



THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY IN THE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Where Clergy and Religious work together in partnership with school staff, the life and mission of the church is immeasurably enhanced.

"Through its schools the Church carries out its mission of evangelisation, with the person of the risen Christ at the heart of all that it is and does, especially in the religious education that our schools provide. Its aim and purpose is not only to provide pupils with the skills necessary for them to take their place confidently in the workplace as responsible citizens committed to the common good of society, but also so that the pupils are formed as religiously literate young people who have the knowledge, understanding and skills to think spiritually, ethically and theologically."

Archbishop Peter Smith, 2015

The late Archbishop Peter's words remind us all that our schools are collaborating in the wider mission of the Church. It is self-evident that there is an important role for parish clergy to support, inform and collaborate with schools in this work. The aim of this document is to offer some guidance to those clergy who work with our secondary phase schools. The Education Service has a separate document offering guidance for working with primary schools.

Most of the secondary schools and sixth form colleges in the diocese are employing lay people to coordinate the wide range of chaplaincy roles within schools. The Education Service offers a variety of support and guidance to school chaplains. For clarity the term 'chaplain' will refer to people contracted by/for the school and are offering chaplaincy work in some form of 'directed time'. This document is aimed at the large numbers of priests and deacons who are supporting the work of schools as governor, pastoral care, sacramental/liturgical presider, visitor, mentor, advocate or by providing a 'listening ear'.

Safeguarding:

The safety and well-being of pupils is the priority for all schools. On your first visit to the school it is necessary to ensure that you know the safeguarding procedures, including reading the safeguarding policy. You should expect to be told about those procedures and how to contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead. In addition, you should expect to be required to 'sign in' on arrival and 'sign out' when leaving. The Diocesan DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) processes will be sufficient in most cases. Schools may be required by their own procedures to see an 'Enhanced DBS'. It is the duty of all adults working or visiting a school to comply with the school's safeguarding procedures.

Some Protocols:

- It is worth getting details of the school day (lesson times; break/lunch; meeting slots) as this helps you understand the rhythm of school life and when you might be able to contact people.
- Find out about the parking arrangements. In many schools parking is a real issue and it may be necessary to book a space in advance.
- Ask the school to let you have access to the school calendar. It will help you identify when key events are taking place. Some schools have calendar information available on their website.
- Introduce yourself to the headteacher's personal assistant.
- Get copies of the Section 48/ CSI inspection report and the Ofsted inspection report. They will give you some insight into the school. These can be obtained from the school or online, easily accessible on the school's website.
- Visiting the school's website is also useful.

Sacramental/liturgical presiding:

All our secondary schools and colleges punctuate the school year with liturgical celebrations. The Eucharist is as much the 'source and summit' of the Church's life in schools as in parishes. This above all things is where schools require the active support of the local priests. Each school will have its own processes for preparing for Mass. It is important to clarify with the individual school the assorted practical preparations.

- *Preparation.* Some schools leave this to the chaplain &/or the head of RE to coordinate. Others have a 'Spiritual Life Committee' that oversees liturgical celebrations. Best practice will encourage pupil participation on the preparation and planning. Suitable adult oversight is essential to ensure the rubric requirements are adhered to. As presider you need to be comfortable with what is going to happen.
- *Readings and prayers.* Some consideration needs to be given to the choice of readings and writing of intercessions. In many circumstances the recommendation would be to use the readings of the day from the lectionary. There will be other occasions when school will have good reasons to select specific readings, such as when marking key moments, or when the mass is for a special occasion. It is always good practice to have pupils chose or write prayers of intercession. Supporting the school with this to ensure a suitable range of intercessions will be useful. In secondary schools you should be able to expect pupil involvement with music. They should have talented musicians and singers. There might be some training of music staff who are not necessarily liturgical musicians.
- *Sacristan Duties.* Liaison with the school chaplain &/or head of RE will ensure that there is clarity on who will prepare/provide the equipment for Mass. Some schools have vestments but not all so do double check whether you are expected to bring your own.
- *Presiding.* Mass is an interesting event in schools. On a day to day basis the leadership structure in the school is clear to all, then at the Mass the presider is the priest (not the headteacher/SLT). Sometimes this emotional compromise becomes a physical one with staff standing around the venue 'supervising' the pupils. The manner of your presiding can help to ensure that this is a liturgical gathering for the whole community. Best practice is for the staff to sit among the pupils.
- *Distribution of communion:* You will need to work out with the school how they manage the movement for communion. It is fairly common practice to expect staff to manage this 'row by row', with all pupils presenting themselves for communion or a blessing. Some schools have a member of staff to remind pupils about the procedure for showing the 'minister' how to present for a blessing. Also, some schools have pupils as 'Extraordinary Ministers of Communion'. These are things you should expect to have clarified in advance.
- *Other liturgies:* There are non-Eucharistic liturgies celebrated in schools. It is expected that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is made available during Advent/Lent. Some schools have 'Reconciliation Services' with several priests present in the venue. Others provide a 'Reconciliation Day' or series of days, when a priest(s) makes themselves available for the sacrament by spending a morning in the school chapel and pupils leave lessons to see the priest. Both these options require the school (Chaplain &/or RE team) to prepare pupils in advance. The latter would need some thought to ensure compliance with safeguarding procedures. Ash Wednesday sometimes occurs during the school term. If so, then it is good practice for the school to mark the start of Lent with a service of the 'distribution of the ashes'. The same practical points apply here as with mass. However, the time constraints with parish commitments will require some careful negotiations. This may be an opportunity to train school staff/pupils to take the lead, perhaps even by doing some joint liturgy planning between school and parish.

