**Anglican Schools’ Office 2018**

Before I launch into the usual report of things achieved and events run since the last General Synod, here are a few vignettes which may give you a better idea of what is happening in our schools than lists and statistics ever could.

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*Rathkeale in Masterton*. Sitting in a room with four senior boys, the “sporty” ones of the year, hearing about life at Rathkeale. Half-hesitantly I mention that I’d heard there was a youth group there, run in partnership with St Matthew’s Collegiate (a girls’ school). Instant smiles all round: it turns out they’re all part of the leadership team.

“What do you do there?” I ask.

“Oh, we start with some games and stuff, and then break into small groups and talk over different questions.”

I can imagine the questions, given the co-ed nature of the group. My own youth group enjoyed lengthy discussions on “relationships”. But I ask, “What sorts of questions?”

He replies, “Things like, ‘Where was Jesus in your week?’”

At Rathkeale, between 40 and 70 students meet, voluntarily, each week to discuss questions like that.

https://steemit-production-imageproxy-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/DQmW54RCQuaGYPCXZ437SEHE9p8R96VH55zUNmRw2xsdUcr*St Mary’s Primary, Labasa*. I’m invited to speak at the assembly on Pentecost. I ask if anyone knows what the day is in the church year, and there is a flood of hands. Emboldened, I explore other key days in the church year, and find the students can explain anything I throw at them. Later, the school manager tells me of a group of senior students from Australia who tried to tell some Bible stories to the kindergarten class, and found the 4 year olds knew them better than they did themselves.

https://steemit-production-imageproxy-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/DQmW54RCQuaGYPCXZ437SEHE9p8R96VH55zUNmRw2xsdUcr*Craighead, Timaru*. Over lunch, +Kelvin Wright and I talk with a group of year 12 and 13 girls. We ask for ideas on how the school could develop its special character. One girl suggests that they should have more regular Eucharists. Two others talk about how meaningful a quiet night prayer was before their exams. We ask about opportunities for service, and find that two of the girls have developed, launched, and run a volunteer program for any student in the school who wants to be involved in various service projects around the town. They had the support of the staff, but the ideas and energy behind it were all their own.

https://steemit-production-imageproxy-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/DQmW54RCQuaGYPCXZ437SEHE9p8R96VH55zUNmRw2xsdUcrI wonder about writing a section on confirmations in our quarterly newsletter. I send out an email to our schools asking who has had confirmations this year. *King’s College* is the first to get back to me, saying that in August, 23 students were confirmed and another six baptised. Other stories flood in from across the country. One chaplain comments, “Confirmation is alive and kicking in our schools.”

https://steemit-production-imageproxy-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/DQmW54RCQuaGYPCXZ437SEHE9p8R96VH55zUNmRw2xsdUcr*St Matthew’s Primary, Hastings.* A school of 150 students with a playground area not much bigger than a double classroom. Roughly 20% of the students have been referred there by The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki. About another 20% are Sikh. I sat next to the Sikh grandfather of one student on a plane, and he was full of praise for the school, and delight that his grandchildren were able to attend a place of such faith.

Kelvin and I come into a classroom, and find the classroom teachers are running the morning devotion. Students are up and dancing and singing loudly to a praise song. The student teacher, herself new to anything Christian, gives a brilliant little study on “fruits of the Spirit”. We move to the next class, and talk to the exhausted but determined teacher who presently has care of a student with foetal alcohol syndrome in her class. Now in Year 8, the school has nurtured him through primary school as a whole-school effort. The principal looks after him every break and lunch time in his office.

Finally we speak with a man who is employed part-time to work one-on-one with troubled students. We ask him how he would sum up the nature of the school. He replies, “Love.”

https://steemit-production-imageproxy-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/DQmW54RCQuaGYPCXZ437SEHE9p8R96VH55zUNmRw2xsdUcrThese are the sorts of reasons I continue to believe passionately that our schools are at the cutting edge of our mission as a church. Many people, I know, still carry images of dull and faithless routines within elite schools that effectively immunise young people against any interest in the church. That is simply not how it is now in the vast majority of our schools. Life is still tough for many of our chaplains, and anyone who feels they could do better should try it out themselves for a while! But there is enormous cause for encouragement and hope as we see the degree of creativity and dedication our chaplains bring to their work, and as we talk with the number of students who leave school with, at the very least, a positive attitude to the church, and, more often than you might expect, a burgeoning faith in Christ.

