

School Chaplaincy in Castlereagh Community School -A Collaborative ministry.



The 1998 Education Act states that educators should "promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students". The school chaplain has a key role in ensuring that these needs are being attended to in the school.

The school is inter-denominational under the joint trusteeship of the Mercy order (Ceist) and GRET. The majority of students belong to the Roman Catholic faith yet the spiritual needs of students and staff of other faiths and none are supported. The school community has full time Chaplaincy services providing care and support for the spiritual, emotional and wellbeing concerns of all members of the school community.

"C.C.S "Chaplaincy vision statement"- a Spiritual and Pastoral focus

The Chaplain embodies the ethos of the school community as stated in the school's mission statement, more specifically underpinning, holding and championing the ethos of this inter-denominational school. The vision and purpose of school Chaplaincy is to be a supportive faith presence within the school community.

Here in C.C.S the role of chaplain is as part of a team. Many of the issues or concerns that present on any given day are taken care of within the pastoral support system and process.

To ensure this happens, the school Chaplain works closely in conjunction with school management, junior and senior care teams, all staff and with the RE department.

Personal relationship, genuine personal presence is at the core of what a compassionate chaplain must be.

As T.S Eliot wrote. "Neither religion nor law nor perfect practice can substitute for the interiority of a person".

In particular the School Chaplain endeavours to be present to those who find themselves at threshold times in their lives. Chaplaincy service are primarily student based and follows through to home and family life particularly with regard to illness, bereavement and loss.

The essence of the role/ministry is to be compassionate to those entrusted to the Chaplain when they share their joy, struggles, aloneness and ambition. So often this sharing is peppered with confusion for them.

In the hustle and bustle of life in a post primary school, the School Chaplain recognises chaos and confusion and the internal contradictions in each person's dreams, spiritual journey and their hopes in lifeand indeed her own.

The Chaplain responds to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the school community under her care in the spirit of the ethos of its trustees, respecting the freedom and or the religious and personal conviction of each individual. The school Chaplaincy services endeavour to meet people authentically at the point of their need.

School chaplaincy primarily involves journeying with students, staff and the families of this school community in a spirit of freedom, equality and compassion. In particular the chaplain is in a unique position to empower young people to navigate the often-choppy waters of adolescence. For many students, academic pressure, emotional, personal and the family life challenges can affect their capacity to learn, to study and sadly sometimes to survive. Sometimes they are searching to find value in a faith life, which will support them into mature adulthood and beyond. Indeed it is so necessary for all members of the school community to have confidential access to a person who is a supportive faith presence particularly at life changing times in their lives.

The chaplain also witnesses core spiritual values by inviting students, staff and parents into conversation with one another and with the wider culture, one that when appropriate celebrates what's innovative in our growing world yet when necessary invites people to value what is traditional and often counter to the emerging culture. –Chaplaincy in CCS actually honours and reflects the inspiring vision of the Trustees: “that education is to be conducted in an atmosphere of care, respect and joy, committed to the holistic development and to the advancement of the full potential of each member of the school community in particular to those who are disadvantaged and marginalized”. These are Gospel values and indeed core human values that the Chaplain desires to foster within the school community now and into the future.

The school Chaplain strives to serve as a reminder of the transcendent in life and as appropriate, to empower people to discover for themselves the abundant life to which their God calls them to. It involves entering into a pastoral /supportive relationship with a particular community of persons who are part of a common endeavour – education.

Since my appointment to the role of School Chaplain in 2002 I have been very conscience that the role is an evolving one. On an on-going basis as Chaplain I embody the ethos of this inter-faith school community more specifically underpinning, holding and championing that ethos. I reach out to the students and staff in ways that ensure they feel valued and respected, building confidence and resilience.... Seizing moments often seen as loitering yet I always have a compassionate intent.

To use the quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi's I aspire to “*Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words!*”

My brief sits comfortably within the realm of wellbeing. Primarily it is to attend compassionately to the spiritual, emotional and often social needs of a school community in the midst of the recent fall out of an economic crisis and now in a climate of economic recovery. I feel both aspects of the role are intertwined yet sometime are perceived as separate on a daily school bases.

Almost in a flash of time, Chaplaincy is challenged and called to serve a community who are increasingly digitally literate. Young and not so young increasingly looking down (at mobile digital devices) internalizing information without informed critique. Too often there is no reflection or discerning of the opinions of “the other”. Less and less outward or more inward looking happens, negatively impacting on the relational giftedness that is the human person.

Ms. Mary Colleary