

Challenger and Champion. Pastor and Prophet. Reflector and Reactor

A brief theology of educational chaplaincy

There are as many different approaches to educational chaplaincy as there are chaplains. Whether you are full or part time, whether employed by the church or the institution, whether ordained or lay, whether or not you are a part of the Senior Leadership; all of these can make a difference. I can claim no authority beyond my own experience (and perhaps that of colleagues who I have listened to and worked alongside) in chaplaincies in primary and secondary schools and within a university.

We are called to be abide in God, to be with God, as God is with us (John 15.4). To me this is about being with people, as God is with us. Building trust and relationship, enabling people to share their stories and make the connections between their stories and the Story of God, the gospel. Perhaps this is at the heart of 'loitering with intent' that is such common practice within Chaplaincy.

Yet the abiding, the loitering, the being with God and the community, does I believe have certain key characteristics.

CHALLENGER AND CHAMPION

As Chaplains we are called to both challenge and champion the community and everyone within it. This is common practice for students (it is an essential part of good teaching), but less so for staff; and what we do to students we don't always do for ourselves. This role also includes being both a challenger and champion to the Principal/Head Teacher/Vice Chancellor; to support and care and offer constructive critique. The Chaplain is often one of the few people within the community who can fulfil this role.

PASTOR AND PROPHET

We are called to care wisely and unconditionally for those who need pastoring, as Jesus did. Yet we are also called speak up, without fear or favour, against injustice and for the kingdom of God; to seek to continue the Biblical tradition of prophecy. In working for some of the most vulnerable students in North Taunton we seek not only to feed those who are often hungry but to work with the School, the Borough Council and other agencies to address structural issues of education, diet and finance. On a different level, within the context of success defined by results, we seek to also advocate the need for the relational. More broadly we aim to remember at all times that as Herbert O'Driscoll, former Dean of Toronto said, 'The more prophetic you are the more pastoral you must be.'

REFLECTOR AND REACTOR

It is easy to be overwhelmed by events, especially when you keep an open door. It is easy to end up simply reacting to staff and student crises. To have an open door, to be highly visible around the community, to be accessible, to be available to respond is hugely important. Yet you also need to have space to reflect, to think and to listen; to breathe and be still, to watch and wait and read and pray. Only by having this time to reflect and pray can you truly begin to abide in and with God, and share that abiding with your community.

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