and reliably effective. All we do – bishop and candidate – is put ourselves in the right place at the right time (again rather untypical of the human condition but beautiful and life changing when it happens) with faith and hope that the Lord will indeed be with us.

The particular aspect of the Spirit's life given in Confirmation is the strength to be a witness, the ability to evangelise. Somewhere Thomas Aquinas says that the sign of readiness for Confirmation is when a person has moved from small mindedness (me and God) to great mindedness (me, God, the Church, and the world) The reason why the bishop is the agent of Confirmation is not to keep him busy, but because he is the one who, even if no one else is, is trying to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles, as evangelist and proclaimer. This aspect of his life and ministry is of course only an embodiment of the calling of all the Christians, though many seem to get through their Christian life without realising it! The readiness and desire to tell others about the joy of a personal relationship with Jesus is one of the key signs of readiness to be confirmed, so that in the school context (as in a parish) in theory the best encouragers of next year's crop of candidates are this year's. Other early Christian writers link the Lord's baptism to the anointing received in confirmation. Jesus, though full of the Spirit from all eternity receives his presence afresh and is then propelled into the wilderness and then on to the mission that took him to Jerusalem. So the candidate, who has received the fullness of the Spirit in baptism receives a fresh outpouring for mission.

I always meet with candidates before a Confirmation service, just for twenty minutes or so, to try to put them at their ease with me, and to encourage them to persevere in the Life. No matter how tired or grumpy I am about the thought of yet another Confirmation, I can honestly say after fourteen years of doing it, that precious time always leaves me humbled and energised and as Scripture says, 'Ready for action' as I discern the Lord alive and at work in the hearts of his people.

Just one extra spin off for a bishop is that a Confirmation is the best 'guest service' on offer as so many 'reluctant' folk turn up thinking they are to witness someone else receiving something and my aim is always to send them away surprised by what they have received and perhaps wondering what these things might mean. As you pray for your candidates each year, pray God will touch those who come to witness the outpouring!

Anyway, enough of these ramblings! I look forward to getting to know something of the work of the Conference as the years go by, and hope that in a small way I can be a support and encouragement.

Confirmation at DOYRMS

by The Rev. Roger Broughton Chaplain of the Duke of York
Royal Military Academy

Confirmation takes place during the beginning of the Lent Term as a whole school Sunday morning chapel service

when the candidates are presented to either the Bishop of Maidstone or the Bishop of Dover. The previous term is taken up with weekly classes for pupils in Year 8 and above and a simplified version of the 'Emmaus' course is followed to give them a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and to develop their character and awareness of the issues which they have to face in order to relate their faith to the world today. Topics include God as Creator, Jesus' ministry, his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit, belonging to the Church, learning to read the Bible and pray, sharing Holy Communion and living God's way. There is one further session in the Lent Term when there is a rehearsal.

Once enrolled for confirmation pupils are expected to attend each session. At the end of the Autumn Term, invitations are sent to the families and we lay on a special buffet after the service, bearing in mind that some families have to travel a considerable distance. Once confirmed, pupils are expected to play a full part in the life of the chapel.

Confirmation at Rossall School.

By The Rev. Steve Cooper, Chaplain of Rossall School.

Our Confirmation always takes place on the last day before Half Term in the Lent Term, and I begin preparation immediately after the Michaelmas Half Term. Invitations are made to all the Middle and Senior School pupils and also to Year 6 in the Junior School, before they get sucked into the anti-chapel peer pressure of Middle School! This year I have nine candidates from Year 6 and one from the 6th form. I have separate preparation for Juniors, Middle and Senior Schools, so that I can work with them at appropriate levels, while covering the same issues. Over the last couple of years I have addressed the following questions using a variety of materials, some taken from other sources, and some of my own design:

Introduction: Questions for a journey of faith

Life: A journey to know God, a way of life.

Who am I? – Made in the image of God.

