

News & Views

87 · AUTUMN 2023

Steadfast and Sure



Alastair Reid
TISCA General Secretary

The theme for our TISCA meetings across the 2023-4 academic year, in succession to *'courage to encourage'* last year, is *'steadfast and sure'*.

In choosing this theme we have had in particular the work of School Chaplains in mind. The TISCA Trustees recognise the central importance of Chaplains to much that goes on to support the Christian faith in schools and, to that end, we have decided to fund a new part-time post: a TISCA Chaplain to be a 'Chaplain for the

Chaplains'. We hope that someone will be appointed to this position by the start of the Spring Term 2024.

One of our attendees at the Chaplains' Conference last March was Simon Bramwell. He is a Baptist associate pastor in New Malden and wrote, as part of a college assignment, a 'reflection on the role of the school chaplain'. Here is an extract under the sub-heading, **'Why does school Chaplaincy exist?'** and it's super to see his footnotes referencing TISCA speakers and Trustees!



Rev. John Ash, Chaplain at Dean Close, with a stripy friend!

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Steadfast and Sure

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Whilst school Chaplains are often based in schools with traditionally strong roots in the Christian faith,¹ several newer Christian schools or academies have also been keen to invest in the ministry of chaplaincy.² As they go about their days encouraging young people in life and learning, serving in environments of opportunity and growth, school chaplains have deservedly been described as 'the heartbeat of the Church'.³ That said, even in educational establishments which are explicitly Christian there is a broad spectrum of religious and non-religious diversity amongst pupils and staff. The school chaplain's 'unique challenge is how to pastor individuals who span the spectrum of beliefs and non-beliefs',⁴ providing spiritual guidance, care and support to all.

It is within the context of diversity that the incarnational ministry of school chaplaincy sits. Just as the Father sent his son Jesus Christ as 'the image of the invisible God' into the world to reconcile all things to himself⁵ so the school chaplain serves to mediate the presence of Christ and to demonstrate God's love and care to those of all faiths and none. In the world of education, where explanation, evidence and proofs

abound, 'one thing chaplains do is present to people God with skin. They are an incarnation of God's presence and work in the world, visible with human eyes to see, human ears to listen, a voice to speak and hands to touch.'⁶

School chaplaincy therefore exists to help all those associated with a school community to encounter and experience an invisible and potentially mysterious God in a visible and tangible way. The chaplain serves as an ambassador for Christ⁷ representing Jesus to pupils and staff alike. For many, the school chaplain may be the only formal religious figure they encounter on a day-to-day basis.⁸ The way the chaplain speaks, behaves and interacts will be foundational in helping those around them to form an appreciation of the nature and character of God. School chaplaincy is therefore of tremendous significance and the role of school chaplain is one of great responsibility.

Therefore, do join us in praying in particular for School Chaplains as we go into the new school year and encourage any in schools local to you by perhaps meeting with them for fellowship or simply sending a letter of encouragement. We need Chaplains, and all Christian staff, Governors, Pupils and Parents to remain 'steadfast and sure' in the Lord as we face future storms together in His strength.

TISCA Communications

📍 www.tisca.org.uk Updated regularly and includes job vacancies (let us have these), events, news

☎️ **07702 950730** TISCA phone number

✉️ **gensec@tisca.org.uk**
We send out regular updates, resources, forms, etc. – let us have your email address if you are happy to be kept in contact this way

✉️ **eepurl.com/gZPPBL**
e-TNV monthly newsletter signup using this url

🗨️ **Chaplains' WhatsApp group**
Now has nearly 55 members: sharing news, prayer requests, events, speakers, resources and a weekly 'thought'. If you'd like to join, please contact Alastair or Alix.

🗨️ **Heads' WhatsApp group**
Has over 20 members. Details from Alastair or Alix

🗨️ **Governors' WhatsApp group**
Launched this year. Details from Alastair or Alix

🗨️ **Senior Teachers (HODS, Year Heads, Deputies, etc.)**
A new WhatsApp group. Details as above

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💬 **Comments and feedback** on publications, events, our platforms welcomed



TISCA Trustees (photo taken at the Annual Conference, 2022)

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TISCA admin

General Secretary: Alastair Reid
Office: Box 17634, Redditch, B97 9RW **Phone:** 07702950730
Email: gensec@tisca.org.uk
Website: www.tisca.org.uk
Development Officer: Alix Stockwell, support@tisca.org.uk

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Alastair and Alix (in the office!)



Some TISCA Trustees – at leisure





Chaplains of courage

Cherishing, comforting and communicating

The TISCA residential Chaplains' Conference, March 2023, Elim Centre, Malvern

Chaplains

'Hi, Alastair, I have legs!' was the greeting I received from the first delegate to arrive at the conference! Our last residential conference (in October 2021) had been a hybrid one and so it was a great delight to gather with 35 others in person (and one online) for another tremendously encouraging time of fellowship with our Chaplains.

Anthony Buckley, TISCA trustee chair and Oxford City rector, led our **devotions** throughout the three days we were in Malvern. He took as his central question, 'How is your Lent?' and he led us winsomely through the last journey of Jesus up to Jerusalem. We were challenged with many questions, such as, 'What do we need to help us carry the cross? How do we hear encouragement? If Jesus were to ask us what we really wanted, what would we say?' Along with consideration of the people and the events Jesus encountered in His journey, there were practical suggestions about chaplaincy (people notice the little things we do such as picking up litter, smiling and opening doors), references to 'The Lord of the Rings' (Aragon: 'There is always hope') and stories. When Elvis Presley's fans started proclaiming him as 'king', Elvis replied: 'There is only one King – Jesus'. Anthony led us into a time of communion at the end of the conference

and posed one more question: *What does this meal mean for me?*

We were uplifted by a **one-man performance** from Mark's gospel by Stefan Smart, a former English and Drama teacher. 'I am Mark' is Stefan's dramatisation and this would be a tremendous presentation for a school assembly, chapel, special occasion and drama group. Go to www.iam-mark.com for details!

Tim Abbott of 'Prayer Spaces in Schools' was inspiring: he set up a number of 'spaces' and showed us how 'pop ups' can be set up under stairwells, even from suitcases, where resources and physical space is limited in a school. He was joined by **the Chaplaincy team from Trinity School, Sevenoaks**, who 'wowed' us with their incredible 'space' celebrating the Love of Jesus. Trinity employs a Christian artist-in-residence too, and she helps the pupils capture their precious reflections about Jesus and His presence. We were also reminded in a presentation by **Rachel Hill-Brown, Chaplain at Solihull School**, that a chaplain's life needs 'pit stops and picnics' to keep us on track with Jesus. She helped us consider some 'top tips' in a brainstorm session and these were the ones we came up with: use free lessons for breaks (a bike ride? a walk?); consider how we use lunch breaks (consider one fast a week to allow for quiet prayer and reflection); look at nature (a 40 second focus

on the natural world revives the soul); use codes in diaries to ensure we consciously planned in breaks (such as 'home missions' when we needed time for ourselves with God). As Jesus says in Mark 6:31 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'.

'**Comforting in times of loss**' was a very productive session, albeit emotional and sadly necessary for all chaplains. This was led by **Pete English** of a bereavement charity: www.ataloss.org. Most of our chaplains have been called on to comfort bereaved children, staff and parents and so it was extremely helpful to have a practical presentation considering responses to past tragedies, reflecting on the language we use when someone dies and discussing how to approach a death at school when there may be a plethora of cultures to navigate. Pete was careful to remind us to 'look after yourself' and pointed us to many helpful resources. We had some time in prayer – one of our number at the conference was helping his boarding school community following the untimely death of a sixth form girl – and we shared words of Scripture together.

Keith Metcalfe, Head at Malvern College (where we were hosted for afternoon tea on one of our days), spoke movingly about the relationship between the Head and the Chaplain. In particular, he shared from Mark 10:1 about Jesus being greeted by crowds and '... as was His custom, He taught them'. Keith reminded us that we cannot do all that Jesus did and that three things regularly fill his prayers: **firstly**, the need for wisdom. How can we be wiser? Keith suggested through our daily devotions, through Christian fellowship and by

ensuring we have trusted Christians with whom to share. **Secondly**, to pray about how best to cultivate a Christian witness. At heart we need to do the right thing – what we say and do matter. It's important to embody the school's values and to be prepared to listen to questions, not least from non-believers (as Jesus did). **Finally**, it's vital that we display servant leadership and allow the Lord to shoulder burdens. Very movingly, Keith shared about his and the College's response to the death of a sixth former almost a year to the day. Keith's constant prayer at such times was, 'What would Jesus do?'

