



Chaplaincy Report

September – December 2020

RECAP FROM SUMMER TERM

Chaplaincy Communication – Over lockdown, Michael was sending out a weekly email to all students and staff containing the prayers that would normally have been sent out for registration. Michael was also in touch with a number of students via e-mail, particularly when they were finding things difficult, or if they got in touch if they had a question or request.

St. Thomas More Virtual Feast Day – Instead of our usual Feast Day celebration at St. Columba's, Wallsend, we celebrated a Virtual Feast Day Mass. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Chris Hughes, and was recorded from the school chapel. The Virtual Feast Day had clips throughout from last year's celebration and the readings and bidding prayers were read by students who were in school as they were children of key workers. The Mass is still available to watch online at: <https://stmacademy.org.uk/st-thomas-more-virtual-feast-day-mass-2020/>

Confirmations Update – After beginning the Confirmation Programme on March 12th, 2020, it was quickly postponed following the Government's lockdown announcement. The Bishop has since allowed parish priests to confirm candidates in his place. This is taking place with 5 students in December at the parish of St. Cuthbert's and St. Joseph's. For the rest of the candidates, it is hoped the programme can restart at some point next year, hopefully alongside current Year 9. Any decision has yet to be finalised on this.

AUTUMN TERM

Since coming back to school in September, just like every other department, the Chaplaincy at St. Thomas More has had to adapt to new ways of working. The priority has been to consider how to reach out to students given the unusual circumstances of year group bubbles and social distancing.

The core of Michael's work as Chaplain has been to pastorally provide for the needs of students and staff, especially as most group activities and acts of Collective Worship that usually take place have had to be cancelled. Michael has also been putting a lot of energy into looking out for staff who are struggling with tiredness, stress and anxiety following all the uncertainty and change this year has brought.

Chaplaincy Lunchtime Drop-Ins – It was a necessity that students were still able to speak to the Chaplain if they had any issues. We had to come up with a way that students could do this in a safe and secure way. The result was lunchtime drop-in spaces. Michael places himself in student bubbles each lunchtime and students can drop in on the following days:

Day	Lower Lunch	Upper Lunch
Monday	Year 7	Year 9
Tuesday	Year 11	Year 10
Wednesday	Year 8	Sixth Form
Thursday	Year 11	Year 9

Students from every year group have dropped in over the last half-term with Year 11 having the most. Michael has supported a group of around 15-20 Year 11 students since they were in Year 7 so knew it was important to maintain this communication on a lunchtime with them.

Slowly over the weeks, the numbers have been growing and there are a steady number of students dropping-in on lunchtimes in almost all year groups.

Weekly Year Group Masses – It is unknown when Student Mass will resume, especially following the second closure of churches through the new lockdown. In theory it is possible to still celebrate Mass in the school chapel with limited numbers and within the Year Group bubbles. However, putting the clergy at unnecessary risk is not an option, and so Mass will continue to be postponed until further notice.

Prayers in Registration – Prayers for 2020/21 have been written by students across the year groups on a range of different themes. The themes were chosen by form tutors and handed over to the students to write. Some students decided upon their own themes and wrote prayers to match. The prayers go out on a weekly basis and are prayed in each class every morning. An example of one of this year's prayers is below:

September 23rd, 2020

A prayer for people living in poverty

Katelyn, Ava and Max in 11S

We pray for the feet without shoes,
the bodies without clothes,
the stomachs without food,
the mouths without water.

Numb the pain and suffering and take away any fear of living.
And when they ask you 'why me?' then show them they are loved and protected.

Show light at the end of the tunnel. Show them that there is beauty in the world.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Charity Work –

Macmillan Cancer Support – A small amount of money was raised following the 'Take a break' gifts for Macmillan Cancer Support (see below).

Food Bank – Michael is planning on working with a group of Year 12 students to establish a Food Bank at St. Thomas More. This is to respond to the need of many of our families in school and is based on the model of St. Aidan's Catholic Academy in Sunderland who operate a similar system.

The idea is that Michael will work with the students in Enrichment time as a project for the year. Hopefully it can become a sustainable project that will still functioning long after the Coronavirus is not on our minds.

Advent Almsgiving – It is hoped students will raise funds for CAFOD this Christmas through their World Gifts scheme. Students will also be encouraged to bring in food for the St. Thomas More Food Bank if it is successfully running by that time - or for the Salvation Army/Bay Food Bank if it is not.

Staff Wellbeing –

Virtual Coffee Mornings – After it was decided at last year's Staff Wellbeing Forum we would have a Coffee Morning every half-term, they continued virtually up to the summer holidays. We had two Zoom Coffee Mornings and they were well attended by staff.