The spark of the Spirit of God that lives in us

Who am I? – Freedom to be.

I am who I choose to be – or allow myself to become.

Who am I? – Saved to be myself.

God who passionately wants me to fulfill my potential

Who is He? – Jesus who shows us God.

When people met Jesus, they felt they had met God.

Who is He? – Jesus who forgives sins.

Jesus and the Cross: Mad, bad or dangerous to know?

Who are we? – Christians, people of the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer, the power-house of spiritual living.

Who are we? – Christians, the Body of Christ.

Communion, the life of Jesus in us.

Who are you? – Made in the image of God.

If it's good enough for me, it's good enough for you.

Who are you? – The challenge of difference.

Being Christian in today's world

This year, my 6th form candidate is of Japanese origin and has no Christian heritage other than her regular attendance in Chapel. For her I am taking a different approach, using discussion based around a selection of Bible passages to build up a picture of the whole sweep of the Bible narrative, from Creation to Revelation, and of God's salvation work within it, especially in the person of Jesus. As I build up the picture through telling the story, I am using it to identify and locate her own call to follow Jesus, from which comes her request for Confirmation, and its implications. This seems to be going well, and may perhaps become my preferred approach for other groups in future years, recognizing the significant ignorance of the salvation story that there is among so many of our young people.

Reflections on Confirmation Preparation at King's College School, Wimbledon.

By The Rev. Lindsay Collins, Senior Chaplain, King's College School Wimbledon

King's College School, Wimbledon has an excellent track record of partnerships with the local community. The school has taken on a partnership with two local state secondary schools, community service projects run on Friday afternoons throughout the borough of Merton and the school premises are shared with a number of local organisations. It was in this context that the Chaplaincy decided two years ago to share Confirmation classes and the Confirmation service with the teenage confirmands from the local parish Church of Christ Church West Wimbledon.

This move has had many benefits from the perspective of the KCS boys. It has broadened the pupils' awareness and understanding of the Anglican Church and made an important connection with a local parish. The confirmands from the parish have all come from different state schools in the area so the classes created an opportunity for them to mix with people they might otherwise not have mixed with. From a chaplain's perspective, it was good to be able to share the leading of the classes and have someone else to bounce ideas off.

The vicar of Christ Church and the chaplain of KCS put their own Confirmation material together borrowing heavily from Youth Emmaus, films, Youth Alpha and Key Christian Beliefs by Chris Wright. The classes began with an ice-breaking activity and included games, discussion, film clips and some personal reflection in the form of journal writing. The post-Confirmation follow up has been difficult to continue with the parish, and the joint classes have not resulted in on-going friendships with the teenagers from Christ Church. A few pupils will attend Christ Church on an occasional basis and do claim to see it now as 'their church'. In school there are two 'Corporate Communion services each half of term where the previous Confirmation class are specially invited and attend a breakfast afterwards. This is a good time to catch up with the pupils and find out how their Christian journeys are progressing. There is a follow-up course offered at a lunch time during the week where we

follow some of the Emmaus material, but this usually only attracts about a third of those who have been confirmed. One or two pupils will attend the Christian Union post Confirmation, but 99% generally come to the Corporate Communion services. It would be interesting if this were still the case without the added bonus of breakfast but I am not willing to test that just now!

Confirmation Preparation

by Fr. John Thackray Chaplain of King's School, Rochester

I suppose the reason that I'm unwilling to write anything is because it has to be a *mea culpa*. If I'm honest then I'm not impressed by the quality of the preparation, and "after care", that we offer. The service is always at the end of the Lent term; about now I've put a list of confirmands (about 20: we're 60 a year) together and we hold weekly meetings until the confirmation. There'll be a quiet afternoon the weekend before the service. The difficulty in this small principally day school is finding a lunch-time free for the weekly meetings. Every year I vow that next year I'll have them put in the school calendar so they have priority; every year I fail to do so.

