Experiri is a quarterly newsletter presenting stories of innovation in school ministry from Australia and beyond. Each edition will provide three or four 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 many schools there is a small group of students who support the chaplain by helping with activities such as worship. Sometimes these students have a formal role such as chapel captain or sacristan. It was perceived that there was a need to encourage and inspire these students and to develop them as future student spiritual leaders in the school. We also wanted to encourage Christian students to have a greater impact on their school community.

The Anglican Schools Commission, in partnership with schools and other Diocesan agencies ran a three day conference open to students in years 10-11 from any of our schools. The Conference was during term time and many schools paid student fees. Students were engaged in a range of activities including guest speakers, practical workshops, worship and community building. An open Q & A session with chaplains, and time to plan what they might take back to their school community were two of the most significant activities.

Fifty four students from ten schools attended the conference. The impact of the student conference has been more significant than expected. Students have reported being greatly encouraged and chaplains are reporting an increased desire and energy among students to build and shape the Christian life of the school with such things as prayer groups, worship committees and lunch time groups. There is also a reported increase in a sense of connection with and understanding of Anglican/Christian identity. Students valued highly the chance to meet others from a range of Anglican schools.

Selling the Conference to schools during academic time was always going to be the hardest task. The Heads supported the concept and the chaplains’ group in Brisbane was instrumental in making it happen. The chaplains, and in some cases senior staff members were the people in the schools that inspired students to go, and provided the budget to send them. One important aspect of its success was the provision of a bus to transport students from school to the conference and back. Chaplains and teachers from participating schools also attended and this helped with the running of the conference.
Innovation #2

“community chaplains can be more proactive in ministering to the adult members of the school”

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What was the need or challenge being addressed?

Shore School has been conducting Christian ministry for 123 years. The ministry of the school has touched students as well as parents, staff and past students. For many years the School Chaplain’s role was to minister to students, staff, parents and old boys. However, as the school community has grown (especially to the increasingly large old boys network) a twofold need was perceived – firstly to allow the School Chaplain to focus on the ministry to the students, and secondly, to be more proactive with the opportunities to minister to the adult members of the school community.

What was the response to the need?

The size of the chaplaincy team was increased with the addition of an experienced chaplain whose focus would be on the ministry to the adults in the school community. The advantage of a Community Chaplain, who did not have a teaching role, was that they would have flexibility during the day to visit families, hospitals, nursing homes, conduct funerals and even visit the jail. The hope was that if the ministry was effective then some funding for the position would be received as a result of donations through events such as weddings, baptisms and other pastoral support.

What was the impact?

The impact was immediate in that a few important ministry initiatives could be introduced. These included more personalised preparation for those getting married in the school Chapel and individual preparation for families seeking to have children baptised. It meant that parents had someone to call if they were seeking support through challenging times. It meant that staff had someone to seek out if they needed support. It also allowed the Community Chaplain to run a course for new staff to explain the Christian ethos of the school. As well, it had a big impact on the School Chaplain who had considerable time freed up to focus on the ministry to the students. As expected the number of Weddings and Baptisms increased significantly in the first year and as the role has increased it has become somewhat self-funding.

What were the greatest challenges?

The initial challenge was making the new role known in the wider school community. This was achieved through the Community Chaplain attending numerous school based events including parent events, sporting functions, staff meetings, old boys events and other school functions. Another challenge was convincing some of the local churches that the existence of a school based Community Chaplain would not take ministry away from the local parish. Over the past seven years it has been the experience of the Community Chaplain that the majority of people whom he ministers to did not have a connection with a local parish. In this regard there have been numerous opportunities to link school families back to a local church.
Innovation #3

What was the need or challenge being addressed?

The *Dads for Life* movement was a government initiative under the Ministry of Communication, Youth & Sport (MCYS). *Dads for Life* is a national fathers movement that seeks to inspire, mobilise and involve fathers to become positive influences in their children’s lives for the whole of their life. In 2009 MCYS launched a program in schools called Fathers @ School that sought to mobilise fathers to be role models to their children and be more active in their children’s school life.

What was the response to the need?

The church saw this as an opportunity and partnered with the school in 2010 to launch the first *Dads for Life* event targeting the Primary Schools 4s & 5s (age 10-11). The initiative had three goals. 1. To build relationships between fathers and sons. 2. To equip fathers to raise their children. 3. To help fathers become more active in their children’s life. The program is packed with fun activities that encourage fathers and sons to work together and trust each other through a range of challenges. As part of the program, we have a treasure hunt to get both parent and child to learn about their school and chapel history. We also have a program aimed at equipping fathers with skills and methods to help their child grow. It gives them a broader perspective on fatherhood.

What was the impact?

On average we have over 90 parents with children at each event. The event is well supported by the parents of our boys who continue to come every year to find intentional meaningful time in fast paced Singapore. The smile on a tired dad’s face, the joy of challenging and beating dad in a race, the laughter of everyone, are a testimony to the positivity of the experience. Each year we have new dads eager and waiting to sign up to take part. We have probably one of the highest numbers of dads who are active in PTA meetings and school extra curriculum events nationally by percentage. The norm is that mothers are more actively represented at *Meet the Parent* sessions; at St Andrew’s we have a higher number of fathers.

What is the greatest challenges?

The challenge we have each year is to find new games that will be energising and stimulating for the dads and sons to play, while providing an even playing field.

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“creative programs that develop father and son relationships also benefit parental involvement”
Innovation #4

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“connecting the chapel and the classroom provides benefits and opportunities for both”

What was the need or challenge being addressed?

The problem was Junior School chapel remained disconnected from the classroom, units of inquiry or general classroom initiatives. Chapel was isolated and lacked relevance or substance beyond the actual chapel session itself. (Context: 35 minute weekly chapel with Religious and Values education (RaVE) hosted by the JS teaching staff.) The need was simple: ground Chapel in the RaVE and simultaneously lift both chapel and RaVE in profile and substance, combining the College’s developing interest in Community of Inquiry practice, a strategy outlined in the Philosophy for Children program.

What was the response to the need?

A two year themed chapel and RaVE course. Tuesday chapel Week A introduced theme and reading. Friday chapel Week B gathered it in and included the classroom work and student reflections. The outline included four sections: Scripture and theological reflection; philosophy (using Philosophy for Children principles); values; extension and resources.

What was the impact?

Enthusiastic staff, engaged and open students, incredibly thoughtful and sophisticated student responses, a very happy Chaplain and a Head of School pleased to see RaVE enrich the wider learning of the student. The staff were very happy to take up the resources. Returning to chapel at the end of week B allows a very natural point of honest accountability. The chapel services now have real substance and a footing back into the classroom. We are now in the third year (doing year A again) and refining the work even further.

What were the greatest challenges?

The attempts to link theme and material to the in-class units of inquiry failed from the beginning. The discovery was that if the themes are big and engaging enough, they feed back into inquiry quite naturally. What we do naturally enriches inquiry. Having all the JS teaching staff in the chapel has not been a big issue. The biggest issue is the pressure on classroom teachers to find the time to follow up and develop the work in the eight school days before returning to the chapel for the reflection chapel.