This Edition

Language for Spirituality

Service Opportunities

Experiri is a quarterly newsletter presenting stories of innovation in school ministry from Australia and beyond. Each edition will provide 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.

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In the process of simplifying life, postmodernity created a language gap that has lead to spiritual illiteracy. From this came the awareness that there was a need to re-claim what had been lost and to teach the vocabulary of our spiritual “mother tongue”. Many young people appeared not to have the words to describe their spiritual nature, its richness or poverty. They needed a way to get back to their ‘true north’. My challenge then was to find a vocabulary that enabled conversations about wholeness, faith, soul and spirit, and purpose and fullness of life.

What was the response to the need?

I addressed this need at several levels. I read widely among current spiritual literacy leaders. Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat’s work in creating a basic alphabet of spiritual literacy was of immense value. We used these words along with school logos to create a small wallet sized card to be used as a ready reminder of what it takes to find one’s way back to a good place within God’s love. Each classroom has an A3 laminated copy displayed and all teachers from Pre-school have their own wallet size card. Our registrar gives copies to all families at the inquiry stage. Students from Year Four have their own card. These words are part of our every day life in the classroom and in Chapel.

What was the impact?

The impact has been powerful and thoughtful. When these cards are read there is a respectful awed awareness of what is important in life. The year sixes for example were asked to identify words they liked and to give examples of when they have seen their word in action. Currently we are working on several concepts including peace, beauty, connections, transformation and mystery. The Compass project is holistic and inclusive and has a timeless quality about it. Because the whole College has embraced it, I am hopeful that we will have a generation who is more attuned to the language of hope and of the divine in their own and others’ lives.

What were the greatest challenges?

Time is always a challenge but has been made easier by the cooperative quality of this project. Many people have been involved. Challenges have included communicating existential concepts and making them concrete without being too prescriptive. Open ended questions are always helpful. I am forever reminded of the lessons learned in inclusion and the challenges found in working with gifted students. The teaching approach that works best for those challenged when learning a new language are those that work for all students.

“providing a community with a spiritual vocabulary enables soul conversations”
Innova

Innovation #2

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“meaningful service opportunities are found more readily when the network is widened”

What was the need being addressed?

The Year level co-ordinator approached me about starting a program for our Year 8 students to be involved in meaningful community service experiences. Our school had a number of key events already in place such as the World Vision 40 Hour Famine, Operation Christmas and the Royal Children’s Hospital Good Friday Appeal. We also had some existing relationships with community and/or mission organisations including Anglicare, Starlight Foundation and Caladenia Dementia Clinic. However, we realised there was not enough ‘hands-on’ service for our Year 8 students to get involved in.

What was the response to the need?

In the first year of the program we challenged the students to undertake 3 hours of community service and we designated a 3 week period in which this should occur. They had to initiate their own voluntary work. This was largely unsuccessful due to little accountability and the difficulty students had in finding meaningful, voluntary activities. The year level coordinator and I organised some opportunities for students who hadn’t been able to find their own. This reached more students which indicated there was a desire to serve. The following year all Year 8 tutors were asked to offer a Community Service experience which students could volunteer for. Involving more staff, with different interests and different contacts meant we had greater variety of opportunities on offer.

What was the impact?

Staff took ownership of the program and enjoyed arranging their service activities. The students saw the enthusiasm of staff and quickly demonstrated their support for the program by stampeding the sign-up sheets. Now in it’s third year, the Community Service opportunities we offer work even better because 6-8 staff arrange one activity each, instead of 1-2 staff trying to drive all 8 activities. The variety of opportunities on offer is greater and the program is now sustainable as it involves all the Year 8 Tutors, their Co-ordinator and me as Chaplain. We ran the program in the last 3 weeks of Term 2 and all students were required to participate in one service experience.

What were the greatest challenges?

The initial solution required Year 8 students to tap into their own networks to find some way to serve. This was an unrealistic expectation. Even for our staff, finding Community Service activities for 12-13 year old students to volunteer for is not easy. This year the Service options included: Graffiti Clean-up Squad, Garden Maintenance, Preparing English language packs for Cambodia, Making Dolls for Kids in Cambodia, Hangin’ with the Grannies, Tutoring Refugees, Lunchtime Reading Club with Prep students and Cleaning up the Local Creek. We added a celebratory Chapel Service at the end of the Program with the message ‘You Do Make a Difference’.