**Planning**

**and evaluating**

**school chaplaincy**

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There are many aspects of chaplaincy work that are flexible and non-formal but that does not mean that chaplaincy should not be planned or evaluated. Planning and evaluation can be an expression of a discerning faith and a creative partnership with the spirit in meeting the needs of the school. Therefore, school chaplaincy cannot be planned in a vacuum within the school. In fact, a chaplaincy plan and its evaluation need to clarify where chaplaincy stands in relationship to the whole school, how it reflects specific aspects of school mission statement and the needs of wider community in and around school life.

## Planning

Planning in a Christian community is a form of discernment that draws the school into a pastoral cycle.[[1]](#footnote-1) The atmosphere of planning is not as much target led as it is spirit driven in responding to the call of God through careful listening and Gospel-based service of the school community. The observations and suggestions below represent some of the main elements of chaplaincy planning as they might be drawn together into an overall plan. It is just one way of doing planning in chaplaincy. There are many other ways and models available many of which emerge from the hospital chaplaincy context.[[2]](#footnote-2) Chaplains, leaderships teams and supervisors of chaplains need to construct a planning process that fits their own setting and the timetables and traditions that are specific to their school community. The planning approach should always include the following elements into the process at some stage:

1. Listening
2. Establishing priorities
3. Identifying ongoing core activities
4. Targeting specific needs
5. Timetabling for presence and flexibility

### Listening

Schools are an amalgamation of many complex individual needs, many interest groups, traditions and politics. Listening to such a complex wall of sound and silence can be baffling for those who plan chaplaincy provision. It is easy to hear the loudest voices and even easier to ignore those who may have no voice in the school community. The Christian tradition on the other hand sets great store by the marginal voices in a community and expects to hear the Spirit speaking most eloquently through them. Balanced listening needs to pick up voices that are both strong and weak in the school community and it will take time. The chaplain has a role which involves constant listening to groups, to individuals and also to the changing patterns of communication in school. This general listening can lead to impressions that need to be confirmed with others and not just subjective judgements on the part of a chaplain. For example, a chaplain may want to mention to a teaching colleague that the noise levels in year nine classes seem to be increasing as the term goes on. Others need to corroborate personal impressions if they are to have the strength needed to inform a chaplaincy plan.

The key question around the process of listening is quite simple. Who does a chaplain listen to? A chaplain will have a natural affinity with certain adults and pupils in the school community through whom they will absorb much of their day to day impressions of the school. That kind of informal listening needs to be enhanced in planning by a more formalised listening that allows a wider range of people to contribute and to allow the chaplaincy to engage directly with the whole school community. A more structured listening approach might involve the chaplain, under the direction of the head teacher and their line manager, to create listening opportunities with the following key groups:

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| **Group** | **Things to listen for and people to listen to** |
| **Pupils and staff and their perceived needs** | The perceived hopes and fears of pupils and staff are the starting point for chaplaincy ministry. Listen for hopes, fears disappointment, anger, frustration, joy suggestions and sadness. This can be achieved in structured conversations or through carefully constructed school-wide surveys. |
| **School leadership and planning teams** | Recall the mission statement of the school. Identify leadership plans and the spiritual potential of their content and timing. Listen for specific worries and hopes from the leadership and any opportunities they identify to integrate chaplaincy provision into their development planning. Regular conversation and a more formal meeting with leadership can help to establish this listening aspect of planning with the whole school |
| **The needs of the local community** | The chaplain works in the school but also beyond it. Therefore, the listening needs to extend to parents (perhaps through the PTA) to parish priests and diocese (perhaps in a deanery meeting) To local authority information, to ecumenical networks and to the plans of agencies such as CAFOD and Fair Trade. |
| **Any Unique future opportunities** | Listening for planning purposes will also include becoming aware of the possibilities that lie ahead. Events such as the world cup, a school anniversary or a significant retirement in school can create opportunities that can be integrated into the planning for a chaplaincy. |
| **The emergence of any scriptural models or Gospel wisdom** | All those involved in the planning for chaplaincy should also be encouraged to listen for any echoes of scripture in the stories they hear about school and their own feelings and impressions. This listening for the Gospel in life is a vital integrating factor in all chaplaincy planning |