At a previous, rather larger and more definitely boarding school this was the pattern until a Chapel Council was established. The Upper Sixth chairman of the Council said at the first meeting (without warning me!) "much as I love FJ, I have to be frank: the confirmation preparation is crap. This is something the Council can now do". And they did: they insisted that the whole group was treated as a group with a weekly meeting in the after supper before prep slot booked in the calendar with outside speakers; the chairman required that the Council led the first meeting. Numbers were high (40 - 50; year groups were 130) and there was no difficulty in attracting good calibre speakers. Perhaps I need to establish a Chapel Council here - except that there is no chapel! - and have the confirmation preparation pupil led.

By the grace of God, those confirmed here do continue faithful. The Headmaster expects that the first thing the School does every week is to worship God; Monday 1 is either Mattins or Mass, and the communicant members of the school have proper opportunity to follow the Headmaster in devotion to Our Lord.

Just one post-script. This is my twenty-first year as a School Chaplain. In every one of my four schools I have prepared pupils for confirmation in school each year. Every time I write, as pastoral common-sense to say nothing of ecclesial etiquette, requires to the parish priest. From time to time I receive a "I don't like public school religion" letter in return. Yet in all those years I have never once received a letter from a parish priest saying that one of the pupils in school is being prepared in the parish for confirmation; when I attended these services it is as a guest of the pupil, never as a guest of the parish (I always invite the parish priests to be part of a school service).. The one exception to this is the Roman Catholic parish priests, who always invite me to be present,

robed, as a token of the school's support. Isn't the dear old CofE wonderful?

The all-knowing, all-singing, all-dancing, all-encompassing Confirmation Course.

By The Rev. Gavin Knight, Chaplain, Monmouth School

I don't know if it is just me or whether there is a wider, more universal sense of anxiety regarding the preparation of our young people for Confirmation. Anxiety rules because I personally want these young people to be prepared for mature Christian discipleship. The problem that always occurs, especially in schools, is that we only have half an hour in an over-timetabled week to deliver all that they need to know to grow (at least what I consider they need).

What, then, is required I wonder? A bit of basic theology surely, maybe a little something on the Trinity - how can you know God without studying the Trinity? The sacraments of the Church have to be considered, after all, how can you possibly get Confirmed without knowing what a sacrament is? (Mental note to myself: get them to learn Augustine's definition by rote). Prayer should be right up there too, if the little people aren't **told** how to pray they might forever miss out on this most significant dimension of the spiritual life. Later in the course we should develop knowledge about the denominational aspect of the Christian Church, all of the issues that lead to dysfunction and separation. I have always found a helpful conclusion to the course is to present the confirmands with a Bible, the St. James version if possible, so that they can learn to quote chapter and verse whenever it is required.

However, many of the young confirmands have other priorities, responsibilities and tasks to perform which infringes upon this "confirmation" time. It is nearly impossible to pack this essential scheme of works into a 12 week course which revolves around a school week. Therefore the confirmation classes become compromised which in itself is a timely reminder for all of us who try to live the Christ-life but fail to live it with due obedience.

Yet, I wonder... this year at Monmouth School we are trying to avoid the all-knowing approach and are simply relying on God to inform our hearts and minds. My greatest concern (as you might have detected by now) is that we place an intellectual impediment in the way of our young people knowing God with their hearts. The pedagogic relationship of student-teacher needs to be re-framed somehow. Confirmation into the life of the Church and therefore Christ has to have more to do with the development of a relationship of trust. Each week we will of course consider various issues which make up the Christian faith, but more importantly we will put aside time to be quiet together, to allow that inner life to flourish. This time of contemplation will increase week by week. It will be empowered by music and the introductory practise of lectio divina. The Confirmands will be asked to listen to the Bible in a way that does not intellectualise the text, but brings it alive in the midst of our meeting. This non-didactic approach might fail.

It might lead to dissatisfied learners, pregnant silences and embarrassing 'no-shows'. But that is my experience of the confirmation process to date, so why not change?