'Take a Break' gift – All staff were given a small bag containing a teabag, a biscuit, an angel charm and a prayer card encouraging staff to take a break after a long-half term. This was acted as the 'coffee morning' for the first half-term. A small amount of money was also raised for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Advent Angels – (see 'Advent')

Friday Morning Staff Prayer – More staff have started coming to Friday Morning Staff Prayer at 8:15am in the School Chapel. We have been able to reconfigure the chairs so they are socially distanced and staff are asked to wear their visors or masks. There is a maximum capacity for 11 members of staff to attend, and this term it has regularly been full to capacity. The prayer time only lasts around 5-7 minutes and is a beautiful way to begin the day and end the week. It has been lovely to see new staff members attend the prayer.

Tyne & Wear Citizens

Just Change – St. Thomas More has now become a "Just Change" school which allows Free School Meals allowance that is not spent due to absence or because the full amount has not been spent to rollover to the following day on student meal accounts. This is in response to a national campaign led by Tyne & Wear Citizens.

Black Lives Matter / anti-racism workshops – Over the summer holidays, several Sixth Form students were part of the discussion around anti-racism and the Black Lives Matter movement. They attended Zoom workshops run by leaders from Tyne & Wear Citizens and have committed to being involved in the regional action around anti-racism.

Schools' Based Counselling (SBC) update – Newcastle East Academy Trust (NEAT) have now appointed a full-time counsellor to work across their MAT. This comes from the SBC campaign that students at St. Thomas More have been actively involved with over the last 2 years.

There are planned meetings with Nick Brown (MP for Newcastle East), Phil Kemp (NASUWT North Tyneside) and the DfE North East Lead to further discuss this. Student involvement is limited right now, but there will be opportunities for participation over the coming year.

Year 7 Transition

Welcome Liturgy – On their first day of school at St. Thomas More, Year 7 students came together at the end of the day to participate in a Welcome Liturgy themed on "I know the plans I have for you..." (Jeremiah 29:11). The students explored the story of St. Paul's conversion and reflected on their own fears and worries about starting school. Candles were lit for each form class and, as a year group, we prayed for each one.

Chaplain Form session – Michael will drop into all Year 7 form classes this term to lead Morning Prayer for the form class. He will also distribute the Gideons Bibles (which normally are given out in Assembly) in this session.

John Paul II Award – Following the closure of churches, it became very difficult for students to complete the hours necessary for the John Paul II Award. Students had already managed to get hours for the Bronze award and it is expected around 10 students will achieve the Bronze Award this year.

Although the John Paul II Award will still run in the Diocese this year, it has been decided to not participate in the Award due to the restrictions on student contact and parish involvement. It may be possible, where students are already involved in parishes, for them to complete the award although no students have yet come forward who are doing this. Michael will focus energy this year on working with Sixth Form to set up the Food Bank.

Retreats – Unfortunately, due to the current world circumstances, both our Year 8 Youth Village Retreat and our Year 7 Ampleforth Retreat has been cancelled. Both services are currently not running for retreats, but it is hoped that they will be open once again next September. It is currently undecided how we will move forward with the missing year. One potential solution would be to offer the Year 8 Retreats to Year 9 going forward.

Remembrance

Remembrance Tree – A Remembrance Tree has been placed in Reception for students, staff and visitors to hang the names of those they know who have died from its branches. Unlike last year, tags with relatives on them have been placed on the tree (Mam, Dad, Grandparent, etc.) so that it can remain COVID-secure. We encourage anybody to spend some time standing at the tree and think about or pray for relatives they have lost themselves.

Remembrance Day Service – November 11th is Remembrance Day in school. At 11:00am, a reflection will be played across the whole school in classrooms and a two-minute silence will be observed.

Advent

Advent Virtual Liturgy – Thoughts are beginning to form around a potential Advent Liturgy that will be posted on the school website near to Christmas time. It is likely to contain musical performances from some of our older students and readings/reflections from some of our younger students. We hope to have a homily and blessing from one of our parish priests. The Liturgy will be streamed to all students one day in the last week and families and parishioners will be encouraged to log on and watch at home.

Advent Angels – For the fourth year, staff will get the opportunity to become an 'Advent Angel' for another member of staff in the last week of term. Last year around 50 staff took part in this. Staff will be encouraged to think about how they can do something for their selected member of staff in a safe way.

Partnership Co-Workers group – The Co-Workers have met twice this term (virtually) to touch base and see if there is anything they can do to support the parishes and their work with young people. One small thing that they have started to do is sending a QR code to the parish bulletins each week – or when necessary – that contains a link to a (usually) video resource for young people. This has been published in a couple of the parish bulletins and it is hoped young people (and adults!) will scan it to access the resource.



Catholic Life of the School – Michael has delivered the usual Catholic Life of the School session twice this term for both the NQTs and the ITT students. We talked about the Catholic ethos/mission statement, the practical routine and rhythm of the school and the role of the chaplaincy.