Thanks to the generosity of the St John’s Trust, the work of the Office has expanded a great deal in the past two years. There are now two Regional Facilitators working two days a week each for the Office. This has enabled us to expand the range and frequency of school visits and Professional Development Seminars we are offering to the wider staff of our schools, and to catch on to the present wave of momentum in our schools by offering them a number of new resources and programs.

***Resource development***

The first major resource to be completed was the Christian Contemplation Curriculum. This is a website packed with practical information and resources to enable secondary school teachers to make Christian contemplation a regular part of their teaching. It has also been taken up with enthusiasm by schools in Australia and the UK. Bishop Kelvin Wright is one of our new facilitators and is himself an expert in Christian contemplation. He has begun to run professional development seminars in our schools on Christian contemplation as an alternative to mindfulness, and he will also be coordinating the development of a Contemplation Curriculum and resources for primary schools.

A second major project has been the Middle School Theology program. This is being run as a pilot program over 2017 and 2018, and we now have almost 20 schools who have taken it up. Designed for years 7 to 10 in Anglican and Presbyterian schools, it bridges the gap between primary school and secondary school, and comes in at the point when students are beginning to question and bring some scepticism to talk of religion. Each unit deals with a question which our students have indicated they are interested in discussing, such as, “Is death the end?”, “How do I know what is true?” or, “Is there anyone out there?”. Devices are hardly ever used, there is very little bookwork, but over the course of each unit students are exposed to, wrestle with, debate, and analyse a range of approaches to the question. The units culminate with a clear focus on one Christian response to the question, and once again students are invited to think about that response deeply. Finally, they are encouraged to ponder what difference all they have heard and thought about over the term might make to their lives. There are presently 12 complete work units available to our schools, each covering a term’s work, and we hope to complete another 12. We are developing this unit together with the Presbyterian Schools’ Office and with the support of the Otago School of Theology who will also be involved in assessment.

Carol Trotter is our second Regional Facilitator and comes with a wealth of experience in primary school education as well as diocesan youth work. One of her particular projects will be the development of an updated primary school curriculum and work units to accompany it. She will be gathering the best ideas from our own primary school chaplains and teachers, and also working with the Anglican Schools Office in Brisbane Diocese who are beginning to redesign their own primary school curriculum and are keen to work with us.

The final major project which is underway is preparing resources for Restorative Practices in our Anglican schools. Professor Chris Marshall, Chair of Restorative Justice at Victoria University, is advising us in this. We’re in the early stages still, but +Kelvin has begun to explore ways in which it is already being practiced across schools in NZ, and how best we can support and equip our own schools to make it and its Christian foundations an integral part of school life.

***Outreach and discipling***

*Staff:* Each Professional Development Seminar we offer the staff of our schools is a privilege to run. Every school is different in terms of the proportion of staff who see themselves as committed Christians, but in most of these seminars we are given the rare opportunity to speak about the Gospel with scores of people “on the fringes”, as well as a few who are faithful and a few who are highly sceptical. (Chaplains, of course, do this on a daily basis!)

Special Character Reviews are another unexpectedly rich source of outreach. In them, staff, parents and students are given the chance to talk privately about their hopes and difficulties, and I am repeatedly surprised and touched at how vulnerable many of them allow themselves to be. For some, Reviews and PD sessions are the one time they think seriously about what it means to be at an Anglican School. Ideally, of course, we would want them to be thinking of that all the time, but at least this is a start! Pleasingly, we are being invited to run Anglican Audits in more independent schools each year, as well as the Reviews of integrated schools. In practical terms they are a valuable way for the schools, and for us, to get a clear picture of how completely Christianity is embedded in the life of the school, and to gather ideas for the way forward. We encourage schools to make these reviews a regular part of school life, aiming to hold them every three or four years.