Our final session in the conference was led by **Frankie Knight**, a TISCA trustee and staff member at Ludgrove School, on the theme of **Communicating and Sharing**. Frankie, with reference to Alan Noble's book, 'Disruptive Witness', gave us a fascinating insight into the distractions we often face in our spiritual lives – not least online. She encouraged us to focus on 'thick beliefs' (rather than 'thin' in which we choose expediency and thus the superficial over a more reflective approach). Her presentation threw out several challenges about the ways in which we might trivialise the gospel – possibly through an over-emphasis on simplistic online Bible verses and messages – and reminded us that the way we **receive** truth impacts on how we **perceive** truth. Much food for reflective thought!

After a fascinating 2023 conference, we are already planning for 18 months hence and the **next TISCA residential Chaplains' Conference** (14th-16th October 2024) at High Leigh conference centre. Keep these dates free!



(left to right) Walking in the Malvern hills; Alastair Reid with Keith Metcalfe; Time for Communion

Brief reflections from Chaplains about the conference

As somebody who is still relatively new to my Chaplaincy post, the TISCA Chaplain's conference (my first one) was everything I could have wanted. A refreshing break and time of peace in the Malvern Hills; useful seminars, planned according to feedback from Chaplains; helpful devotions and a time to be reminded of our primary purposes for Chaplaincy; and above all a chance to meet with other chaplains - to listen, to advise, to learn, to encourage, and to be encouraged. I recommend it warmly.



Philip Millward (Mr)
Lay Chaplain, Leicester
Grammar School Trust

Fresh ideas and vision, fresh food, fresh linen, fresh air – what more could you ask of a School Chaplains' Conference? Old friendships were replenished and new ones forged as we listened to stimulating and constructive talks, were fed on God's word and shared, from our hearts, the experiences of chaplaincy together. A great place to find loving support and encouragement, laughter and joy and a renewed commitment to 'facing the task unfinished' as we returned to our respective schools.



Revd Graham Wright
Chaplain, Gordon's School, Woking

Tim Abbott came to the Chaplain's Conference to tell us about Prayer Spaces in Schools (prayerspacesinschools.com) and inspire us Chaplains to set them up! He showed us numerous examples including a Prayer Space under a staircase in a central milling around space in a school. This was a pop-up Prayer Space (it was only there for 3 days) and included the empty chair where young people are encouraged to think of someone they have lost from their lives and write their name on a luggage tag. Tim also invited Chaplain Anna Graham to speak of her experience of running a yearly week long Prayer Space in Trinity School, Sevenoaks. She showed us what is possible with a good sized budget but there were still many ideas and lots of inspiration in her stories and images from her most recent Prayer Space. The whole session spurred me on to better advertise our tiny Prayer Space and refresh it more regularly with different Prayer activities. Thank you, Tim and Anna!



Revd Alice Monaghan
Chaplain at Westonbirt School

The Fellowship of the King!

What joy it was to gather with fellow Chaplains at the Malvern conference. I feel SO blessed by the richness of our time together. It was so refreshing to be amongst colleagues who genuinely understand the uniqueness of Chaplaincy and share practical wisdom and pray with one another. I loved every seminar; every conversation; the dramatic performance; walking in the Malvern Hills and as always, I drank in every word of Anthony Buckley's reflections on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

I woke up on Thursday morning ready for the new school day, with a new spring in my step and the words which echoed in my mind were '*and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume*' John 12:3. Mary's extravagant act of devotion to Jesus had filled the room with a priceless beauty. I then realised I had experienced the same beauty at the conference. Thank you for encouraging each Chaplain to keep on pouring out their unique gifts and talents extravagantly for Christ's glory to students and staff alike.



Anna Graham
Head of Chaplaincy, Trinity School Sevenoaks

Despite not currently serving as a Chaplain (formerly, I was lay Chaplain, whilst also being a TISCA Head), I was really excited to be able to spend time with Chaplains again. I had deliberately set out to use the conference as personal retreat; time to listen to God, journey with others and learn to be obedient to where I would be led in the future. It didn't disappoint on any counts! For whatever reason, I had set expectations of accommodation low, and so was blown away by the centre; its warmth, welcome, views, comfort and food were all delightful. The teaching input was insightful, honest, vulnerable and helpful both for my work in schools as much as in parish life. I learnt more on the afternoon sessions covering bereavement than three days at theological college on the same subject, and I came back armed with amazing ideas for using prayer spaces in church for Good Friday and for the 24-7 prayer week before Pentecost. Chaplains really need to be celebrated for all they are, what they seek to do prayerfully, and leading the spiritual life of the school, as they help shape school culture. It was breathtaking to spend time in their presence, discerning my own future vocation and growing from their wisdom.



Rev James Hanson
Former Head at Aldro School

Heads (and governors) meeting at Monkton Combe School



Discernment in difficult times

TISCA Heads' meeting, May 2023, Monkton Combe School, Bath

Heads

We invited a Governor to attend with their Heads on this occasion as we gathered at Monkton Combe School near Bath and followed up on the input at the 'Round Table' meeting last November in Oxford. It was a most encouraging and informative meeting with plenty of opportunity to share, discuss and to pray together.

Emma Taylor (Warden at Dean Close) led our thinking and stimulated the discussion. We considered 1 Peter 3:8-17 and reminded ourselves that even in 'difficult times' we should not trade insult with insult. It's vital that we listen to other views and respect them – but this doesn't mean we accept views contrary to Scripture. Chris Wheeler (Principal at Monkton) suggested that our approach should always be 'dialogue and not

monologue' and that we help pupils, staff and parents to understand that simply because a view was strongly held (and 'modern') did not mean it was right: it's fine to disagree but do so graciously, winsomely and prayerfully.

Various scenarios were considered and these included how to appoint Chaplains (to what extent is a school like a church?), what to do if staff underperform (due process, appraisal and consultation must be robust and fair) and how to advise parents whose children wanted to use pronouns for themselves which were different to their biological gender. We were urged not to avoid 'hot potato subjects' but to ask the right questions, listen carefully to views which were shared and to be courageous in giving a clear and biblical position.

In the devotional time in the Monkton chapel before a very generous dinner, Chris Wheeler shared from Matthew 5. We do need to follow 'the law' but to be aware of the context, to engage in dialogue and to accept that boundaries set out in God's Word give a necessary 'edge' to our lives. Chris finished with a story of two farming brothers who needed to set out into a snowy landscape in search of their sheep: the younger brother found that when he stepped into the footprints of his elder brother and remained close behind him, the way was easier. This is a picture of what we need to do as we follow Jesus: closely, trustingly and with our eyes on Him.



Monkton Combe School, Somerset

We try to visit as many regions of the UK as possible over a two-year period both for regional gatherings and also for school visits. During the Summer Term 2023, Alix and I visited seven schools...

Regional meetings and school visits

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Compiled by Alastair Reid
TISCA General Secretary

Lambrook School, Bracknell

On 27th April TISCA hosted a regional meeting at Lambrook School. Those in attendance included Heads, Chaplains, teachers and governors from schools in this area, as well as Lambrook staff. We gathered to hear James Shone, founder of the charity 'I Can and I Am', talk about the tragedy he faced when he was diagnosed with a large brain tumour at the time he was appointed Head of Monkton Prep School ten years ago.

With raw honesty, deep humility and warm Christian faith, James shared some of the lessons he'd learned from what he'd experienced and he encouraged us all, whatever difficulties we face in life, to 'look up, forward and out': looking up to the LORD and seeking his strength; looking forward in hope and keeping a positive attitude; and looking outward in generosity and love towards others. James helped us consider how this connects so well with those three key aspects of the Christian life; faith, hope and love.

There was a great time for questions afterwards, during which we reflected on caring for pupils in our schools when they go through tragedies, the issues

Regional meeting at Castle Court Prep School



facing young people today, the sovereignty of God and how to keep going spiritually ourselves. We prayed together before enjoying a wonderful time of fellowship over bowls of particularly yummy 'street food'! We are particularly grateful to Jonathan and Jenny Perry and Lambrook School for hosting us.

Castle Court School, Wimborne, Dorset

In early May we set off on a three-day 'road trip' and visited four different schools. We were last at Castle Court in January 2022 when the weather was wet and the evening dark. This time we had bright Spring sunshine and a BBQ to enjoy! Some 20 people gathered



Alix with Revd Graham Wright (Gordon's School) enroute to Lambrook

At Heritage School with the co-founders, Fiona and Jason Fletcher



At Ipswich School with the Chaplain and the Head



from across seven different schools and we were challenged by Roger Leake (former Head and a Governor at St David's College) to consider. 'What do the pupils think?' (See separate article on this talk.) As ever, CC staff were incredibly generous with their fellowship, their food and their encouragement.

Heritage School

Our travels then took us to Cambridge and a visit to a relatively new member, **Heritage School**. Situated in the former PGCE buildings (where I once sat as a budding teacher), beautifully utilised for classrooms, we could sense God's presence through all those we met. The co-founders (and Head/Deputy Head), Jason and Fiona Fletcher, have an amazing story of being persistent in pursuing a God-given dream of setting up a school. Heritage will be the venue for a regional meeting on the 8th May 2024 - save the date!