My mantra is to do less rather than to do more. Surely this is a lesson for all of us who work in schools. If this can be learnt at the time of confirmation it might possibly shape our young people in their Christian discipleship. Now let's get to work on the Confirmation rite....

Harvest sermon preached at Queen Anne's

by Joanna Laynesmith.

My driveway is littered with conkers, spiky cases split open, gorgeous chestnut skins shining and rather a lot of squished creamy pulp where the car has driven over them. Conkers are one of the great emblems of autumn, abundant and gleaming. They aren't particularly useful - not like blackberries or elderberries or all the cultivated harvests we celebrate, or even the scarlet hips and haws that the birds are stocking up on for winter - indeed, conkers are mildly toxic, but they are beautiful, they make life feel richer - conkers are a reminder that God's creations do not have to be obviously useful to be valuable and treasured.

But the horse chestnut trees along my road have been looking sick all summer - leaf miner beetles which used die off in the winter are weakening the trees. Our conkers are falling victim to climate change.

Of course they're not the only ones. Let me tell you about Risolat Muradova. She is 18 years old and a member of Tajikistan's national basketball team. This summer she came over to the UK to start Christian Aid's 1,000 mile Cut the Carbon march. The march ended in London last Tuesday when they petitioned the government to commit British businesses and government to a radical reduction in our carbon emissions. Risolat made the journey here from Tajikistan because she can see the devastation climate change is already causing - so many poor harvests are driving the farmers of Tajikistan to abandon their homes and become builders in Russia. Ironically the average inhabitant of Tajikistan only produces just over half a tonne of carbon each year, whereas here in Britain we produce about 10 tonnes. Risolat's fellow marcher, Mohammed Adow comes from Kenya - his neighbours only produce one fifth of a tonne of carbon each, but droughts are destroying their land - it's not uncommon for women and girls to have to walk 30km in a day to find water - that's like having to walk from here to Wokingham and back for water - it always is the women and girls who are hit hardest in such crises.

And yet, my latest post from Friends of the Earth began 'climate change could life better for you'. The need to act on climate change could be the catalyst we need to build a cleaner, fairer future with stronger local communities and a healthier relationship with the land. What I'd like you to take away this evening is a conviction that we can do this - that God has given us all that we need, and that we are the Noahs of this day with an ark to build.

On some levels the Christian response to the climate crisis must be the same as that of any person with a conscience. Christ called us to love our neighbour, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; to do all we can for those girls walking 30km a day to fetch water.

But there's more to it than that - the God who made us and loves us takes delight in this whole planet. There's a great passage in the otherwise rather depressing book of Job where God demands 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . 'Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail? . . . 'From whose womb did the ice come forth and who has given birth to the hoar-frost of heaven? . . . 'Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer? . . . 'Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will it spend the night at your crib?'

Here God reveals a passionate continuing involvement in Creation, a care even for the mountain goats giving birth. If we can see our efforts to look after our planet as working alongside God's continual creating it becomes a good deal more hopeful, even joyful, sharing in this task.

That's why I chose the first reading this evening from Proverbs - God's Wisdom speaking of her childhood participating joyfully and playfully in God's act of creation. We don't tend to think of God as a child very often, but God is all ages of man and woman. Wisdom tells us that she was 'At play everywhere on this earth, delighting to be with the children of men'. 'Delighting to be with the children of men' - this is so important.

So often in environmentalism humans seem to be simply the bad guys - inevitably destructive, by our very nature at odds with the needs of the rest of the planet.

Yet Christianity's most famous 'green hero', St Francis, had a rather different take on it. He wrote that 'We bless the earth with each step we take. And the firmament too needs our touch'

Passages like that in Proverbs or even the Genesis Creation story had convinced St Francis that human beings were designed to be good for the Earth, to work in a positive relationship with life on Earth. And we know we can be - just look up into the skies above Caversham or along the road to Oxford - and almost invariably you will find somewhere en route a beautiful bird of prey with russet red feathers and a distinctive forked tail - it's the red kite - once extinct in England, but now flourishing thanks to human effort.

