

Chaplaincy Ministry at St. Anne's Primary School Chertsey

“Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8

These words of St. Paul shows that the aim of education is to enliven children's hearts and minds with what is beautiful, true, and full of light, shaping not just what they learn but who they become. For Don Bosco, we educate by evangelizing and vice versa. In education, this becomes a tender calling to nurture curiosity and goodness, forming the minds of children to see the world through a lens of hope and wonder. In evangelisation, teachers inspire children to share faith in ways that feel alive and radiant, touching their hearts with messages of love, grace, and truth. When we guide children to dwell on what is pure and admirable, we gently anchor them in values that can steady them through life's storms. In this way, learning and faith come together as a deeply meaningful journey, forming children who not only know what is right, but feel drawn to live it with joy and conviction.

My ministry, as a priest in St. Anne's Primary School, has been a deeply enriching and humbling experience, one that continually reveals the profound impact of a faith-centred educational environment on the holistic development of children. I am present in the school twice a week, on Mondays and Tuesdays, and during this time I work closely with Mr. Cassidy to support and strengthen the spiritual life of the school community. Together, we strive to ensure that the Catholic identity of St. Anne's is not merely preserved but lived authentically and joyfully in the daily experiences of both pupils and staff.

A central aspect of my role involves leading class Masses in the parish of St. Anne's. These are typically celebrated on a Monday close to the feast day of each class's patron saint, offering the children a meaningful opportunity to connect with the lives of the saints and to understand their relevance in today's world. These liturgies are carefully prepared in collaboration with staff and pupils, ensuring that they are both reverent and engaging.

Another important dimension of my ministry is the provision of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. During the seasons of Advent and Lent, St. Anne's offers opportunities for children who have received their First Holy Communion to celebrate confession. These moments are approached with sensitivity and care, ensuring that the children understand the sacrament not as something to fear, but as an encounter with God's mercy and love. It is always moving to witness the sincerity and openness with which the children approach this sacrament, often demonstrating a depth of reflection beyond their years.

Beyond the sacraments, I regularly lead acts of worship, prayer services, and reflections that align with the liturgical calendar and the themes being explored within Religious Education. During the Marian months, for example, at the request of Ms. Pigot, I lead the Holy Rosary with the children, helping them to develop a deeper appreciation for the role of Our Lady in the life of the Church. These moments of collective prayer foster a sense of unity and reverence within the school, reinforcing the idea that faith is not confined to the classroom but is a living, shared experience.

Pastoral care is also at the heart of my ministry. I make myself available to children who may be struggling emotionally, socially, or spiritually. Whether through informal conversations

during break and lunch times or more structured support when needed, I aim to provide a listening ear and a compassionate presence. Often, it is in these simple, quiet interactions that the most meaningful connections are formed. Being present in the playground and dining hall allows me to engage with the children in a natural and approachable way, breaking down barriers and building trust.

In addition, supervised by Mr. Cassidy, I contribute to the academic and spiritual formation of the pupils by delivering sessions related to Religious Education and Catholic life. These presentations are designed to complement the curriculum while also offering a broader perspective on faith, morality, and the teachings of the Church. I also assist in preparing some of the Year 3 pupils for their First Holy Communion, guiding them through this important phase of their faith journey with care and attentiveness.

Occasionally, I organize and lead liturgies for staff, providing them with opportunities for reflection, prayer, and spiritual nourishment. These gatherings are important not only for individual well-being but also for fostering a shared sense of mission among the staff. The commitment of the teachers to their vocation is truly inspiring. They are not only highly skilled professionals but also deeply compassionate individuals who approach their work with genuine love and dedication. Their care for the children is rooted in a profound respect for the dignity and sanctity of life, reflecting the values of the Gospel in a tangible and impactful way.

The mission statement of St. Anne's: "*With Christ at the centre of our lives, we live out our call to serve the young: 'It is not enough to love children, they must know that they are loved'*"—is not merely a guiding principle but a lived reality within the school. Every aspect of school life is shaped by this ethos. The emphasis on creating a safe, nurturing, and positive environment is evident in the relationships between staff and pupils, as well as among the children themselves. There is a palpable sense of harmony and mutual respect, supported by a strong network of collaboration among staff.

As a Catholic school, St. Anne's is deeply rooted in the Gospel values of respect, kindness, perseverance, forgiveness, and inclusivity. These values are not only taught but consistently modelled, forming the bedrock of the children's moral and spiritual development. Under the leadership of Mrs. C. Martin, the Headteacher, and Mr. S. Cassidy, the Deputy Headteacher, the school has cultivated an environment that nurtures both intellectual excellence and emotional maturity. Despite the challenges presented by contemporary society, the school remains steadfast in its commitment to forming children of strong character and integrity.

The chaplaincy team, consisting of Mr. Cassidy, Mrs. S. Pigot, Mrs. R. Kemp-Smith, and myself, works collaboratively to provide comprehensive spiritual support. The enthusiasm, joy, and dedication with which these colleagues embrace their additional responsibilities are truly commendable. Their willingness to go beyond their formal roles, often making personal sacrifices for the benefit of the children, speaks volumes about their commitment to the school's mission.

From my experience, St. Anne's stands as an exemplary institution, one that any parent would be fortunate to choose for their child. It is a school that genuinely welcomes all, respects all, and cares for each individual with equal attention and compassion. It is a place where every voice is heard, and every concern is addressed with professionalism and sensitivity. More importantly, it is a community where love is not only present but visibly radiant like the sunlight that warms and sustains all within its reach.

What sets St. Anne's apart is not only its ability to respond effectively to challenges but also its proactive approach to preventing them. There is a deep awareness of the needs of the children, and a shared commitment to ensuring their well-being in every dimension: physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. This holistic approach is what makes St. Anne's not just a school, but a wonder institute of deep human formation. In the words of Don Bosco, "education is a matter of the heart."

In conclusion, my time at St. Anne's continues to be a source of great joy and fulfilment. It is a privilege to serve alongside such dedicated staff and to accompany the children on their journey of growth and discovery. The school's unwavering commitment to placing Christ at the centre of all it does is evident in every interaction, every initiative, and every moment of shared life. It is, without doubt, a place where faith is lived, love is made visible, and every child is given the opportunity to flourish.

Fr. Stephen M. Teye SDB