This Edition

Travelling Church

Monty the Spoodle

Experiri is a quarterly newsletter presenting stories of innovation in school ministry from Australia and beyond. Each edition provides single page profiles of innovative strategies that have been developed in response to challenges or emerging issues for chaplains or others in the school, including Heads and Religious Educators. If you are interested in contributing to Experiri see our contact information below.

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In her 8th year as Chaplain, Rev Nicki created an idea to respond to the busyness of the school community; “If staff, students and family were ‘too busy’ to make it to morning chapel, I thought there was no reason why we couldn’t bring chapel to them – meet people where they are, being who they are, completely present in the moment”.

On a clear bright Autumn morning, just as the school community was readying themselves for the new day, a service of Holy Communion was held … not in the chapel, not in a classroom, but outdoors surrounded by the morning activities of St Margaret’s. The Reverend Nicki Colledge, School Chaplain, plans on taking Church to the people; “Wherever there are people, there is God. Sacred space is not just confined to a building, but wherever we may find quiet, or peace, or a moment of something special”.

“There was a need to make chapel more accessible to the community”

“Travelling Church” has also been held around the School’s Dragon (look up the story of St Margaret of Antioch!) and outside the School Tuckshop (Canteen). The Rev Nicki celebrates the sacrament of the Eucharist surrounded by the “noise of that place”. In the rush of a new day a group of staff and students may find a moments’ peace. To celebrate and receive communion or a blessing in “God’s Cathedral” - the great outdoors – is a gift. Rev Nicki plans on bringing “Travelling Church” to a variety of surprising places around the school each month. The Service will follow the ringing of an old school bell that was a gift to the School Chapel in 1958. The first Travelling Church, held in the new Barley Sugar Gardens, created a vital link with past and present, tradition and modernity.

What were the greatest challenges?

One of the greatest challenges in Faith-based schools is offering worship and spiritual experiences that are not only accessible to the community, but are attractive and appealing. Travelling Church was an idea that emerged out of that challenge! Too often chapel is completely compulsory, but by offering a choice means that suddenly the culture is laid bare - is there anybody out there who will willingly come?

Travelling Church’s greatest challenge for me is having the courage and the faith to give it a go…and see who accepts the invitation.
Innovation #2

Montgomery aka ‘Monty the Spoodle’ was recruited to take on the challenge of providing comfort, companionship and friendship. On moving to Lindisfarne Anglican Grammar School I was convinced of the value of a dog on campus and set about convincing the powers to be to allow him to attend the school one or two days per week.

What was the response to the need?
He was given a staff identity badge and a title – ‘Assistant to the Chaplain’ – and a uniform to wear, and commenced duties in 2010.

His primary role is to wander around the school with me and to engage with the students and staff. His mission: to be available and attentive to each young person and to spend time with them. His presence calms, relaxes and soothes students who are, for any reason, anxious, concerned or upset.

Animals are very intuitive. They know how you are feeling and know when to engage and when not to. It is not unusual to find Monty and a student just sitting together away from everybody else simply ‘chillin’. The student is getting attention and giving attention unconditionally, and so is Monty.

What was the impact?
He will often appear to seek out certain students and find a way to interact with them. These can be students that we know are struggling but are yet to feel comfortable enough to speak to a chaplain or a teacher. At other times the presence of Monty provides an avenue to commence a conversation that has been hard to start for a range of reasons. Staff also looks forward to his visit to their office or workspace, classroom or staff room. His role with the staff is exactly the same as it is with students. He is also a school ambassador in the sense that he attends every ‘Principal’s tour’ for prospective students and their families. He makes an immediate connection with the young people, softening what can sometimes be a confronting moment for them. They now know someone at the school who will greet them in their first week here. They are not alone.

What were the greatest challenges?
The primary fear for the school had to do with work, health and safety issues but I have taken responsibility for those, just as I had in the RAN. It is important to note that not all dogs are suitable for this work. They must be a one-person dog, obedient and have had some basic training to work with people. Monty spent 10 days at a training facility as part of his adjustment to his new role when he joined the RAN.