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| **The Chaplain’s own impressions and experience** | The chaplain needs to spend some time reflecting on their own experience as well as the impressions of others. Sometimes favourite projects need to be reassessed, expectations need to be raised and lowered at times. Personal gifts need to be recognised and also relinquished as part of the planning process. |

### Establishing Priorities

Listening is a never-ending process which continues to inform planning at every stage. At some point the listening has to give way to the establishment of clearer priorities which will form the core of a more detailed plan for chaplaincy provision. It is important that this filtering of what has been heard takes place in a group context for the chaplain. There should be a planning group that may not meet except at around this time to ensure a broad-based planning. The group should include the chaplain, the chaplain’s line manager and the head teacher. Beyond that small group the head of RE may be invited and perhaps a member of the governing body with particular concern for school ethos. In some schools, where a governing body has an ethos sub-committee, that group might form a more natural and continuous setting for the broad overview of chaplaincy planning.

The task of the planning group will be to establish clear priorities for the chaplain to work towards rather than to generate a detailed plan. The group’s challenge is to respond to the perceived needs outlined in the table above and in a prayerful setting to let the main priorities emerge from discussion. In general, the group should identify four or five main priorities and suggest some favoured strategies that might fit into the school and its wider plans. Those favoured strategies should also consider the gifts and availability of the chaplain and their team. This group can help the chaplain to discriminate between core activities that the school needs and short-term projects that may have had their day.

Having established some priorities this group can allow the chaplain and their line manager to develop a more detailed plan. This stage is mentioned in some detail below but it does need to return to this larger group to be challenged, sharpened and connected to the wider planning within the school. Some redrafting may be necessary before an agreed plan emerges.

The core activities and the major priorities that emerge from this group need to have clear links back to the mission statement of the school and to the development plan for the school. There should be a chaplaincy thread running through that development plan so that Chaplaincy can be seen to be a core part of the school life, to be accountable in clear ways and to be seen to be adding value to the work of the school community. An integrated chaplaincy plan allows schools to highlight their distinctive Christian ethos and it also creates opportunities to draw other staff into involvement in chaplaincy by simply doing what they may have done before but in a more isolated way.

### Identifying Core Activities

It is clear that chaplaincy has a constant task regarding the seven focal point of chaplaincy identified in chapter two. How those seven focal points are acted out in chaplaincy will vary greatly but each of them should find a representation somewhere in the core tasks of a chaplaincy plan. Having clear core tasks as a chaplain is essential. Simply “being” as a chaplain is not sufficient in the busy and structured atmosphere of most schools. A chaplaincy plan should identify a core of activities that give the chaplain a rhythm of working and a pattern of access point to a wide range of the school community. A good core activity is one that would be regular, available to a range of different people and easy to provide in terms of preparation and follow up. Generally, it should have a focus around personal, social or spiritual activity rather than academic disciplines.

The rhythm of such core activities should shape the daily timetable and the weekly timetable of the chaplain. For instance, a chaplain may well want to have presence at all assemblies or in classroom prayer each morning. Another chaplain with different priorities may wish to be present around the pastoral offices in the first half hour of school. A chaplaincy plan might encourage a chaplain to be in the staff room for half an hour each day at the same time to engage with a varying population of staff each day. On a weekly basis a plan might suggest a chaplain should be in the yard three break times a week rather than restricted to the chaplaincy base.

More structured links with the RE department and attendance at pastoral meetings will add further shape to the chaplain’s role in school. With some carefully planning a chaplain can find these core activities provide a range of access to pupils and an opportunity to work alongside a number of adult colleagues in school. There is a danger to this organisation of the chaplain’s core activities. The greatest gifts a chaplain can bring to a busy school are their stillness, presence and flexibility. Overloading a chaplain with too many core activities undermines those gifts for the school. Ideally the timetable for a chaplain should be loosely packed and focussed around personal and pastoral needs. A chaplain should always be flexible enough to respond more or less immediately to personal needs, to show a new arrival around the school, to talk with a pupil in a corridor. Being a still point in the whirlwind of a school day means that priorities need to be fewer and deadlines longer but both deadlines and specific priorities do need to be there to give shape to the role of the chaplain.

