

**'Chaplaincy Matters'**  
**December 2009**

This is the first Chaplaincy Matters to be compiled by Becky Ayers-Harris (rah@sherborne.com) and Anthony Buckley (buckleyag@alleyns.org.uk). Please send ideas/responses for the next issue to either of us by the end of December

In this edition we offer three topics:

Christmas - ideas to share. Many thanks for the contributions.

Questions or concerns - Please send in your responses

Excerpts from a thought-provoking speech from Dr Walker, Headmaster of King's Rochester

**Christmas..... A few thoughts gathered from fellow chaplains**

- 1) Try an Advent Carol service
- 2) Tell the story from different viewpoints (eg, the Innkeeper)
- 3) Acknowledge that Christmas is a difficult time for some students
- 4) Promise a Chaplaincy prize for the best crib scene in a classroom
- 5) Remember the power of the story itself - don't neglect it through trying to be too clever!
- 6) Use a proper Advent calendar in your office or classroom
- 7) Use different versions of the Bible (John 1 in the Message translation is very powerful)
- 8) Hexham Press based at Hexham Abbey in Northumberland, produce a monthly activity sheet called Take This for children aged 7-11 years. Highly recommended. Each child in the Junior School receives a copy as a gift from the chaplain.
- 9) The idea of Posada (see church Army website) Adapted from it's Mexican origins, we provided a kit containing simple figures of Mary, Joseph and the Donkey, along with a candle and a simple script and prayer sheet. The figures 'travel' from class to class in the run up to Christmas, looking for somewhere to stay. When the figures are handed on there is a simple retelling of the story, a question and response script asking for the recipients to make room for the figures in their class and a prayer about making room in our hearts for Christ this Christmas time.
- 10) Don't forget the Magi at the start of next term...
- (11) show a 5 minute clip from "The nativity", using the wise men coming to look at Jesus- very powerful and brings home the reality of the incarnation.

## Questions and Queries

Question: Advice please! A group of sixth form students have been using a Ouiji board, and have become very scared. Advice would be useful on how to approach the subject and practical tips on ensuring it is contained.

Question: Advice on job descriptions! If you were asked what the main areas of focus of Chaplaincy was, outside of liturgy and pastoral services what would they be? Also, what is the best way to get to know/ be alongside students?

Responses to these are genuinely sought - please send thoughts to Becky or Anthony. And similarly other questions

## A speech by Dr. Ian Walker, Head Master of King's School, Rochester, to the Waterloo Place Group of Chaplains, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2009

What is a Chaplain?

School chaplains occupy an uneasy, some would say, anachronistic place in the panoply of priests which is, wrongly, the labour division of the Church of England.

For those within the Church, you lot are outsiders, catering to the souls of the rich whose elitism is anathema to the teachings of the humble carpenter who, unlike the foxes in my back garden, had nowhere to lay his head.

But you are not just priests – fulfilling the strictures (and the spirit) of Canon law – you are also educators, as we must call ourselves these days.

What are we doing when we educate others? I think a commitment to teaching is nothing if not a vocation. The relationship between teacher and pupil must never be marred by condescension, flattery or the desire for uncritical discipleship; it is to do with the shared adventure of thinking and seeking for understanding.

In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates tells us that the difference between legitimate and illegitimate forms of persuasion is at the heart of the difference between the love of wisdom and its spurious semblances. He also says that it is a presupposition of friendship which, no less than the pursuit of wisdom, depends on the strict observance of the distinction between conversation and forms of speech which are corrupted by the desire for power. Chaplains beware! I suppose I should say: Headmasters, beware even more! Plato dramatised powerfully the thought that an intellectual friendship neither proceeds by force nor submits to force, including the force of a charismatic personality.

Our lives, all of us involved in learning, should be shaped by the shared need of truth and objectivity. We need to learn how to distinguish the generally collaborative search for understanding from its portrayal in the very many seductive forms of counterfeit intellectual friendship; this, of course, means that proselytizing will, more often than not, be a counterfeit intellectual relationship.

Only something like the concept of a vocation - a certain moral commitment to a life's work - will enable one adequately to characterise the kind of obligations acknowledged in the respect between those engaged in this common search and in the nature of their commitments to their pupils and to the life of the mind.

The idea of a vocation, at the very least a moral commitment to a career or occupation, is something that cannot be covered by the concept of a profession and its associated responsibilities; a vocation is much more than that.

These days the word 'vocation' means little more than a job, rather than something that non-accidentally fills a life and worthily fills it. We could not imagine a Socrates or a Wittgenstein taking early retirement and the fact that we could not derives from a sense of what they did, the nature of it, and their vocation to it.

What is it to be a teacher or indeed a pupil or student of philosophy, or history, or physics? This is a question whose answers may deepen without limit. And the obligations which partly define vocations cannot, as can the ethics of a profession, be decided by a committee.

This is why we can say without absurdity (even if we say it falsely) that an entire age has lost an understanding of what it means to be a teacher, a doctor, a nurse or, dare I say it, a priest. But that also means that an entire age has lost an understanding of what it means to have a vocation to teach, to heal, or to pastor.

If we are serious about our vocation, and the pursuit of our intellectual ambitions, we will need to develop virtues of character. We will need, for example, courage, truthfulness and humility; these, however, are names of virtues which are in substance quite different when they are connected with the serious conception of the love of truth.