Framingham College

From Cambridge we drove to **Framingham College** in Suffolk and were very warmly welcomed by Brynn Bayman, the Chaplain. Here a group, largely parents and grandparents (part of Brynn's 'kinship group' called Soul Food - see on) with a few from local schools, gathered to hear Bishop Sandy Millar (a co-author of the Alpha course), speak about 'the courage to encourage'. Sandy

reminded us that whilst there is much (seemingly) that's gloomy in the world, 'we do not lose heart' (2 Corinthians 4:1). Sandy reminded us that young people love a challenge and so we mustn't be afraid to talk with them about Jesus. There were four particular lessons for us in schools: firstly, remember there is much encouragement in the way we came to faith - and let's not lose sight of the vision and purpose we gained then (and nor be frightened of asking for a fresh vision, whatever our age); secondly, don't neglect our devotional lives (and see another article in TNV on this in schools); thirdly, have one or more people with which to pray regularly - a 'kinship group'; and, fourthly (our 'homework' from Sandy), we need to 'speak to ourselves' regularly, put our Hope in God, pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit and trust Jesus when He says, 'If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it' (John 14:14).

Ipswich School

The final stop off on our 'road trip' was at **Ipswich School**, the alma mater of Thomas Wolsey. Here we had a warm welcome from the Head, Nick Weaver, and the Chaplain, Holly Crompton-Battersby. It was super to share something of TISCA's work, to hear about matters in the school and then to pray together. This, as ever, was a massive encouragement, and remains an aim when we go on 'road trips' - namely to visit schools on our route wherever possible.



Alastair and Alix at Framingham College - with the Castle in the background



Bishop Sandy Millar, speaking at the Framingham regional meeting

Since the pandemic, we have continued to hold a once a term online evening meeting which has allowed our members and friends from across the world to join together to hear a stimulating talk, join in with a discussion and to pray together...

TISCA online meeting

An evening meeting with... Paul Houghton of Kingdom Bank

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Alastair Reid
TISCA General Secretary

Paul Houghton, the CEO (since 2020) of Kingdom Bank and the Chair of Governors at Birkdale School, spoke at our Summer Term 2023 online evening meeting.

As usual we had a wonderful geographical spread of those online – embracing England, Wales, India and Nigeria on this occasion. Paul filled us in on his background (including the life-changing impact of Glod Christian camps), schooling at Wellington College, studies at Durham and his work as an accountant with Deloitte and at Grant Thornton before working with Sheffield City Council. His faith grew through Glod, at St Helen's Bishopsgate and latterly through membership of Christchurch, Fulwood, in Sheffield. He has served as a Trustee and as a Director in various organisations and throughout all of these, including at his present

work with Kingdom Bank, he has focussed on three key principles:

- **Culture:** God is a God of relationships – what does that mean for us where we are serving?
- **Growth:** what is the focus and direction of the charities and organisations of which we are a part?
- **Quality:** how can we best do things well?

Paul acknowledged, as we all will have experienced, that change is hard for any organisation but that doesn't mean we shouldn't go down that 'road'. He challenged us to google '**jaws of culture**' and to reflect on how we might bring about Godly change to our work places and to the Church. Finally, Paul also encouraged us to consider the work of Kingdom Bank which seeks to invest in Christian work and mission: www.kingdom.bank

Photos from the 'Leading in the Limelight' conference at St Michael at the Northgate church, Oxford



Leading in the (lime)Light

A TISCA Emerging Leaders' Conference in Oxford

Staff



Alastair Reid
TISCA General Secretary

Our recent Christian leadership conference was blessed with teaching and discussion led by four key TISCA supporters. Amongst much of value, here are four things for each of us to consider, whatever our role in schools / supporting schools:

1. **'Thicken our skins but enlarge our hearts'** (Antony Spencer, CEO of the Mill Hill Foundation): as Christians in schools we need to maintain high standards and support the discipline structure, even when this means serious discipline, even expelling a pupil. Nonetheless, let's bring grace to difficult situations and 'go with the right motives – but still go'!
2. **'Keep a nice things file'** (Emma Taylor, Warden of the Dean Close Foundation): Headship and leadership of all kinds can be a lonely place but, 'Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess' (Hebrews 10:23), listen to what others say and advise, and in the face of all too much criticism and negativity (at times), keep a file of 'nice things' – 'thank you' letters,

notes of appreciation, etc. – as reminders that many do appreciate what we do!

3. **'Leadership is an achievement of trust'** (Justyn Terry, VP and Academic Dean at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford): quoting Peter Druckler on leadership, we were reminded that we need to foster trustworthiness in ourselves first and foremost. The Bible has a great deal to say on this (cf Acts 20, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, etc.): our focus is to be on character rather than appearance, popularity or worldly prestige.
4. **'Work from a place of satisfied rest'** (Margaret White, former Deputy Head and Sandpiper consultancy): Margaret's mum says, 'There's always time for a cup of coffee' and this simple statement reminds us that rest is God-ordained. Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). Are we able to trust in Jesus' finished work to such an extent that we are able to rest from our own work on a regular basis and with a sense of satisfaction?



In His image

Our dignity, development, distinctiveness and desire to serve in schools

TISCA Annual Conference, June 2023

- Chaplains
- Heads
- Parents
- Staff
- Governors
- Pupils
- Supporters



Alastair Reid
TISCA General Secretary

We again gathered in The Emmanuel Centre (EC) in Westminster and were blessed with over seventy in-person delegates (some from as far afield as Ethiopia) and some twelve online (embracing the Western Isles and India). Richard Hindley of the IT department at Westminster School and a pastor at the EC was a wonderful host and, as ever, the facilities and refreshments were excellent.

We were also blessed through the sponsorship of **Rock UK** (passionate about transforming lives through outdoor adventure) as our primary supporter and, additionally, by secondary sponsor **Utility Aid**. There were a further seven stallholders – Alive to the World, Bingham Academy, Compassion, EasiPC, Faraday Institute, Kick and Living and Powerful.

All of our sessions are available as audio downloads (do ask if you'd like these) and so what follows is a [brief summary](#) of the Conference sessions, all of which allowed time for discussion, questions and feedback.

Our conference began with a hymn ('Praise to the Lord, the Almighty') and prayer led by Andrew Hutchinson (Head of Chaplaincy at Monkton Combe

and a TISCA Trustee). **Alex Aldous** (Chaplain at Prestfelde School and a TISCA Trustee), led devotions. He shared from John 1, from Colossians 1 and from Isaiah 49 ('engraved on the palm of His hands') and reminded us that we are made in the image of God. His challenge came through a 'dignity statement' which he saw displayed in a school: 'The measure of how good a school is, is how it treats the least of its members'. Our 'take away' from this was a reminder to show appreciation whenever we can – to those 'above' and 'below' us in school – for we are all made in God's image and precious in His sight.



Alex Aldous

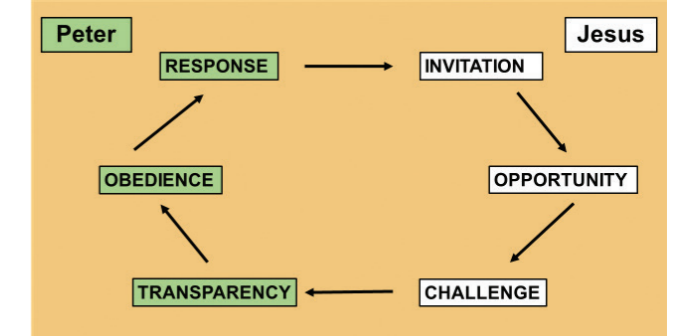
Peter Woodroffe (Deputy CEO of the Independent Schools Association, ISA) led session 1 with a focus on school pupils and on what ISI inspectors look out for. Peter had three themes: firstly, how do we review the school ethos (Galatians 5:22-23 – on the fruit of the Spirit which should be our hallmark in all schools)? Secondly, how do we engage meaningfully with pupils (John 4:13-14 – Jesus engaging with the Samaritan woman at the well – listening well, speaking directly but gently and graciously). Thirdly, how do we best assess risk (John 8:7 – let's not be eager to throw the first 'stone'). In his session, Peter allowed a lot of time for discussion in small groups and for feedback (and kept the Gen Sec on his toes with the roving mic!). In his conclusion he brought us back to where we were in the opening devotions: Genesis 1:27. We are all made in God's image and this should govern our actions in schools at all times.



