Scholarly Christian Educators' Gathering (SCEG)
"Faith Formation in Christian Schools"
Meeting on 28th October 2016, St Andrews Cathedral School,
M.C. Newth Auditorium, Senior College, 51-53 Druitt Street, Sydney

NOTES

9:30am *Registration*

10:00am Welcome to St Andrew's – Dr John Collier, (Principal, SACS)
Overview of day – James Dalziel (SCEG Convenor)

Dr John Collier: This is a dearth of research in Christian education in Australia compared to overseas (England, Canada, United States) – thank you for supporting this group.

The role of Chaplains in schools is critical – young people are not in churches, but they are in schools // schools are the shopfronts of faith // We have a wonderful opportunity, like Acts 17 //

10:05am Devotion – Dr Edwin Boyce (Principal, PHCS)

Dr Ted Boyce: quoted Spurgeon about being 'perfect in Christ Jesus' // what is the role of individual personal spiritual formation, and the more difficult area of community spiritual formation // Faith formation – this is not just encouraging people to come to faith – how do we help our students grow in faith? Growth in personal faith is the basis of sharing faith with others.

Example – students on service trips experience faith in action – they have learnt the substance of their faith //

1 Corinthians 8:1-6: – knowledge puffs up, but love (faith in action) builds up – then the passage moves onto the role of idols – we can have idols in our knowledge, position, etc. i.e. we can idolise that which we have made – in verse 6, we are reminded that we have one Father, and all comes from Him – and one Lord (the One to whom we owe our allegiance – not academia, status or position) // we are here to raise the Name of Christ high.

Galatians 5:6b – all that counts is faith expressing itself in love // do we express our faith in how we love? There must be action from faith for it to be authentic // When we do things together for the good of others to the glory of God – this is a critical way to grow in faith and love i.e. growing in personal and community spiritual formation // as a Christian believer, what is the purpose of what I am doing – to have faith in Christ and love others

10:20am Challenges and Opportunities for reaching young people today – Simon Smart (Executive Director, Centre of Public Christianity)

Simon Smart – CPX is a media company to help the public understand Christianity

"The public trust the Christians with their education" – so much opportunity.

Doubts among today's Public – suspicion of authority // low reputation of the Church // low reputation of the Bible // absence of a Biblical understanding of the world // negative personal experiences // lack of knowledge of the Bible and its contribution to society // very little contact with the Church – not rejecting anything, they simply do not know… // Marriages are not in churches (1973 to 2012 from 84% to 12%) – cannot assume any Christian language or framework of understanding – have to be sensitive to the reality of what is said and how it is heard…

Prof John Stackhouse – notes how different (odd) Christian beliefs are to those with no Christian understanding // SS – and some consider Christianity as a sinister force // Christian stories no longer known – e.g. the simplest of Bible surveys are difficult – so does the story require translating? // How is our audience defining what is the secret to the good life?

Consumerism and freedom – two of the dominating 'solutions' to hope in life in contemporary Australia // a radical individualism wherein I, and only I, am the author of my story e.g. the Levi's ad // people do not set out to seek these things necessarily, but it soaks in – freedom as defined as endless choice // become who you are meant to be (in Christ) are Paul's message // *Three Choice Commandments* – do what you want without hurting others / keep it consensual with others / do not tell anyone else what is right and wrong or you will be quickly condemned

Opportunities – longing for justice // longing for some sort of spirituality // longing for community // longing for personal significance – Christians understand this – teens move in places of fluidity instead of places where they can be anchored – note Genesis 1:26-27 as a contrast to the 'mall identity', where the great terror is anonymity // longing for meaning – note the emptiness of a Godless universe – many having become functionally atheist [SF comment – functionally atheist in the structure of their daily lives, but still with the deeper longings as above] // perhaps we need to say *imagine if this was true…*

Critic and confirmer – a dual role as suggested by Bruggemann in terms of the 'prophetic' // the example of the high-jump mat – strong and hard to move, but providing a soft landing // the memory is as much about what they experience as much as what they heard said

10:50am Lessons for Faith Formation from Danebank and Sabbatical Tour – Maryanne Davis (Principal, Danebank)

Maryanne Davis – The Purpose Driven School

Does a distinctly Christian approach to education exist? What is the bench-mark we are looking for? Quoted Trevor Cairney re the institution being a redeeming

place // visited schools to see if one could describe the Christian impact of the school

Some research observations – investigated the areas of mission, magnification, membership, maturity, ministry… (from the "Purpose Driven Church") // How do we assess the impact? // nurture of identity, well-being, formation of character and academic performance // note the lack of clarity of terms // 'Shared values' is the alternative to Christian beliefs

Some research findings – questions based on the purpose driven areas // MISSION - a diversity of responses about whether the school was involved in Christian mission // none of the schools evaluated whether students were 'inoculated' (counter-evangelised) from Christianity // MAGNIFICATION - none were *tracking* when students are challenged to come to Christ // alumni tend to refer to the school *culture*, but not necessarily the Christian heart (faith base) of the school // MEMBERSHIP – the biggest challenge in the minds of the Principals (having students move into church life) – students felt like 'strangers in a strange land' visiting local churches// MATURITY – most believed they did not help young Christians develop – no measures to assess this – one school had a dedicated person to engage with students as they are about to leave and help them find a fellowship group // MINISTRY – service was in all schools – only a couple of schools did students identify this service linked to Christianity – a couple encouraged post school Christian 'gap year of mission'. // Distraction about compliance was the greatest pressure in keeping a focus on Christ.