For most schools these core tasks will be captured in the job description with which they will be familiar for other roles in school. The difference for a chaplain is that these core roles need a more regular review since they can change with emerging needs and as a result of changes in the development plans of the school.

### Targeting specific needs

Listening to the school community with the Gospel in mind can generate a wide range of possible projects that respond to specific needs. Some of these possible projects need to be recognised as whole school projects beyond the remit of the chaplaincy alone. Other projects can be very short term and fit well with a flexible chaplaincy plan. In one school for example, the provision of relaxation classes for year eleven pupils prior to exams is a successful project that responded appropriately to a need and could be met with support from learning mentors.

Some needs emerge from a broader view of chaplaincy provision as a witness to the Gospel. The previous chapter outlined a comprehensive framework for informal ministry with young people. Young people at each stage of their time in school should have the opportunity to be challenged through each of the dimensions listed in the previous chapter. Therefore, some elements of spirituality, justice and peace, service and leadership as well as prayer and worship among others should be accessible in each age group in the school. It is often not possible to provide these as an on-going provision through the chaplaincy but they could be made available as short projects that can raise the profile of these aspects of Christian living.

One school consciously set up a small twinning project at key stage three level precisely because justice and service were under represented in the school experience of the pupils in that age group. Another school has established a regular pilgrimage to Santiago in order to focus on the spirituality dimension of year ten pupils. Choosing specific projects is therefore an art that involves creating experiences to fill out what it means to be a Christian for young people. Timing these projects effectively into the school programme and drawing other staff into supporting such projects is another art that chaplaincy needs to access in the school. A good chaplain will also identify what is already happening and recognising how it is contributing to the comprehensive youth ministry approach and be careful to support it and not duplicate it for that age range in a way that leads to competition for the attention of young people. By spreading specific short-term projects across a school year that link to existing good practice and traditions a chaplaincy begins to establish its own style of working within the school community.

### Timetabling for presence and flexibility

Chaplains regularly complain that most of their work has to be squeezed into too few lunchtime slots. The chaplain who is always busy with small groups at lunchtime is not in the playground, not in the staff room and not available to enter into conversation with the majority of the school. And yet, lunch time is the only time that much of the chaplain’s group work can go on. Being available, free to roam and ready to waste time with people is especially useful at break times in the school day. This role is part of the core activity of a chaplain. Therefore, a chaplain should not be timetable them self every break time. The number of projects may need to diminish, the scale of the project may be smaller and its duration shorter. Unlike the teacher in the class room a chaplain has a duty to the whole school community and needs to fit specific tasks into the core attitude of availability and flexibility especially for individual needs.

The timetable of a chaplain should be loosely packed and some elements should be moveable. The ideal situation is that the chaplain is always occupied but can always be interrupted. That requires that a chaplain be well ahead with any deadlines and not get drawn into the last-minute mentality of some school organisation. Another aspect of flexibility involves always having some task to involve others with. When young people are distressed, isolated or unwell having a stream of small tasks can help increase participation in activities through the presence of pupils who need to take time out. Having flexible tasks ready takes planning creates community and extends the influence of the chaplaincy. One school chaplaincy has built a card making project out of such occasional visitors to the chaplaincy who did not want to talk but needed activity out of the classroom.

One of the chaplain’s skills in managing work in the school is to know when to end a project. There are many projects in school that have lost their life and are endured rather than enjoyed. A chaplain needs to remember that most informal groups will have a ‘sell by date’ that indicates they have become stale and need to end at a convenient moment with a good evaluation and celebration. Letting groups go is important for a chaplain if they are to avoid building cliques that only generate resentment in excluded pupils and staff. A group that runs on for a long time will be increasingly likely to be meeting the chaplain’s needs rather than the needs of the group or the school. Line managers of chaplains need to be ready to challenge chaplains in this area and clarify the spiritual and emotional health of such groups.