Peter Woodroffe

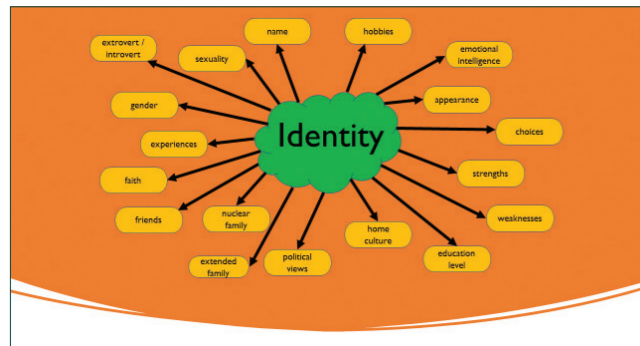
Our second session was led by **Liz Bewley** (Executive Director of Onelife leadership) whose focus was on staff (and pupils) leading well. At the outset of her presentation, Liz recalled John Maxwell's statement: 'Leadership is one life influencing another'. She also referred to Pete Wynter's challenge: 'Leadership is calling the best out of yourself and those around you'. Liz was keen to stress that young people are not the church of tomorrow but of today and so should be treated and equipped accordingly. She used a very helpful diagram to explain how Jesus approached Peter when he was first called to be a disciple: an invitation, an opportunity and a challenge which then caused Peter to act with transparency, obedience and then a ready response. And so this 'circle' of invitation by Jesus to response from us continues today. Liz, too, engaged regularly with the delegates and even had us moving out of our seats to engage with those we had not yet met – and, moreover, drawing pictures to illustrate how best to serve in leadership!

Liz Bewley with John Ash (Dean Close) sketching 'serving'



Liz Bewley's 'circle' diagram

Our final session was led by former TISCA Trustee, **Sarah Griffiths** (Deputy Head Pastoral and Wellbeing at Caterham School). Sarah reminded us that it is certainly possible to be distinctive and authentic within a secular landscape. To demonstrate this, she led us through a number of questions related to key legislation/issues in schools and engagingly got us discussing and sharing in small groups. Sarah had lots of practical suggestions as 'take aways': for example, reinforcing small boundaries (eg. uniform infractions) in order to establish trust and, ultimately, help pupils to feel safe. She reassured us that any teacher is entitled to express her or his own views on a topic so long as they take into account the context, setting and timing of the encounter and allow for a gracious discussion: what might be said in for example a compulsory chapel setting needs to take account of the fact there is no easy 'right of reply' and some issues are better left to a classroom or discussion setting. Above all, we must provide safe and effective care for children. We need to consider (for example) how easy or otherwise it is for pupils to visit the school matron or counsellor: there may be 'barriers' (such as a school's routines, its staffing or house structure – even a pupil's parents) which can inhibit a young person being open and seeking appropriate advice. Sarah shared an identity 'cloud burst' diagram which served to remind us that it is to be expected that young people will explore many areas of their identity during adolescence. She urged us to respond calmly whilst this is happening as this can only be helpful.



Sarah Griffiths and the identity 'cloud'

Our conference concluded with a panel of presenters, chaired by **Antony Spencer** (CEO of Mill Hill School and a TISCA Trustee) considering questions and comments from delegates. As part of our day, we

were also privileged to have **Andrew Lewer, MP** (chair of the APPG for independent education) speak to us and to share something of the way his Christian faith has been evident in the meetings and political discussions of which he has been a part. This reminded us that some politicians do indeed 'do God' and that we should remember to pray for MPs and all in government.



Andrew Lewer MP



Delegates in discussion

Reflections on the day by delegates – in person and online

This was my first Annual TISCA Conference. I was unable to attend in person but I was very impressed with the speakers who came and presented. Each presentation was thought provoking and challenging. The presenters kept us engaged and encouraged us to have discussions with fellow believers that were genuine and heartfelt. Coming from diverse backgrounds, we were able to come together with a single focus of transforming education through Christ. It challenged me to see how I could reflect Christ in the position He has placed us in. The topics in the conference also highlighted the various challenges and pressures fellow believers face and how schools are trying to face these issues to point children and co-workers to Christ. The wonderful thing about TISCA is how they bring together disciples of Christ from as far as Africa and Asia together for the Gospel through education. A brilliantly special conference that touches the heart and impacts action in education.



Barnabas Moses

Director of Samaritans School,
Yelagiri Hills, Tamil Nadu India

As a new chaplain, it was a lovely encouragement to gather with other Christian staff working in similar context: we may be scattering seed in different fields, but we are co-workers fulfilling the same Great Commission. The variety of speakers each gave me something to take away to apply, be encouraged by, or be prompted to think more about. I appreciated the warm fellowship of all those I talked to, and the chances to discuss in groups in two of the sessions, as that gave further opportunities to meet more people as a someone new to TISCA and chaplaincy. All in all, a well-thought out and purposeful day with clear thinking about being aware of the issues of this current time and how we navigate them.



Hannah Hidden

Chaplain at Birkdale School, Sheffield

I enjoyed all aspects of the TISCA Conference 2023 – the speakers, the discussion and talking to people during the breaks. I found the talk given by Sarah Griffiths particularly stimulating and helpful. Sarah dealt with the theme "His hands and His feet: being distinctive and authentic within a secular landscape". Sarah speaks from wide experience, most recently as Deputy Head Pastoral & Wellbeing at Caterham School.

She posed a series of six questions, to which she responded once delegates had had an opportunity to consider their own responses. The session began by asking whether it was indeed possible for a school to (legally) have a distinctively Christian ethos. The answer was a resounding 'yes' but it was acknowledged that some areas are relatively straightforward and generally well-understood (e.g. admissions policy, staff recruitment, acts of worship) whereas other areas take more thought and more understanding to avoid creating issues or raising concern (e.g. teaching RSE, uniform requirements and supporting pupils who do not espouse the school's faith ethos).

She spoke helpfully about issues of identity, pointing out that the identity of our pupils is far more complex than merely their gender and sexuality: it includes things like home culture, political views and many more. We need to allow pupils to explore these areas for themselves within the framework of school life. My take-away thought was that we need to greet all pupils and be gracious to them, always remembering how Jesus reacted to those who opposed or feared him, and affirming that each individual human being is made in God's image and precious to him.



Hugh Bradby

Chair of Governors at Woodstock School,
India – and former Gen Sec



Be prepared! Facing inspections and inspectors...

Heads Staff Governors



Jack Champness

Deputy Head Academic, Monkton Combe Prep School

The acronym 'ISI' (the Independent Schools' Inspectorate) is well



known in the independent sector and, albeit not evoking quite such visceral feelings as 'OFSTED' might in our state sector colleagues, it can make everyone nervous.

Despite not having a reputation quite on a level with Ofsted for being a burdensome and judgemental big brother figure, they can be perceived by some colleagues as heralding the apocalypse. However, in actuality ISI is founded upon a philosophy of 'peer review', a culture of consultation and an intention to support the independent sector.

In my experience, both inspecting schools for ISI as a Team Inspector and supporting schools I work for through inspections, **there are three things which make an enormous difference to staff.**



A Monkton Prep Y5 class

1. SLT (Senior Leadership Team) need to smile

Nothing transmits stress like SLT looking stressed. It is an intense experience going through inspection, especially if things are not going as planned. The most impactful and effective way of helping staff is for leadership to evoke calm.

2. Be honest

ISI is not looking to catch schools out. The majority of Team Inspectors are working SLT in schools, and they know full well it is never possible to have everything perfect. If the school is on a journey in a certain area - like curriculum development, for example - and it has not reached the destination, staff being honest about how it is going and what the successes and challenges have been will be very well received by inspectors.

3. Be prepared

Inspections are sprung on schools with as little as 22 hours' notice, and ISI will have been exploring the school's policies and website information for weeks before the call comes. So it is important that staff are as prepared as they can be without being on tenterhooks all the time. Simple 'hacks' like having a generic school lesson plan template already shared and having regular reminders on what training staff have undertaken can mean a school is ready without feeling the need to do huge amounts of extra work.

ISI is launching a new Framework as of September 2023 with more emphasis on collaboration with staff and students during inspections; the fundamentals however will stay the same. Even though they are tense affairs, inspections are really useful audits to help schools get even better.



John Richardson

A former Head and a current Chair of Governors

St Paul wrote about Christians being created in Christ Jesus *'to do good works which God planned in advance that we should do'* [Eph 2:10]. It's a call to service that gives us the freedom to use our time and talents for good as we choose within the providence of God.

So why choose to be a school governor? And how might a calling be discerned and pursued?

It might be argued that being a Christian minister is the highest calling, but being a school governor surely comes a close second. After all, every child goes to school; very few go to church. So, the answer to 'why' is perhaps self-evident.

But which of us is suited to it and how do we set about being appointed?

Who should be a governor is, in my experience, the critical question. The composition of a board of governors and the way it behaves are hugely influential in the life of a school. Good governance enables a school to flourish whereas mediocre or poor governance is a significant hindrance.

