



Chaplaincy Prayers in schools and colleges

Prayer is one of the things which is distinctive about chaplaincy. As Chaplains we are called to pray with and for our schools and colleges.

Our prayers can be:

- collective, at times when the whole school or college community gather;
- corporate, when students and staff voluntarily gather to pray;
- individual when the chaplain prays alone as part of their daily prayers and in times of crisis or hope;
- pastoral, when chaplains are praying with within a pastoral relationship with students, staff or parents.

In schools and colleges, with staff, pupils, governors and parents of many faiths and beliefs, it can be helpful to think about the way in which Healthcare chaplains speak of their ministry. They often say that their work is being 'patient-led', whether visiting someone, meeting them in a corridor or office, or praying with them. Similarly, all chaplains meet people where they are and journey on with them from that point. This is as true of prayer as is it of any other aspect of our ministry.

It's worth thinking about how your ministry and your school or college puts that important insight into practice.

- How can you communicate clearly that you pray for your community? After all, it's often something that people will naturally expect you to be doing, whether or not they share your faith. Being known as someone who cares about and naturally prays for the school or college and for the people who work and learn there is a really important part of communicating the gospel.
- However, not everyone is comfortable with prayer, there are perceived and actual cultural, spiritual and religious barriers. Be sensitive to these, especially where someone might feel awkward about declining your offer of prayer. That may apply particularly to pupils, since adults in school do have an assigned authority, not matter how approachable and empathetic they may be as individuals. When leading prayer in collective worship a simple way of offering prayer, rather than imposing it, is to invite people to join you in saying 'amen' if they want to make the prayer their own.



- In one-to-one conversations, it's usually more appropriate to ask about prayer, perhaps using language like 'Would you like me to pray for you?' or 'Would you like me to pray for you now?' rather than making assumptions or expectations, or launching into prayer without asking first.
- Remember that you don't always have to pray for the person there and then: sometimes chaplains will say something like, 'I'll be saying my afternoon prayers a bit later today – would you like me to pray for then?'
- If a student or member of staff does ask you to pray, think about how, where and when you pray. For instance, find a space which is open, but not crowded or easily overheard.
- Use language which is understood and culturally appropriate, avoid jargon and bear in mind that many people may not have the background familiarity with the language of faith that we do. Phrases that carry important meanings to us might seem very strange to others.
- Listen carefully [as always] so that your prayers reflect the situation and request and the language of the person you are praying for.
- Don't be afraid of silence in prayers, or indeed tears from the person you are praying for.
- If someone isn't familiar with prayer, brevity and simplicity can be a virtue. Try to imagine how your prayer would sound to someone who had never entered a church.
- In prayer, and everything else, Chaplains follow the safeguarding guidelines of the school or college. So, for instance, although many traditions lay hands on the head of the person receiving prayer, that's not something that schools and colleges can permit.

Rev Mike Haslam & Rev Garry Neave on behalf of CCE

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