The beginning and endings of school years and terms are typically very busy for school chaplaincy. Planning large liturgies, welcoming new members to the school community and saying goodbye to others all takes time. Whilst teachers are running down to the last day of term the chaplain is usually gearing up for liturgy practices, music, drama and other events to celebrate the end of term. These periods of time need to see some further flexibility and some support from the line manager in easing any issues.

In planning for the start of a chaplaincy year, it is advisable to delay some projects a week or so later where possible so that the year or the term does not begin with a log jam of unfulfilled hopes. Similarly, there should be space in the chaplain’s year for some retreat time and each week should see some designated time for reflection, reading and prayer. The chaplain who is not praying, reflecting and reading is not doing their job in the school. This element of their role needs to be reflected in their timetable on a weekly, termly and an annual basis.

## An outline grid for planning a Chaplain’s timetable

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| **Activity** | **Target Group** | **Frequency** | **Location** |
| **Core activities** |  |  |  |  |
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|  | Target group | Time of year |
| **Specific projects** |  |  |  |
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Core activities should cover the focal points of chaplaincy outlined in the PowerPoint. Remember that one good activity can achieve a number of different outcomes that could cover a number of focal points. Specific projects should pick up any gaps in the core activities and make the most of any opportunities that emerge in the school year. The aim of this grid is to create a balanced plan that achieves a wide impact in the school and maintains a good weekly rhythm for the chaplain that ensures flexibility and time for reflection.

## Evaluation tools for Chaplaincy

A range of options is available to schools in order to assess and build effective chaplaincies in school. The most familiar format for schools is the one provided through the Catholic Education Service under its section fort eight inspection schedule. This format has been adapted to focus on chaplaincy and can be found in the appendices of this book. The advantage of this form of inspection is that it provides the kind of language and accountability that teaching colleagues will recognise. It also gains rapid recognition in the planning structures of the school which will tend to raise the profile of the chaplaincy as a legitimate departmental structure within the school. The evaluation grid also highlights some of the specific concerns and the methods of chaplaincy and enshrines them in a familiar format available to governors and leadership in school. A further benefit of the section forty-eight structure is the possibility of noting develops and extension of work from year to year in a clear way.

The disadvantage of this form of evaluation is that it can miss the less tangible aspects of a chaplaincy that cannot be recorded effectively in words. Most chaplaincy is relational in nature and the quality of the contact a chaplain creates with individuals and groups needs to be recognised in other forms of evaluation that stand alongside the more formal instrument proposed above.

### Evaluating the processes at work in a school chaplaincy.

This approach relies upon the model of chaplaincy outlined in the introduction and offers five-point criteria for evaluating the process of chaplaincy provision. It can be used to examine the whole chaplaincy provision, a specific area of chaplaincy provision (such as liturgy or justice and peace) or it could be used to examine a specific project. The evaluation questions are laid out below in the form of a table but they need to be explored in a structured conversation rather than as a paper exercise. The evaluation will tease out hidden assumptions and examine the effectiveness of the relational aspect of the chaplain’s work. Even though relationships can be difficult to examine in chaplaincy the supervisor should ask for evidence and illustrative experiences where possible in exploring the chaplain’s work.

This form of evaluation will be best explored in a conversation between the chaplain and their line manager at an evaluation point in the school year. The focus of the conversation will be around who the chaplain is listening to. Whose needs are they meeting and what quality of honesty and confidentiality is at work in these relationships. A chaplain will undoubtedly have a number of strong qualities and will be drawn to action in some areas of their role rather than others. The ability of the chaplain to listen, build teams, involve a wide range of people and draw them into spiritual reflection are crucial aspects of this evaluation. Some chaplains will be so busy that they have no time to reflect, to listen to God. Others will be so caught up in listening that they never get into effective action based on what they have heard. The chaplain will also tend to focus on a specific age range. How does the chaplain relate across the range from staff to year seven pupils will throw up some areas of personal development for the chaplain? The ability of the chaplain to recruit others to fill the gaps in their own giftedness is a further collaborative element of this type of evaluation.