Encouraging Pupil Involvement:

As in the parish, a representation of the community in the celebrations acts to build community. You can support schools in this by encouraging the chaplains/staff to have pupils doing the readings, music etc. In addition, supporting the school to train pupils as 'Extraordinary Ministers of Communion' can further nurture the relationship with the parish. Best practice in this aspect is for schools to get parish priests to give references for any pupil who offers to take on this role. In many cases parishes respond by encouraging those pupils to subsequently minister in the parish.

The Dean:

Secondary schools take pupils from a several parishes. As a consequence, the Dean can make a significant contribution to the collaboration between schools and the parishes. In particular he can be a focal point for communication. Working with the local secondary school or college could be a regular item on the agenda for deanery meetings. It can be good practice to negotiate, on behalf of the clergy and the school, the sharing of duties. One model that is used is for clergy to be linked to specific year groups or 'houses'. That gives continuity of pastoral care and yet maintain a balance between parish work and responding to the needs of the school. An alternate model that may be appropriate in some areas is for the Dean to negotiate for one priest or deacon to take lead in the relationship with the local secondary school/college. The Dean can help to nurture the relationship between the parishes and the school. Creating the time to visit the school on behalf of the local clergy can reap many rewards. Similarly, it can be fruitful to arrange for the Headteacher to attend the deanery meeting occasionally. One opportunity may be in preparation for Education Sunday.

Being the 'presence' of the Church in the secondary school is an under-appreciated element of pastoral work. This can be easier in the parish primary school, however it is still possible and encouraged. Schools like clarity and structure so such pastoral work does need to be negotiated and agreed with the school. Being seen around the school site will give a context to why you are presiding at a liturgy. Examples include:

- A regular visit for lunchtime. Pupils greatly value seeing clergy at their school. Being seen around the school enables the community to recognise you and to become comfortable with your presence. Lunchtime is their unstructured time and can be opportunities for them to chat without any set agenda. A regular pattern, such as the same day each month, helps the predictability for the school community.
- Attendance at school events. Schools have lots of events to celebrate the work of their community. There are concerts, plays, PTA events, awards evenings, openings, charity events and exhibitions. Obviously, no one person can attend all of them, however seeing the local clergy at some of the events is really valued by staff, pupils and parents. It affirms the work of the school and builds up their connection with the local community.
- Meeting the key groups. It might be possible to negotiate opportunities to meet with the RE team or the 'chaplaincy' team. This could be through gaining an invitation to a department meeting or through arranging an informal lunchtime gathering.
- A Teaching Resource. There may be times in the RE curriculum when an opportunity for pupils to ask questions of clergy can deepen their understanding. Knowing that you would be willing to respond to such requests would be very supportive. It is important to ensure that the teacher remains with the class. Your role would be as visitor, not as substitute teacher.

Working with the key staff:

The headteacher has lead responsibility for the 'Catholic Life of the School'. Creating time to meet them can establish that sense of collaboration that is essential for both parish and school.

You could encourage the dean to invite them to a deanery meeting or perhaps you could arrange to meet once a year.

The chaplain is the link between the pastoral care system of the school and parish pastoral ministry. For those who are regularly presiding at liturgies at the school it is important to meet with the chaplain sufficiently to help the school improve the spiritual development of the pupils. The head of RE has lead responsibility for the religious literacy of the pupils. Whilst there is a difference between 'religious education' and 'catechesis', there is also an overlap. Finding strategies to get to know the head of RE will help nurture collaboration.

Becoming a school Governor:

Foundation governors are a vital element of the continued development of our schools. They act as the 'critical friend' to the senior leadership team. Our secondary schools greatly value the participation of clergy as Governors. Clearly there is a time management issue here. The demands and expectation of parish ministry are significant. Any priest or deacon considering making himself available as a foundation governor would need to have strategies to manage potential conflicting demands. That being said, being foundation governor would be making a significant contribution to the development of Catholic education and schools are keen to have local clergy represented on governing bodies.

Communication:

One very effective way of nurturing collaboration between parish and school is by sharing information. Arrange with the school to be on the mailing list for the school newsletter. News from the school or about the school can then be included in the parish newsletter. Often school newsletters are distributed by email which means you may be able to negotiate permission to 'cut & paste' items. Similarly, some parishes send their weekly newsletters into schools to go on a notice board in the reception area. This demonstrates to the school and visitors that there is a shared role in the work of the Church. There are events in parishes that it would be appropriate to invite the school to send representatives.

Education Sunday:

This event, is a celebration of the Church's work in education. The Catholic Education Service provide materials that can be used in collaboration with schools. This is a great opportunity to promote Catholic education in the parish.

Moving into a new parish:

There is a lot to do when moving into a new parish. We encourage you to put a visit to the local secondary school on your list of things to do.