The key characteristics of a good governor are that he/she is committed [they share the school's

vision], hard-working [they turn up to meetings, come well prepared, and take an interest in the life of the school], knowledgeable [they have specific skills and experience], astute [they are up-to-date and well informed], open-minded [they are adaptable and willing to learn], and humble [they are not narrowly dogmatic]. And, most importantly, he/she answers emails!

As for the way to be appointed, be prepared and be proactive. Put together a CV and a covering letter outlining why you want to serve and what you would bring to a board. Make your willingness to be a governor known to your local vicar/minister [they are often asked], suitable schools [they are nearly always recruiting], multi-academy trusts etc [they have access to groups of schools], head-hunting agencies [they are commonly employed to find talented individuals], and other governors you know [they recommend people they trust].

Once you are in post, be positive, think creatively, dare to dream, and enjoy it!

TISCA is running a 'Governors' Gathering at Pangbourne College on Wednesday, 18th October 2023. See our website for details - and come along!



Heads and Governors' meeting at Monkton Combe School, May 2023

Leaders making better decisions

Heads Governors



Mark Herbert

Mark Herbert is a former teacher and church pastor, and co-founder and director at *Salt & Light Leadership Coaching*. He is the author of *I'm not a leader* and supports multiple schools with their pupil and staff leadership development. He lives in Guildford (Surrey) and has a young family.



God's Word has much to teach us about decision-making, largely through the lens of seeking wisdom (both the attribute – Proverbs 4:5, and the Person – Proverbs 4:6). What might this look like as we consider the context of leadership and decision-making in schools?

Here are 4 reflections, each posed as a question.

1. Better Thinking

"Am I fostering a thinking environment for myself and others?"

A *Thinking Environment* is a concept created by the author Nancy Kline¹. She suggests that in order to make consistently great decisions, we must first do great thinking. It is common to hear school leaders share of a longing for "more head-space" and "quiet". These are not a pre-requisite for great thinking in everyone but will resonate with many. If you share this longing, consider what could you do to create pockets of space in the cadence of a busy school day, week, month, term – a space where you can replace your best 'doing' with your best 'thinking'? What might you need to say "no" to, in order to say "yes" to this?

2. Better Decisions

"Where am I displaying 'functional stupidity' in my leadership?"

This seemingly provocative term is the opposite of cognitive diversity. Functional stupidity refers to a persistence to function in sub-optimal way(s), often subconsciously, in terms of leveraging the best thinking in ourselves and others. We are all biased, and more than we care admit. Bias blunts our thinking and short circuits

our creativity. Where are you limiting cognitive diversity, with the knock on of limiting both your decision-making and the resultant leadership? Perhaps you have opportunity to invite guests into your meetings – people who see things differently or disagree with you. How might this be of benefit to you? True cognitive diversity sparks honest debate, the forerunner (often) to better decisions.

3. Better Leaders

"When do I have opportunity to get out of the way?"

A common blockage preventing others from growing is our own leadership. This becomes particularly true when stakes are high, and we increase our tendency to grip the control-reins firmer. Counterintuitively, these are the very moments to involve others in our decision-making, sharing the responsibility that comes with this. Far from being leadership abdication, sharing a decision is a means of taking another's person's



Mark and his business partner Jon Bircher – on a recent 'team away day'!

leadership development seriously. Getting out of the way (sometimes entirely, more often in part) and sharing meaningful responsibility is a means of creating a healthy leadership vacuum. Someone else can then step forward into this space and exercise their decision-making muscles – but this is only possible when we have first got out of the way.

4. Better Schools

"What narrative are I telling in my leadership?"

There is a subtle but profoundly damaging difference of using the language of "leader" more than "leadership". The former can unconsciously reinforce an 'us' and

'them' mentality - there are the 'leaders' and then there is 'everyone else'. Far too many pupils and school staff then comfortably align with the 'everyone else', assuming leadership to be the sole domain of the 'leaders'. The result is so much wasted leadership. By contrast, when we speak more about "leadership", positioning this as something any person can aspire towards, we will see a greater number of actual leaders rising to the surface and leading authentically. Who wouldn't want to see that happen?

- Better thinking means better decisions
- Better decisions mean better leadership
- Better leadership means better schools

TISCA news

New school members

- Francis Holland School, Sloane Square, London
- Bingham Academy, Ethiopia



Movers/new appointments

- John Ash, Chaplain at **Dean Close School**, is moving into a new ministry and the new Chaplain at Dean Close is Ian Gulland and the Associate Chaplain, moving from Westonbirt, is Alice Monaghan (a TISCA Trustee)
- Matt Fox: moving from the Perse School in Cambridge across the City to be Deputy Head at **Heritage School**, Cambridge
- Andy Pilkington is the new Head at **Castle Court Prep School** and joins them from Elstree School
- Pete Last started his new appointment as Head at **Kingham Hill School** in the Summer term 2023
- Richard Naylor is the new Principal at **Hebron School**, India, and joins from positions with mission agencies and other charities in the UK, having worked Overseas in Russia and in China as well as in Surrey. His predecessor at Hebron, Tim Wright, is now with the Church of England education department in London
- The new Chaplain at **Mill Hill School** is Ryan Venn-Dunn
- The new Chaplain at **Birkdale** is Hannah Hidden



With Lucinda van der Hart, Chaplain at Francis Holland Sloane Square



New Trustee

We are delighted to announce that **Ray Maher**, Bursar at King Edward's School, Southampton, has joined the TISCA Trustee body.

1 Time to Think – Nancy Kline

How can we as Christian parents be a positive influence in our children's school?

Parents Supporters



Sue Clark

TISCA Trustee and former boarding parent and a current school governor

Parents are busy people and particularly when one can be far away from school it can feel difficult to be involved or connected.

All too easily the first contact can be when you have concerns about your child, but being intentional about being a positive influence in school can really help the atmosphere of school and a child's experience whilst there. Here are some suggestions.

If we see an issue or **feel the need to make a complaint** it is worth stopping, praying and thinking about the best way to achieve a good result for everyone in a way that is positive and up-building and could achieve positive change.

Could we do **something practical** to help the school out at support groups, events or school activities? Do we have a professional skill? These are really appreciated, particularly in small schools. A positive Christian presence always makes an impact.

Above all, though, **prayer** is the most important

component of any Christian ministry, and we need to make it a priority. What is in place to facilitate parents' prayer varies tremendously from school to school. When our son went to board there were weekly prayer emails sent out, which was extremely helpful. Eventually these were replaced by in-person prayer meetings, but we were not local, so this was more difficult. Boarding schools, or day schools drawing from a wide area, could facilitate online prayer gatherings to boost the level of involvement.

If there isn't a school prayer meeting, why not start one? We began as three Christian parents in a day school; we drew in other parents from different year groups until we had a little group of us. At another school I only knew one other Christian parent and a group never got going. So, we prayed by ourselves instead. If you are praying on your own, you can equip yourself with news sheets and updates, school calendar etc. If you live a long way away and it's not easy to get information, praying scripture over the school is a great idea.

How can we better pray for our schools?

Parents Staff Supporters



Alastair Reid

TISCA General Secretary

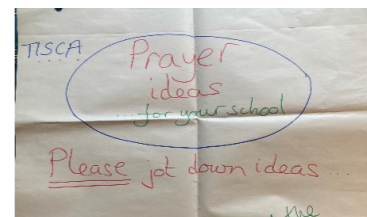
At the Annual Conference in June 2023, we asked delegates to give us ideas about how we might be even more focussed and creative in praying for the schools we serve in and govern.

Here is a summary of the ideas we received, in the words of the delegates:

- Pray around **the boundaries** and campus of school – it makes for a refreshing walk, too!

- **Staff prayer group** is an easy way to make sure that more people than just the Chaplain are praying for the school. Needs wisdom so that it doesn't become a source of gossip but worth the thought. We meet for about 10mins in a 20mins first break. We just go to a part of the school gardens where the children are not allowed. When the weather is too bad we meet in a tiny room between two classrooms – sort of store room! Also, **parent prayer groups** are a good idea

(left to right) Discussion and prayer group at the Annual TISCA conference; Flip chart from the Conference; Chaplains gathering for prayer



- but I have found the staff group to be a great way to support the Christian Staff and get people praying!
- We are always **looking to recruit godly teachers** for our context. We'd love prayer that God would speak to the people who need to come and be a part of our school's ministry.
- Is there scope for a yearly **prayer calendar** with various schools and themes attached?
- Maybe **breakfast meetings** that staff, parents and maybe pupils can attend? Could be before work and school so all can get there. Would bring the community together?
- A **TISCA Prayer Board** that can be updated online once

- a week and accessed by TISCA Members for prayer.
- We often pray for our local schools in our **Church prayer meeting**, and I know other branches of the Church do as well. And I pray for schools when I'm visiting Church families
- Pray around the **exam hall** as you take part in invigilation

'Prayer spaces' and 'Pray for Schools' About Us | Pray For Schools are also fabulous resources for those 'special occasions' in the school year but let's continue to seek ways to encourage regular, sustained and purposeful prayer for pupils, staff, parents and governors.

