

Christ known and loved through a culture of encounter

The Bishop's Vision for Diocesan School Chaplaincy

The intention with this vision for school chaplaincy in the Diocese of Middlesbrough is to provide an outline that is broad enough to accommodate the various expressions of chaplaincy, clear enough to unite our understanding of chaplaincy and deep enough to inspire our practice of chaplaincy.

The starting point for this journey is the Bishop's Vision for Catholic Education in the Diocese of Middlesbrough. He states his vision as follows,

To make Christ known and loved through the provision of excellent Catholic education and schools intent on finding Christ in their daily lives and sharing that encounter with others.

The opening words of the vision, "To make Christ known and loved", express very simply the mission of the Church to evangelise, that is, to tell people about Jesus and his message. It is for this reason that Jesus established the Church. He commanded his disciples to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey all that I commanded you..." (Mt 28:19-20) Hence, the bishop's vision helps us to see that the school's mission is the Church's mission.

This mission is peculiar to Catholic schools. A secular school only has the provision of education as its mission. Here we find the importance of chaplaincy. Because it is possible to be a school that doesn't share this mission, the role of chaplaincy is to keep this mandate constantly before the eyes of the community. The chaplaincy guidelines, *Measuring the Unmeasurable*, put it as follows,

Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.

Pope Saint Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #14.

School chaplaincy provides focus, direction and inspiration for the rest of the school community so that all they do, say and are continually points to the truth revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, school chaplaincy exists to focus the school on its fundamental mission to make Christ known and loved. This isn't the work of a single person, but the work of every person undertaking the school's mission. This includes our school staff, our families, pupils and parish. We could say that chaplaincy is the engine room behind our catholic life.

Hence our vision for Schools' Chaplaincy is **Christ known and loved** in our communities.

But how does chaplaincy do this? How does it integrate the mission to make Christ known and loved with its mission to provide excellent education? Is the classroom exempt from this? Here we can take guidance from the second half of the Bishop's vision which speaks of an encounter with Christ in our daily lives. Building a culture of encounter helps to unite our school's purpose. The story of St Martin of Tours, which gave rise to the term "chaplain" can help us understand this concept more deeply.

The example of Saint Martin of Tours

Martin was a Roman soldier of the fourth century. On returning from battle, he encountered a poor man who asked for help. Knowing something of the Christian message, Martin divided his cloak in two and presented it to the man. Later that night, he had a dream of Jesus in heaven telling his listeners, “did you see the cloak that Martin shared with me?” Martin discovered he had encountered Christ in the poor man. He went on to become a priest and later a holy Bishop. After his death, his cloak, or *capa*, was kept in a shrine as a sign of this pivotal moment and those who served there were *cappellanum*, or chaplains, in its English development. Martin’s story helps us to understand the various ways in which we encounter Christ in daily life.



1. The message of the Gospel.

Martin had heard the message of Jesus Christ. It caused him to see the world differently. It was as though he saw the world through the eyes of Jesus. This was an encounter. Our proclamation of the Gospel is an invitation to see the world as God sees. In our community, what we value, what we celebrate, what we shun, will all be affected by this view. This even affects our teaching in the classroom. A contemporary example is our teaching of science. This is not a “God-free zone” where we discover what is really happening in the world, but instead an exploration of God’s creation. As we examine the laws of science, we encounter with the Law-Giver.

2. Service of the poor

Martin was moved to serve the person before him, who was in need. In serving, he encountered Christ. Our communities encounter Christ through our charitable works, but when we stop and think, who is there among us who isn’t in some sort of need? None of us is self-sufficient. A child is in need of education. A staff member in need of support. Hence, when our attitude towards one another in school is marked by service rather than exploitation, we encounter Christ.

3. Conversion of life

Martin’s act of charity changed the direction of his life. Each day he strived, with God’s help, to be a bit better than before. As a soldier, perhaps he craved renown or the spoils of battle. As a Christian he desired to be holy. This is an encounter with Jesus, who said, “What does it gain a man to win the whole world, but to lose his very soul.” (Mt 16:26) In our community, we encounter Christ by inviting all our members to be better, a little each day.

4. A sense of the sacred

Martin’s cloak took on a deeper meaning after his holy life and his followers retained it as a sign of God’s work in the world. It now had a sense of the sacred, something that pointed to Christ. Our world has the possibility of being given a sacred sense. This is most clear from God’s decision to enter it in the Incarnation. We encounter Christ when we have this sense that there is more to the world. Significant signs include our churches, our chapels and our holy places. However, we encounter Christ in ourselves when we discover we too are sacred, destined to be vessels of the Holy Spirit. Our community expresses this by our sacred spaces in the classroom, our liturgies, our times of prayer.

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. [1] The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace”.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #3.