A few months ago a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on my door and asked me what worried me - I told them climate change and they said 'Ah yes, it is such a great problem that we cannot possibly do anything about it, we must just trust in God to sort it out'. I was so surprised I couldn't think of a response at the time. I wish I'd remembered the story of Joseph and Pharaoh - you know how Joseph was the favourite younger son, sold to passing camel traders by his jealous brothers so he ended up in Egypt

interpreting the Pharaoh's mysterious dream about skinny cows eating healthy cows. God had sent the dream to warn Pharaoh that after seven years of good harvests there would be seven years of famine - forewarned with this knowledge Joseph and Pharaoh carefully looked after Egypt's harvests and saved enough to feed the people through the famine. If Pharaoh had just said 'Oh dear, we'll have a famine, never mind I'm sure God will sort it out' the people would have starved. Today we've got scientific predictions instead of dreams, but the situation is the same, we know what we've got to do and we can do it.

On a smaller scale we have done it before - when I was at school the environmental crisis of the day was the hole in the ozone layer - this was a thinning of the ozone in the earth's atmosphere caused by gases used in fridges and aerosols that was likely to give us all skin cancer. Environmental campaigning led to political action to stop the use of these gases. Scientists say the hole is now in the process of mending as a consequence of these actions.

It is easy to imagine as individuals that we cannot achieve much - so I take heart from one of my great heroes - Anita Roddick, who died last month. She started the Body Shop simply because she needed a way to earn money for herself and her daughters while her husband cleared off for two years to ride a horse from Buenos Aires to New York. But her passion for the environment and for social justice shaped a new way of doing business that has influenced so many high street shops. Of course while Anita Roddick was the visionary her family and all those who worked for the Body Shop were what made it happen. We don't all have to be the visionaries at the front, indeed it won't work at all if we all try to be that - it's the working together that achieves most.

That's why development agencies like Christian Aid are trying to get us all on board with their Cut the Carbon campaign. Thousands of people are petitioning the government to commit to drastic reductions in carbon dioxide emissions - Anita Roddick added her name to Friends of the Earth's part of the campaign just two months before she died. Jude Law, James Blunt, Thom Yorke and Darcy Bussell are among other famous figures you'll find talking about it on Friends of the Earth's website. If you would like to join them, you can pick up one of the Christian Aid postcards at the back of chapel and fill it out - we can post them off together.

Achieving change at a political level is part of building the ark. The other is how we live our own lives - did you know that a tonne of your carbon emissions is a result of the manufacture and care of your clothes? Buying fewer clothes and buying them second hand or organic makes a big difference - yes I did say organic - manufacturing pesticides produces extra greenhouse gases and a quarter of all the pesticides in the world are used in cotton growing. Making sure washing temperatures are as low as possible helps too. Buying organic food and food that hasn't travelled miles is another basic step. Farmers' markets and farm shops are a beautiful way to shop. One of the biggest but easiest changes

you can make is to get your family to switch to a green energy supplier like Ecotricity - the ones with that magnificent windmill near junction 11 of the M4 - check Christian Aid's website to see how you can get Ecotricity to give Christian Aid a donation when you sign up. Another biggie is cutting down on your meat and dairy foods because cattle emit an awful lot of greenhouse gases, not to mention the vast destruction of precious, precious rainforests for their grazing - and for growing chicken feed.

Once upon a time harvest festivals were primarily a time to pray for our farmers and their care of the land. Now they need our prayers more than ever. But also we know we all have a responsibility to care for this beautiful, precious, fragile earth and its inhabitants, our neighbours. We have been told just as clearly as Noah was - if we join Risolat from Tajikistan and the thousands of others campaigning and changing their lifestyles - we can build that ark with God.

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