

Prayer letter: June 2011

Departing from my usual pattern, this Prayer letter is concerned only with one issue for prayer:

CRE & chaplaincy.

“This is no time for fear, this is the time for Faith and determination. Don’t lose the vision here, carried away by emotion...” (Twila Paris, *God is in Control*)

In the forefront of our minds, in our faces in the media and possibly weighing heavy on our heart, is the present opportunity and the future possibilities for CRE in Victorian State Schools.

Inflammatory statements, question and challenges, in articles and letters, have been given plenty of airtime, certainly raising the temperature for many teachers, parents, councils and churches. This is no time for worry or fear. Certainly no time for defensiveness. But it is **a time to pray**.

Strangely amidst all of the noise and complaints, our schools have kept a flint face silence.

We pray together, united with our hearts open in generous love and blessing towards our schools. We are so thankful for the hospitality and welcome received in many schools. We pray for the pressure that heads of schools are under in this debate. We recognise that it would be easy for schools and staff who don’t value chaplains and CRE in the school community to take this opportunity to join forces with the dissenters. But they have not done so. We are moved to give thanks and praise in great joy for this. The testimony of grace is speaking for itself. Not

“shouting in the street”

and

“not breaking the bruised reed,
or putting out the dying flame.”

(*Matthew 12*)



The quiet transformation of individual children and of whole school communities, through the presence of gracious servants of the gospel of peace and reconciliation has been visible and tangible.

Schools know the difference that Chaplains bring, that CRE teachers offer.

So we pray in gentle, humble celebration. And ask the Spirit to continue to gift us in the ways we can serve the needs around us.

We pray for each other, as CRE teachers, team leaders, parents and friends in our local school communities. We pray for grace and confidence in Christ Jesus, praying against the compulsion to defend or justify ourselves, to be noticed or recognised. We pray for faith for each other, in the long term value of nurturing any child.

Leadership

Prayer letter: June 2011 continued...

And,

We pray for the silent, neglected voiceless ones, who ought to be the centre of this discussion, but who have been (appallingly typically) marginalised: the Children in our schools. They are rarely given space in this debate.

What does having a CRE teacher visit the classroom and share ancient texts and current convictions mean to a small child?

What does it mean to a year 6 student to be allowed to ask 'what really matters to me?' And to know a person who can model believing in something with substance and structure as well as heart.



The 'objective' delivery of information about religion that the vocal few are suggesting, lacks this.

So **pray for the children whose heads are being spoken over**. Give thanks that children have not been dragged negatively into this discussion. But also pray that we will not forget or disregard them.

And we pray for unity. God forbid, that this should simply become a chance for different ends of the liberal/evangelical spectrum of conviction to try to score a public point against one another. We pray for care in speaking our convictions, not to be politically correct, but to be ever mindful that we will be assessed by the world on the criteria that Jesus pointed us to. He knew what he was saying: **"They shall know you are my disciples, by your love."**

In the Spirit of Jesus, whom we affirm as Lord of the cosmos, we empty ourselves of our sense of entitlement, we lay aside our rights, we pour ourselves out again as slaves of Christ, so utterly free, that we can submit to any system, without it threatening the central authority of Jesus as Lord.

From the place of weakness, we pray for communities, our state, our media agencies, schools, and churches, children and their families.

Our concern in prayer is not to sure up our own position. We pray passionately for the **protection of CRE in the curriculum**. And we pray full of faith, that if official doors are closed and the systems we know are dismantled, the **gospel is not in chains**.

Let the weak say 'I am strong'.
Grace & Peace, Beth.