Creative Chapel Themes

Chaplains Heads



Compiled by Frankie Knight

TISCA Trustee

It's not always easy to come up with themes for your school assembly or Chapel series. Here are a few suggestions that might be worth a try...

'Big Questions'

One school invited pupils to feed in questions via their tutors. These questions were then grouped into themes that formed the basis of a term-long Chapel series which engaged and answered the questions from a Christian perspective.



'How Jesus Related to People'

How we relate well to people, especially those who are different to us, is a key question of our culture. Why not consider a series that looks at how the Lord Jesus related to those he met? In him we see a God who is both personal and knowable; a God of relationship who treated people with empathy, compassion and dignity; a God of high standards and yet deep mercy. Pupils might be surprised to hear what Jesus is like and challenged in their own attitudes towards others.



'Jesus the Gamechanger'

A school ran a series on 'how the teachings of Jesus revolutionised the world'. The series explored how many of the moral claims we make, and so many of the rights we claim to hold dear, are rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and, specifically, the teachings of Jesus. The series looked at things such as care for the outsider, inclusion of women, value of human life, equality of all people, the importance of compassion, the establishing of education centres, the virtue of humility and the beginnings of the scientific method.



'Religion and Resilience'

Research has shown that some of the key factors that contribute to resilience are: gratitude, hope, belief in something greater than yourself, ability to forgive and opportunities to serve others. A Chapel series looking at each of these things might serve your school community well and could also point pupils to the fact that, as those created by God, we thrive on things ultimately found in relationship with him.



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Vital stories to enhance Relationships & Health Education Years 1–8

Through the power of storytelling, this RHE resource library of books brings children alive to themselves and to the world around them. The Alive to the World stories open young eyes to the consequences of their actions. Readers sharpen their critical thinking and learn why self-regulation leads to happiness, greater productivity, and better human relationships. The story library comes with teaching materials to reduce teacher workload. Families are connected through website content and can acquire copies of the books.

“ This excellent programme reinforces in a charming way the fundamental values which used to be absorbed through osmosis. It is a much needed aspect of education for children of all backgrounds.”

Judith Nemeth,
Executive Director, Values Foundation

Compliance charts for the DfE's RHE Guidelines (primary) are available.

To find out more or have a trial online session, please contact Louise Kirk at info@alivetotheworld.co.uk or 07969 680519.

An innovative method of teaching

A chosen quality or value is presented through a story which children enjoy because it speaks about real things that happen in their own lives.

Pupils associate with Charlie and Alice and want to know what happens next, making learning enjoyable and the moral memorable.

Having recognised a value, they are shown how it applies more generally, and how putting it into practice strengthens their willpower.

Teacher guides explain the goal of each chapter with clear objectives for **knowing**, **accepting** and **doing**. These are accompanied by activities.

The student texts are enlivened with general knowledge, giving cross-curricular links to other subjects such as sport, history and geography.

Books 1–3 (Early Books & KS1/Foundation Stage)

Large format Show-and-Tell classroom books.
Full electronic teacher guides.

Books 4–8 (ages 8–13)

Student storybooks.
Full teacher textbooks.



All books are also available in an online version.
Books may be bought individually or as class packages.

Encouraging staff to have a regular Quiet Time

Staff

We asked three people engaged with children in our schools how we as adults can be encouraged to make the most of our 'quiet times' – and to take these whenever possible.

It is not easy to find a 'moment of calm' free from distractions in a busy workday, often for many with the domestic to-do list that is no less frenetic than the workplace. I am fortunate to have a 35-minute car journey into work each morning which fits perfectly for many of the sermons I download. I go to trusted sources, Timothy Keller, John Risbridger, Chris Kilby..... and also find working through Nicky Gumbel's 'Bible in a Year' is a useful discipline to make sure you get the full benefit of God's word avoiding cherry picking the less taxing passages. So often things we need to hear are buried away in the less familiar. Reading or hearing Bible passages and reflecting on them is invaluable in the quiet sanctuary of a familiar car journey but prayer is the engine room of the Christian journey. Weather permitting, walking off my school lunch as I lap the school (1km, 10mins) helps me to have a brief time out in the middle of the day to lift my head up, get some perspective and talk to God, thanking him for all his good gifts, reassured that I can commit the pupils, parents, staff and governors to him, secure in the knowledge that he is Lord of All.



Ray Maher

Bursar at King's School, Southampton, and a TISCA Trustee

We may believe that we don't live by bread alone but it's so easy to function as though we do. None of us finds daily Bible reading easy and one thing we've done to encourage people is to create something short and bite-sized which they can read on their phone (www.daybydaynotes.org). We wrote it with teenagers in mind, wanting them to spend three minutes with the Lord in his word rather than waiting for the 20 minutes they could never quite find. But we've also found a number of adults have found it helpful to establish or re-establish a daily pattern of Bible reading and prayer. It's a free resource so if you find it helpful do pass it on to others at school, church or elsewhere! And it's very much a work in progress so do let us have any feedback (admin@lymingtonrushmore.org).



Anthony Bewes

Team Leader, Lymington Rushmore Holidays

Leading in a Christian community is a demanding task, leading us to often be time poor in service of others. Finding time to pray has been a regular challenge! I am reminded of Psalm 61,

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Over the years I have tried a number of different things. I have learnt, that time must be put in the diary before anything else. For me, early time is great, a regular routine beats a moving feast and a resource in necessary. I have found simply listening to scripture a source of encouragement at times. Serving also helps to push me back to God. Delivering prayer, bible study and reflection with a view to serving other inevitably serves me too (often more than the intended audience)! If you are struggling, you are not alone. It is worth the effort!



Ben Williams

Trinity School, Sevenoaks, Deputy Head

We were delighted to welcome Bingham Academy in Ethiopia into membership and were amazed they were able to be represented in person at our Annual Conference in Westminster in June 2023!

Bingham Academy – our newest Overseas' member!

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Edwina Dewart & Teresa Feller
HR and Recruitment Officer, Bingham Academy

Selamta (ሰላምታ) or greetings dear friends from Addis Ababa!

We are delighted to have become recent members of TISCA and really enjoyed being at the annual conference in Westminster in June. If you took some Ethiopian coffee samples from us, we hope you enjoyed them – Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee and keeps our teachers energised!

What can we tell you about Bingham Academy? Bingham is a ministry of Serving in Mission (SIM), which was originally called the Sudan Interior Mission when it began in 1893. One of its three founders was a missionary called Roland Bingham who had a heart to reach the least-reached people of sub-Saharan Africa and our school is named after him.

Bingham started in 1946 and is an international, interdenominational school with 340 students (ages 4-18) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The school was made



A science lesson preparing students for their IGCSEs.

Monthly staff coffee ceremony. Don't worry Ethiopia also has wonderful tea for all the tea drinkers among you!



possible by Emperor Haile Selassie who was a patron in its earliest years. Some of you may know that Haile Selassie had strong ties with the UK, having spent five years in England during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and some of his children and grandchildren were educated there.

Bingham Academy began as a school for children of missionary families. It later expanded to include children of diplomatic families and international nonprofit organizations (NGOs), followed by Ethiopian families. Today about 40% of children attending are from missionary families, which encourages missionaries to come, and continue serving in Ethiopia, because they know their children are receiving high quality education.

Bingham is accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and uses the Cambridge International Curriculum.

We are always looking for committed Christian teachers to join our school. Visit our website for more information or reach out with any questions or a chat. Contact Teresa on recruitment@binghamacademy.net or binghamacademy.net

Schools boast a whole host of extra-curricular opportunities for their pupils and, wonderfully, many allow voluntary Christian groups to be among those options. Across the country, there are optional Christian meetings happening in schools that give pupils the chance to explore the Christian faith or to grow in their own faith. We asked a few teachers and Chaplains to tell us about the Christian group(s) at their school...

The season of Lent can provide a great opportunity for pupils to engage with the Christian faith at school. We asked three Chaplains how they make the most of Lent in their school context.

Christian Groups in Schools

Chaplains Staff

King's Bruton is a co-ed boarding school with some day pupils (ages 13-18). We run a weekly meeting called 'TGI' on a Friday at 4:30pm. Anyone and everyone is welcome: we fill a room with sofas, rugs and beanbags and have background music. Pupils arrive and can chill and chat whilst enjoying a can of drink and snack; we then play a group game or do team challenges; this is then followed by a Bible talk from a member of staff or a visiting speaker. Each term has a talk series (this term is "What Jesus says about..."). A myriad of pupils come along, all at varying stages of exploring/growing faith.