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| *Evaluating the process of chaplaincy* |
| **Aspect of the process** | **General** | **Specific Project** |
| **1. Listening to real and perceived needs** | To what extent has the chaplain time for conversation with individuals and groups in school?  | In whose perceived needs is this project based? |
| To whom is the chaplain listening in making judgements and plans? | How far have those needs been checked with a wider group? |
| Is the chaplain accessible to a wide range of people for informal conversation? | How far is the chaplain listening and planning with others? |
| What general needs are being expressed by the majority of the school community? | How are those affected by the project given a voice in an evaluation at it’s conclusion? |
| **2. Guarding individual dignity** | To what extent is the chaplain available for individual needs? | What are the objective principles for the selection of individuals for this project? |
| What provision is the chaplaincy making for vulnerable members of the school community? | Are vulnerable members of the school community encouraged to engage with this project? |
| How does the chaplain recognise and celebrate success? | In what ways will the activity of this group be accredited? |
| How are confidentiality and child protection standards maintained in the work of the chaplaincy? | Does this group’s activity fit the normal pattern or need a specific risk assessment? |
| How accessible and confidential is the chaplain in meeting personal staff needs? | How have individual needs been communicated to other staff in the school? |
| **3.Actively and visibly serving the community i** | How well does the chaplaincy promote and publicise its work around the school? | Whose real and pressing needs lie at the heart of this project? |
| What percentage of the chaplaincy work is devoted to justice and service projects? | How widely has its work been advertised in school? |
| What specific service activities have been used to animate the whole school? | Is there a variety of the school community involved? |
| What is the general impact of chaplaincy as a witness to gospel values in school? | Have groups with a similar focus been identified and contacted? |
| Have opportunities been taken to engage with the local community around identified needs? | How is this project going to lead to long term provision and change in the school and community? |

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| **4. Safeguarding spiritual values** | What are the spiritual values of the school? | How are the aims of this group expressed in spiritual terms? |
| How does the chaplaincy sustain those values in its normal pattern of activity? | How does the work of this project model aspects of the gospel? |
| What visible symbols and activity witness to the spiritual values of the school? | How is individual spiritual maturity developed in this project? |
| To what extent does the chaplain promote the spiritual values of the school in pupil behaviour, staffing, mission statements and policy development? | How is the work of this project presented to the school as a spiritual activity? |
| Is the whole school liturgy provided by chaplaincy celebrated properly and well? | How has the work of this group been linked to liturgy and ritual? |
| **5. Rooted in prayer and reflection** | How much time does the chaplain devote to reflection and personal prayer for the school? | To what extent has reflection on the aims of the group happened? |
| What provision is made across the school to resource personal and collective prayer? | How has prayer been integrated into the general pattern of activity in this project? |
| How does the chaplain encourage and resource the ability of adults to reflect on their experience in school? | Have specific issues in the group been linked to reflection and prayer e.g. being reconciled, giving thanks. |
| Has the chaplain been given access to regular line management and non-managerial supervision? | Have individual issues been highlighted and given time for reflection? |



# Evaluating Chaplaincy 3 Evaluating the shape of chaplaincy

The final approach to evaluating chaplaincy rests on the content of chapter five and six of ***School Ethos and Chaplaincy***. The elements of a relational youth ministry cover a range of different activities that can reveal the overall shape of chaplaincy provision. In general, a large school chaplaincy should be able to cover all the aspects of this comprehensive model of youth ministry and apply it also to working with staff. The specific needs of the school may dictate that some aspects have a higher priority than others and the gifts of the chaplain may tend to enhance some areas more than others. The evaluation grid below allows the chaplain to assess the work of the chaplaincy plan against the components of youth ministry and identify where the strengths and weaknesses lie in present provision.