The idea that one might be a professional lover of truth is a joke. But it is not a joke to say that the love of truth is an obligation fundamental to an intellectual or academic vocation, and much, much more importantly, to a priestly vocation.

An institution which does not require its members to reflect seriously on the meaning and the place of intellectual activity in human life is not a school, no matter how disinterested it is in its pursuit of learning, and no matter how distinguished its contribution to it. Where better is a chaplain's role exemplified than in reflection on the meaning and place of intellectual activity in human life?

More particularly, thinking about the life of the mind, its place and value in human life, is in a broad sense an ethical concern. If it is done passionately in response to a sense that it's an obligation which is part of an academic vocation, it would be an example of Socrates' claim that to enquire about how to live is amongst the most important things a human being can do. Not to do it, as Socrates said, is to live a life unworthy of a human being. Where better is a chaplain's role exemplified than in reflection on how to live a worthy life?

That is why a university, for example, should remain an ivory tower. The values of the outside political and professional worlds are often dangerous to it; it rightly remains unworldly, arguably spiritual. If universities provide students with the space that protects them from the pressures of the world, from worldliness in one of the many senses of that word, and from the pressures which conspire to make them children of their times, then they meet their primary public obligation. I think that is relevant in schools as well. Where better is a chaplain's role exemplified than the protection of pupils from the pressures which conspire to make them children of their times?

Sadly, the concept of a vocation, something which one does by a moral obligation, is now an anachronism, past its sell-by date.

Teachers are, in principle, indispensable; they are the means of getting into the heads of pupils what we think should be there.

These days, however, people think that good teaching is a transferable skill or technique which may be enhanced in the best teachers by an inexplicable knack which facilitates the learning of things which pupils may have learnt themselves. Many people now believe that rubbish. Teachers, they think, do for the pupils what those who are self-taught do for themselves.

Natural though it is to think this way, it ignores the teacher's love of his subject and what the enactment of that love may teach pupils about the worth of what they are doing together. Where better is a chaplain's role exemplified than in the enactment of that love which God has demonstrated in the incarnation of His Son?

Through a teacher's example, one may begin to understand the intrinsic worth of the life of the mind which, at its deepest, is to understand it as something to which a life may be worthily devoted and sometimes, as the fate of Socrates reminds us, for which life may be worthily given.

The deepest values of the life of the mind cannot be taught: they can only be shown, but, of course, only to those who have eyes to see; they reveal themselves in the teacher's style of teaching when it is determined by his attentive obedience to the disciplines of his subject, or by the chaplain's attentive obedience to his devotion to his Lord.

Teachers must make something inspirational of their subject but it cannot be their motive to inspire. Teachers who set out to inspire have their attention in the wrong place and are too distracted from their subject to be able to offer anything deep, no matter how many hearts they set afire. This is why the films *Mona Lisa's Smile* and *The Dead Poet's Society* have got it precisely wrong.

Teachers can give passionate but corrupt inspiration.

Just as genuine charity must be motivated by the needs of another, rather than by the desire to do something charitable, so teachers inspire their pupils into a proper love of what they are doing by the manner of their attention to the subject rather than by setting out to inspire them.

I was saddened, but not in the slightest surprised, to see a headline last September in the *Times Educational Supplement*: 'Mission to Inspire', with the subtext 'Create a buzz in every lesson!' A fine teacher is made so by his love of his subject. In his teaching he will reveal the worth of the life he has given to teaching – the worth of his vocation. If only politicians, with their talk of 'delivery' and 'transferable skills', 'key stake-holders' and other such meaningless jargon, could understand this.

A teacher's and a chaplain's vocation, his privileged obligation, is, as Plato saw, to initiate his pupils into a worthy love. There is nothing finer that one human being can do for another. When teachers do it for their pupils, rare and wonderful though their example is, they've done no more than their vocation requires of them.

Mostly teaching is less than this and there is nothing much to be done about it. But it remains the high standard in the light of which teachers may describe and judge what they do and on whose light pupils may recognise the treasure which schools may offer them.

Love is seldom spoken of seriously in discussions of education. We speak of it interchangeably with enthusiasm and, generally, to praise enthusiasms of teachers because they are catching, because they are psychological aids to learning. How sad!

Sadly, we have lost sight of the fact that it is a teacher's worthy attention to his subject that stretches pupils, not examinations.

"How should one live"? was a question that Socrates asked and for him philosophy was the search, if not the answer, to that question.

The general feeling of unease we have about these matters arises from the Socratic impulse that learning is not, as the Sophists thought, simply subject or teaching- based; it is actually about the kind of life we lead; it is, whether you're a believer or not, a spiritual exercise. And that is why such matters as honesty, integrity, beauty, truth and goodness – all of them indefinable yet all indispensable - must sit at the heart and form the causal nexus of all we teachers, and priests, try to do; and that is where a school must make demands of its chaplains because your vocation is not simply to ask these broad spiritual questions of your pupils, your parents, your staff and particularly your Head Master; it's also to raise those narrow, but vitally important, religious questions that get swamped in the mire of ephemera into which we are all so easily dragged.

Winston Churchill said that the most powerful man in English public life was a public school Headmaster. In that he might have been right. But the most important, the most, person in public school life is the chaplain. You have a high calling.

So: store up the Lord Christ in your hearts and be willing to give an answer for the hope that is within you, as my two chaplains unfailingly, thoughtfully and lovingly do.

Thank you for listening to me.

Ian Walker.