

Dear Parents

Term started, as it always does, with a Eucharist service in the chapel. This service lasts about 70 minutes. Those of us who went to church schools can probably recall our own chapels, chaplains, choir and the various services. Maybe we can even remember the odd sermon (not sure I can and I must have heard hundreds at senior school) but it is rare to meet someone whose life was dramatically changed in a chapel at school as a result of a particular talk.

However, I firmly believe that compulsory chapel is a very important part of what makes Bishops (and schools like it) special. What happens to boys in chapel is not possible to quantify but we would not produce the same boys without it.

First and foremost from the chapel's size, situation and the words delivered in liturgy, sermon and song we proclaim to the boys that at Bishops God is central and worth considering as you grow into a man. A boy may choose to reject or ignore this but few do completely and, even if they do that is fine because these things happen differently and at different times for each of us. I remember at school my fagmaster going to our chaplain and telling him that he had decided that there was definitely no God. "Good for you!" replied Fr Candler quite unperturbed even though Rawden had shown quite a lot of interest up to then. He was far too wise a chaplain to believe that a clever argument from him at that moment was going to change Rawden's mind. (I met Rawden about 10 years later and he was a very committed Christian.)

Secondly, the chapel services allow the boys to be quiet so they can think (without realizing they are doing it). Some boys do this as a matter of course, and quietness does not concern them, but many rarely allow their world to be quiet. Elijah heard the Lord in a quiet breeze. With all the MP3 players, laptops etc our boys rarely experience these quiet moments. Quiet breezes are drowned out.

Thirdly we hear beautiful music from our choir and instrumentalists – so uplifting and moving. We also sing great hymns from rousing ones like "For all the Saints" to calming ones like "Dear Lord and Father of mankind".

Fourthly, we hear some superb talks in the chapel. They are not necessarily all exciting but so many wonderful truths are imparted to the boys by many caring people – men and women from in and out of the school, including some of their peers. In the first service of this term, for example, Fr Coomer spoke so wisely and eloquently about leadership. Christian values (most of which are held by all major religions) are spoken about week after week. Boys may not remember a single sermon but I know that all this goodness spoken must, at the very least, provide pressure in the right direction.

Of course it is our hope that the boys will take their religion (spirituality, if you prefer) seriously so that it has a positive affect on their lives. Judging by the

numbers who go up for communion or a blessing during the Eucharist services many of our boys recognize that there is this important part of being human and, of course, many who remain in their seats are seeking in their own ways, including within the bounds of other faiths.

Again and again I am filled with gratitude for those who built our beautiful chapels and to those chaplains, principals and staff who, over the years, have faithfully served in them and so helped ensure that we remain a church school.

Please remember that you are welcome at any service. Simply come in at the back and, if unsure, just ask a staff member where you can sit.

Yours sincerely

Peter Westwood
(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)