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| **Evaluating the shape of Chaplaincy** |
| What aspects of youth ministry are present in the chaplaincy activities listed below? | Community building | Evangelisation | Justice and service | Leader development | Pastoral Care | Prayer and Worship | Multi- Cultural working | Catechesis | Advocacy |
| Liturgy group work | **✓** | **✓** |  | **✓** |  | **✓** |  |  |  |
| Fair Trade |  |  | **✓** | **✓** |  |  | **✓** |  | **✓** |
| Lunchtime drop in | **✓** |  | **✓** |  | **✓** |  |  |  | **✓** |
| Staff meditation | **✓** | **✓** |  |  | **✓** | **✓** |  |  |  |
| Sacramental Preparation | **✓** | **✓** |  |  | **✓** | **✓** |  | **✓** |  |
| Assembly support | **✓** | **✓** |  |  |  | **✓** |  |  |  |
| Bereavement Support | **✓** |  |  |  | **✓** | **✓** |  |  |  |
| Retreat provision | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |
| Totals | **7** | **5** | **2** | **2** | **4** | **6** | **1** | **1** | **2** |

Using this grid as a basis for reflection allows practical ways of working to be examined to make them more comprehensive in their impact. The totals in different columns are only a stimulus to reflection and not hard figures. A school in a multicultural area might want to look at a low score in that area and ask if they are missing opportunities to engage with that need. A school with a deprived catchment would expect to have a chaplaincy with a strong pastoral care element. On the other hand, a school with a settled and gifted intake would be expecting to demonstrate a lot of leadership development. The conversation emerging from this kind of assessment might have as much to do with the range of perception of the chaplain as with what is actually taking place. Some chaplains will realise that they can achieve a number of different aims through one activity, others will not recognise that as clearly. The line manager has an opportunity in this evaluation to help the chaplain to appreciate the range of opportunities in even the simplest activity. This evaluation tool looks like an exercise in ticking boxes but the conversation that follows that exercise creates an opportunity to reflect on the multiple levels on which chaplaincy work can happen in one single activity or project. Thinking through the complexity of the role and its outcome allows the line manager to appreciate and celebrate the work of the chaplain. Recognising the undeveloped aspects of the chaplaincy can clarify the specific shape of the chaplaincy and perhaps some development needs for the chaplain in the year ahead.

**An important Caveat**

Much of the above has tried to lay out a pattern of good practice which will lead to the establishment of an appropriate and effective chaplaincy. It has been concerned to integrate chaplaincy into a system where measurable outcomes emerge from identifiable targets making chaplaincy accountable for the resources invested in it by the school. The danger of this managerial approach is that it accepts a superficial definition of success that misses the richness of a Gospel faith that is based on the failure of the cross. The reflection below is offered as an antidote to the present culture of education that takes a superficial view of education as concerned only with the visible, measurable and repeatable outcomes of instruction and examinations. The reflection is also offered to chaplains personally as an encouragement to see failure as an educational tool and a vital part of the process of chaplaincy. A chaplain who always achieves the desired outcomes and has never embraced failure in a public forum is probably not witnessing to the full breadth of Gospel faith. They might also be missing the opportunity for solidarity with the lost and lowly members of the school community.

**A reflection**

*Failure can achieve more than success when a broader and more spiritual view of work is embraced. If a chaplain can recognise the value of failure they can also stand by pupils and colleagues who have failed and present that broader view to them at the appropriate time. Of course, there may well be a gap between a failure and its fruits and as educators we are called to live by the faith that turned the failure of the cross into the embrace of a loving God. In the story of the cross the gap between cross and resurrection was only three days. The fruits of struggle and failure in school may well emerge many years later in the lives of the young when the educator is not around to see them. A chaplain lives by faith that all failure is fruitful and nothing is ever wasted by God.*

1. See *Christian Leadership* David O’Malley SDB Don Bosco Publications 2007 page 62 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *A review of some theoretical models of healthcare chaplaincy* S Yorkshire NHS 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)