*Chaplains:* Apart from the usual conferences, quiet days and PD opportunities, 2018 marks the start of a new initiative: the Chaplaincy Internship. Chaplaincy is a distinct ministry requiring a range of skills, and it can be hard work finding the right people to do it. Chaplains may be the only witness to Christ that hundreds, often thousands, of young people over the years, will experience. It is a heavy responsibility. Through this internship, we are offering someone the chance to spend a year working with chaplains across a range of schools, so that they can decide from experience if this is the right path for them, and, if so, develop a range of skills and resources to do it well. Toby Behan is our intern for 2018, presently working under the guidance and training of Peg Riley and Gillian Simpson at St Margaret’s.

*Students:* All the resources we supply are in some way focused on nurturing and discipling our students. However, there is a new programme growing in the South Island with discipling at the centre. Through the combined ideas of a number of students, and the vision of Joshua Taylor, we are trialling a scheme in Timaru through Craighead School which encourages students to complete four strands over the space of 3 terms: a worship strand, involving regular Eucharists; a service strand, involving service through a local parish; a discipleship strand, involving termly training days with diocesan youth workers; and a 3-Tikanga strand, involving some cross-Tikanga activity. It is just a trial, and we may later combine our ideas with programmes that dioceses are already running, but it is an exciting prospect.

***Partnerships***

The schools in our networks continue to strengthen ties with each other through visits, sports, music, our Anglican Schools’ Camp, the AS Conference, and exchanges. The issue of visits from schools in Aotearoa New Zealand to Polynesia is one we have been exploring recently, with the result that we are moving towards whole-school partnerships rather than annual visits. A number of schools have taken up this challenge enthusiastically.

We are also continuing to explore further ways of building partnerships between schools and youth and children’s workers in their dioceses. As an example of this, the 2018 Anglican Schools’ Senior Camp is being run by the Office in partnership with Wellington Diocese, Blueprint Church, and World Vision. We also work as closely as we can with Diana from Strandz, and benefit greatly from her creativity. We were very sorry to say goodbye to Phil Trotter as National Youth Advisor for Tikanga Pakeha, but look forward to working with the new Advisor as well as the new Commissioner for TYC.

It has been wonderful to experience the generosity of spirit shown by those who work with Anglican schools in Australia, the UK, and South Africa, who are willing to share their own resources and be appreciative of resources we are developing. Our partnership with the Presbyterian Schools Office has also been extremely important. The Presbyterian Office is sharing the costs and adding their people resources for the development of Contemplation Curriculums, the Middle School Theology course, and the “Pursuing Peace” project initiated by Victoria University which will result in resources for NCEA. We are also working together to organise a quiet day for our chaplains and teachers in the North.

Our work would not be possible without the support of the St John’s Trust and the Williams Trust. Each year the Williams Trust ensures that we are able to fund particular projects in our Tikanga Pasefika schools, and to help staff and students attend the conference and camp. The St John’s Trust has secured the day-to-day running of the work of the Office since its formation, and has recently enabled the Office to expand its reach and mission. The Anglican Schools Board continues to be a group of people with whom it is a joy to get together, whose combined wisdom and vision both support and drive the work of the Office. My thanks to them all.

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Our vision since the last General Synod has been that of “working the yeast through the dough”. We are trying to move from a model in which the church put the “bread roll” of a chaplain into the middle of a school, to one in which the yeast of faith is worked through every aspect of school life. It is an ambitious vision, but one it is vital we follow without compromise, however many setbacks we face. Students respond to integrity, and nothing will “inoculate” them against faith faster than any sense of falseness or tokenism.

It is also a vision which acknowledges that we can no longer assume students come to our schools from Christian families and thus bring their own “yeast” into the mix, as happens in a parish. Our schools are mission fields in a land where Christianity speaks in a foreign language, and any rumours of God have been filtered and often twisted through the secular lens of our society. Long before we can “train good Anglicans” we have to work our way through misconceptions and apathy in the hope that students will begin to grasp the reality of the welcome that our loving God is holding out to them. The good news is that there is evidence in our schools right across the Province of this yeast spreading, of the mustard tree of faith sprouting tentative green shoots in unexpected places. For that we thank God.