 **George Beverley**
Chaplain at King's Bruton

Pangbourne College is a senior co-ed day and boarding school. The day is very busy so over the years we have tried various times for our Christian meetings: before breakfast and after boarders' prep have sometimes been workable. At the moment, we have a Year 7-8 meeting during their daytime prep slot before sport - it's a popular alternative to prep! For Years 9 upward, we meet at 6pm on a Tuesday and some day pupils are able to stay late to join in. We meet for 45 minutes and we had pizza while the budget could accommodate it, a short game and then talk with discussion.

 **Neil Jeffers**
Chaplain of Pangbourne College

Berkhamsted is a large 3-18 school with a mixed Prep School, separate boys and girls from ages 11-16 and then a mixed Sixth Form. We mostly have day students but some Sixth Form boarders. The school buildings are scattered through the town so moving between sites and staggered break times and lunchtimes are a challenge to gathering students (and staff) together. Therefore, we have several quite small Christian groups that meet at lunchtimes on different sites: some boys meet on a Wednesday lunchtime and girls meet on a Thursday lunchtime. We meet for about half an hour of biscuits, discussion and contemplative activities.

 **Jane Markby**
Chaplain at Berkhamsted School

St Helen and St Katharine's is a girls' day school with lots of extra-curricular activities for the girls to choose from. It therefore seemed prudent for our 'Engage' group to meet weekly at break times. The school's famously delicious cookies are there to welcome the girls on arrival, then giving 12 minutes for the study out of a 20-minute break. Although I am no longer at the school, when I was running the meeting it was helpful to have a series on either a short Bible book, a group of passages or something thematic to span a few weeks in order to cover topics in more depth. Even though the time for each week was very short, a lot of ground can be covered in Bible-based discussion.

 **Rebecca Hutton**
formerly a teacher at St Helen and St Katherine's School

Headington is an all girls school from Nursery to Year 13. In the senior school there are 800 pupils with about a quarter being boarders and, in total, there are around 40 different nationalities in the school. The voluntary Christian Union meetings are called 'Explore': we have one group in the Prep School and three at the Senior School (for Years 7&8, Years 9&10 and Years 11-13). The numbers range quite a bit but, when we put on an 'Explore Evening Event' for senior students, we probably number around 30.

 **Tom Howell**
Chaplain at Headington Girls School

Making the Most of Lent

Chaplains Heads

Lenten Life

We run a week of activities, 'Lenten Life', to enable students and staff to explore the Christian faith in a variety of ways. It has been an annual feature of school life for over a decade now and we have been grateful to see God bless it.

A major reason for Lenten Life's success has been our partnership with visiting speakers and teams during the week: visitors contribute to Philosophy and Theology lessons, presenting the gospel with academic integrity, creativity and openness to students' responses and questions. They also speak in daily Chapel services, drop-in doughnut sessions in morning break and at special lunch time pizza gatherings for different age groups. We try to create a fun, accessible atmosphere with no question or comment off-limits.

The Lenten Life debate, hosted by the debating society, always creates a buzz and the annual lecture in Science and Christianity (to which we invite students from local schools) has been a fantastic opportunity for students to hear a prominent scientist explain how their faith impacts their personal and professional life.

It is hard to know exactly what fruit Lenten Life will produce but we have certainly noticed a growing openness to faith. I particularly rejoice in the story of one student confiding to his tutor, 'Sir, when I came here I didn't believe in God, Now I'm a Christian'. Thanks be to God.

 **Simon Steer**
Chaplain at Abingdon School

Lent Labyrinth

In my previous school, we ran a 'Prayer Labyrinth Week' during the penultimate week of the Lent term. We took the chairs out of Chapel and marked out a labyrinth with creative prayer stations on the journey to the cross and out again towards the resurrection.

Prayer stations on the labyrinth included taking off your shoes/socks and making footprints in the sand as a sign of beginning your journey; holding onto a large sized, rusty nail in reflection on the crucifixion; taking a stone from a pile at the foot of a cross and laying it at the feet of Jesus; making a thumb print in ink to recognise our sin; planting a seed of hope and so on. Around the outside of the labyrinth, we had other prayer spaces - such as a gratitude gazebo, a 'prayers' board, a world map with stickers to pray for the world, Foodbank donations prayers, washing line prayers etc.

Alongside the labyrinth/prayer spaces we also invited in some visiting speakers to talk with groups of girls, to help with RS lessons as well as to 'host' the labyrinth. We had cookies at break time for the girls (and staff) to enjoy.

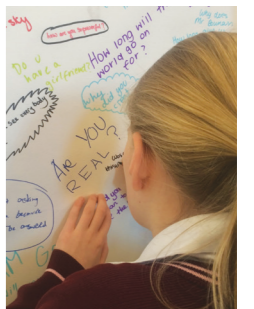
These weeks were amazing - the girls and staff loved them and there were many encouraging conversations about faith. I think the most effective thing about it all was that the pupils themselves could decide what they did: some came in groups and others came on their own; some came back time and again. Many wonderful seeds of faith were sown and I was always asked if we could do it again.

 **Katie Windle**
Chaplain at Sherborne Girls' School

Lent Lectures

During Lent we used to run a weekend for our boarders with a team invited in to run activities, games and to give talks. When this came to an end for various reasons, I suggested we use some of our regular Sixth Form lectures to focus on Christianity during Lent. So now we have a mini-series of 'Lent Lectures' with three visiting speakers. They usually talk about why they are Christians and the difference knowing Jesus makes to them and give an opportunity for questions at the end. This year, after one of the 'Lent Lectures', a Year 12 boy waited behind to chat with the visiting speaker and prayed with me and the speaker, giving his life to the Lord!

  **Alice Monaghan** Chaplain at Westonbirt School



Pupils engaging with a Lent Labyrinth

The debate on 'value added' has raged for many years but most independent schools, and especially those with a Christian ethos, seek to deliver so much more. Joanna Wright, Head at King Edward's Witley (and a TISCA Trustee), focuses on 'the journey'.

For many years some UK independent schools looked to establish branches Overseas. This wasn't always easy for those with a clear Christian ethos and so partnerships and mergers closer to home became more attractive. Here the Warden of a TISCA foundation school, Dean Close, describes some of the advantages of such mergers.

Look at the results – but see the journey

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Joanna Wright
Head at King Edward's, Witley

As results days rise up to meet us, when grades fulfil dreams or rain down disappointment, it is all too easy to compute results as success and failure, and value may easily be viewed in terms of cost.

Clearly positive outcomes need to justify considerable expenditure. With the cost of living rising, the words 'finding value' resonate even louder. Grades matter. They help realise ambition and secure a future. But there is so much more.

Schools promise much. Their core purpose is to add value so we must operate in a results-driven environment, reaching for data, to show academic progress and achievement.

Value is so much more than results. Look at the results but see the journey.

The passage of each child through school is all important, time mapped out by team sheets, certificates, matches, awards, performances; these parts equal only some of the sum. Experiences, woven between these, complete the added value for our pupils: friendship, challenge, moments of choice, failure and discovery.

These unplanned moments can grow understanding of self and others, develop learning and ignite a search for wisdom. Looking through a Christian lens, we seek holistic value; cultivation of mind and spirit, attributes to serve pupils well throughout their lives. Acquisition of knowledge and skill achieves results and sets a course, but teaching how to think and ask questions equips for life.

With knowledge, pupils will pass exams, with wisdom they will live and love well. In schools, we can help them to find value in so many ways. When we:

1. **Recognise the immeasurable**, ensuring that we shine light on the things of lasting value by finding opportunities to speak about and celebrate wisdom, kindness, service, and hope. When our reward systems and structures show the value that we place on the immeasurable.
2. **Teach pupils to become critical thinkers**, to question assumptions and challenge fake news so that they

3. **Find time to pray and plan.** We curate experiences that nurture growth in understanding of themselves and of others.
4. **Clarify the distinctiveness of Christian teaching** and how it subverts societal norms. Not all schools allow explicit bible teaching but we can orchestrate questions, highlight diversity in success, showcasing inspirational models of those who have served as well as succeeded.
5. **Support good emotional and mental health** by encouraging openness and creating opportunities to express feelings, fears and anxieties, acknowledging that everyone has moments of self-doubt where they question their value. So much conspires to bruise a fragile and vulnerable sense of self. We listen well and uphold a sense that results do not define worth.
6. **Value community.** Even if they are not explicitly Christian, schools are places where Christian guidelines can benefit all. God intended us to be different with equally valued gifts and skills. We can be purposefully appreciative and intentionally inclusive of difference without aspiring to be the same.
7. **Establish a culture of grace** as a place of powerful learning so we can discuss the big issues in life, enabling questions to be asked without fear of recrimination or judgement.
8. **Notice** the individual child, we give them dignity. When we make time for others, and act with humility and grace, we gift dignity to others.
9. **Consider the impact of the language we use** and remember that a child remembers how they feel long after they have forgotten the exact words.
10. **Practice forgiveness.** When mistakes are made, we make time to create a sense of new beginning. A culture of forgiveness supports a learning and enriching community.

Whatever prayer we have for our schools, we hope that they are places where things of lasting value flourish both now and into eternity.

School mergers – a 'marriage of convenience' and / or an alignment of vision?

Heads Governors Supporters



Emma Taylor
Warden of the Dean Close Foundation (and a TISCA Trustee)

One trend in the independent school sector which is likely only to become stronger over the coming years is the forming of groups, or federations of schools, and it is interesting to reflect on what opportunities this offers for schools with a specifically Christian foundation and mission.

These opportunities will depend on what sort of relationship exists between the schools in a group, i.e. whether it is largely an economic arrangement (what I call a 'marriage of convenience') to allow schools to share office functions and benefit from economies of scale, for example, or whether it goes further, requiring an alignment of vision, mission and values at the strategic level, or even further and deeper than that, aiming for alignment in curriculum, behaviour policies and all the other features that shape the character of a school.

For any group structure to bring wider opportunities to share the Christian faith with young people and to nurture and develop this faith, it will be necessary at least to agree that the aims of the group go beyond economic sustainability. The five schools and six nurseries in the Dean Close group currently, and any others who might join us in the future, have a shared commitment to a set of values derived from biblical truths, our school leaders and governors all sign up to the Christian ethos of the Foundation, and our Chaplaincy structure ensures that there is provision for Christian assemblies, voluntary

Christian activities and pastoral support in all areas of the Foundation. This means that hundreds of young people who did not previously have access to a Chaplain, and who only infrequently experienced Christian worship or heard biblical ideas explained and explored, now have these opportunities. We have invested (against the run of play in the sector) in additional staffing for our Chaplaincy team, and are ambitious to see an expansion not just in the formal acts of worship they lead, but also in those all-important one-to-one and small group conversations that help young people grapple with the deeper questions of life alongside someone who can help them reflect on spiritual truths they might otherwise never have encountered. The rest, of course, is over to God!

The forming of federations of schools is perhaps unlikely to be initially motivated by the desire to make and develop disciples of Jesus, but there are nevertheless exciting opportunities to do so if this is made an explicit aim of such groups.



Rev John Ash, Chaplain at Dean Close, with a stripy friend!

Why Fiction for Young People?

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Janet Wilson

Janet Wilson of Dernier Publishing This article first appeared in Together magazine, July 2023

We have a serious problem in the UK: many churches have no children, or young people. Many, many more children won't hear the good news of Jesus at school, or at home, either.

This is alarming, because our children and young people are the church of today, as well as the church of tomorrow.

Most people nod and smile politely when they ask me what I do, and I tell them I'm a publisher of Christian fiction for young people. Sounds pretty harmless, doesn't it?

When I applied for a visa to visit China a few years ago, I had a totally different reaction.

The super-efficient interviewer at the visa application centre looked at me coldly, when I told him what I do. With his neat black hair, impeccable suit and inscrutable expression, he trawled through my application papers with a fine tooth comb, followed by a good look at the Dernier Publishing website.

He disappeared for a while, before returning and handing me a pen and paper.

I had to sign and date a declaration in my own handwriting, stating that I would take no part in publishing or media activities whilst in the country, should I be granted the visa. The interviewer also took my mobile phone number, no doubt for tracking purposes.

"The Chinese government will have the final say," he said, taking back the pen and paper.

In China, if I did what I do here in the UK, I would be breaking the law. I might even be languishing in prison or doing hard labour, because Christian fiction for children is banned in China.

But they are just stories! we might say.

And we would be wrong. Stories are powerful, and the Chinese government knows it. We are story creatures. Stories seep into our very souls. It's the way we learn about the world, about our place in it, about people and right and wrong, about consequences and the truth and how to act in our world.

In a speech entitled, The Importance of Storytelling, The Rt Hon Nick Gibb, MP, said, "Would the teachings of the Bible have been so powerful had Jesus never told the story of the Good Samaritan, but simply instructed his followers to care for all humankind? ... Humans are hard-wired to remember stories, to the point that psychologists have referred to stories as 'psychologically



privileged' in the human mind." *<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-importance-of-storytelling>

Fortunately for us, here in the UK, we are free to legally produce and make available story books for children that are written from a Christian perspective. At the moment, anyway.

We need to provide our children with stories relevant for them, with characters young people can identify with, exciting plots to draw them in, thrilling adventures and dangers to delight them, satisfying endings to bring hope... and a message to remember.

A message to mull over. Whether the theme is revenge, justice, prayer, trust, or an orphan discovering that he has a father in heaven who cares for him; stories can share truth, sow seeds and build faith.

Stories allow us to think things over for ourselves and come to our own conclusions.

Stories *do* change lives.

Jesus told stories for a reason – every one has a point, but you have to want to see the point to get it.

Christian fiction for young people does the same.

We may not see immediate results from offering our children Christian fiction to read, but stories will shape their thinking, help them to see things they didn't know, build faith, and ultimately give glory to God.

According to Scripture Union, only 5% of children have any involvement in church, but many are interested in spiritual matters. They are hungry. They want to know. They are seeking the truth.

At least ¾ of the people reading this, will have taken their first steps of faith before the age of 21.

Every single child in this country deserves access to excellent, relevant, fun fiction, that will allow them to think about faith for themselves. When a child tells me that one of our books is the best story they have ever read, it makes me smile, because I know the Holy Spirit is moving in their lives, touching a place only He can.

Oh, and I got my visa and I went to China. But that's another story.

Big World, Big Questions

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Cathy Priest

Training Officer, The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion

As a young person with a Christian faith, who loved science and went on to study it at university, I remember having two mindsets growing up.

The first was where I explored scientific questions - I loved this, and thought the scientific processes were amazing. But I only engaged with these scientific ideas when doing schoolwork. The other was where I asked big life questions, and developed an understanding of my faith, my identity and purpose in the world. I engaged with these ideas in church settings and at home. From where I stood, these two ways of questioning did not seem to have much to do with each other: I didn't see my science teacher at church, and neither my parents, who happened to be church leaders, nor my Christian youth leaders had anything much to do with science.

While at university I helped lead the Christian Union where I developed my communication skills and I realised I wanted a job that was worthwhile, that involved communicating science and working with people - so I trained as a science teacher. I worked for 20

years in the science classroom having some wonderful experiences helping young people understand and fall in love with science, alongside some challenges with those who did not! During this season though I had no time to think beyond the next lesson and while my faith helped me show the fruits of the spirit in a demanding school setting there was no intellectual engagement between my faith and my science teaching. Then, with a young family of my own, and wanting to work in science education outside the classroom, I was thrilled to find a role developing teacher training at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. Here, I have more time and space to explore the interplay between science and religion and apply it to an educational setting.

The Faraday Institute is a Cambridge-based interdisciplinary research institute. Our aim is to shed new light on life's big questions in the field of science and religion through academic research and communication with adults and young people.

But why is this needed? Young people today, of all backgrounds, worldviews and faiths, face a vast array of important questions - from questions about human identity and meaning; to our response to climate crisis and natural disasters; and the ethics around new technology. For young people to flourish in today's world, we believe they need opportunities to ask their big questions and think deeply about how different curriculum areas can help explore them.

Since joining the team, I have found it rewarding to work with teachers to help build their confidence in discussing big questions with young people in curriculum-relevant and enhancing ways. Our training and resources cover a wealth of topics to support both secondary RS and science teachers, and primary teachers – covering the power and limitations of science; scriptural interpretation; ethical issues in science; perspectives on racism, climate change, and human origins in faith and science; and inspiring awe and wonder in the classroom.

If, like me, you know young people with big questions, or who are wrestling with questions about their faith, science, and the future, we would love to help.

Visit our website for more information www.faradayeducators.com and see the back page advert for more information



How do you solve a problem like climate change? Integrating knowledge from different subjects is a key part of exploring big questions

Big World, Big Questions:

Exploring **Science** and **Religion** with **young people**

The Youth and Schools Team at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion are here to support you and your young people.



We offer **school visits** to explore Big Questions directly with young people...

'You did an amazing job, covering fascinating content and drawing out a level the conversation that quite simply does not happen enough in schools. It really was a joy to watch.'

... and **teacher training** workshops to equip teachers to explore Big Question with the young people in their care.

'It was really lovely to come away feeling inspired and energised to get back to the classroom with new resources and ideas. I really think the work the FI are doing is vital... particularly in providing the intellectual tools for our children who are the changemakers of the future.'

Explore more, here: www.faradayeducators.com

We travel nationwide and can tailor content to any requirement:
from single sessions to full days, in-person or online.

Email schools@faraday.cam.ac.uk to chat to us, or register your interest.