11:15am *Morning Tea*

11:30am Faith Formation among CEN and Anglican Schools – Dr Ken Dickens (Principal, NICE)

Ken Dickens – focussed on intentional integration // parent nurture + church outreach were different paradigms, consistent with historical origins // some factors came out that indicated what helped or hindered faith formation // the word is mediated through 'liturgies' - habitual community practices = social regularities – do they enhance or hinder the Gospel (JK Smith)

Some Findings – the problem of over-protecting our students [can't talk to our teachers about their 'real issues'] // the problem of over-evangelising our students [no discipleship, and simplistic faith expectations] // the problem of peer pressure [non-Christian influences] // the problem of poor pedagogy and theology [poor teachers with poor relationships and 'hobby horse' teaching] // the problem of various forms of dualism // the problem of contrived integration [and this was given as a reason not to try by some teachers] // the problem of the captive audience [the Gospel is invitational in a mandatory setting] // the problem of 'niceness' [I thank God I am not like them'] // the power of genuine care // the power of safety to put a Christian position [could speak their position] // the power of authentic student witness [enable the students to do it] // the power of the theological educator – 'theologian in residence' (Cowling) [instead of being called 'chaplain'] // the power of [Christian] functional yet cosmopolitan [inclusive] community (Vryhof, 2004)

11:50am Faith Formation in a "missional" low fee Christian school –
Martin Telfer (Deputy Principal, St Philip's Christian College Cessnock)

Martin Telfer – SPCC Cessnock (part of a network of schools in the Hunter – St Philip's Christian Colleges) – few Christian students and families, in a lower SES area – all staff are Christian

What is distinctive at each school – a good question for each school (which is different to 'what do we do') – Attractive – Matthew 5 – the local churches struggle for strength – yet the parents like 'something that is different' – name and claim that it is because of Christ // e.g. a year 7 boy who is being given alcohol at home – seeing a different way of living for the first time // conflict resolution – learning a different way of doing this, because of Christ // use of language different and more attractive – Proverbs' wisdom used a lot at the school

Authentic Community // no keeping up appearances – there is an openness to Christianity (not intellectual 'snobbery'), and an ability to speak plainly with each other

Hopeful for Cessnock SPCC // a community of hope – the big issue is not lack of money, but lack of aspiration – spend a lot of time focussing on Christian hope – changing generational pathways – what kind of man are you going to be? Etc. [JD: for US examples of lack of aspiration, see "Hillbilly Elegy", JD Vance] // "Where else do we have to go" (Peter in John 6) – knowing the Father through Christ

12:10pm Review of Christian Education at St Andrews & Student Interviews
James Dalziel (SCEG Convenor)

James Dalziel – an invited review of Christian Education at SACS // a complex environment

Summary – POSITIVE: Christian camps, CRU groups – time for longer informal discussions of heart issues – and teachers who took time to talk with students (after class, over tea, at lunch) - // NEGATIVE / NEUTRAL – Chapel was mostly neutral if not negative (concerns about singing and Bible teaching) – Christian development classes (not connecting in later years) // In summary: informal things were having the impact, and the formal things neutral or negative

Teaching Christianly project – an important project [see later presentation by Brad Swibel] // *Student inoculation* – how was the Gospel presented? Too often the same way? // *Challenging Topics* – key issues for affirmation or loss of faith in upper secondary

12:20pm Reflections from Chaplains, and General Discussion
Rev Peter Wilson (Past Chaplain, St Paul's Grammar, 12 years)
Rev Dr Nick Foord (Community Chaplain, Shore – absent due to illness)
Martin Telfer (also Past Chaplain, Tara)

Rev Peter Wilson – the issue of being marginalised even within a Christian school as the Chaplain – Galatians: "I might be in chains, but the Gospel is not" // Some heart stories – a Buddhist who said 'tell me about Jesus, I have never seen community like this' / a Christian student who failed exams and then learnt to surrender her life to Christ / journeying with students whose peer had lost his life – and watching his peers celebrate his life // Two key concepts – *incarnation* (the Gospel is more than information: what character is being presented by our staff?) – *integration* (legitimate expression within the curriculum and in every aspect of what we do) – "we do not know what we truly believe until it is a matter of life and death" (Lewis) – if we do not think what we do matters, neither will others // Christian pastoral care is discerning the presence or absence of God in any moment, and responding to that – note the lostness of the heart in the whole of life for many of our young people //

Is the Christian school the face of post-modern Christianity? Our theology can limit the kind of dialogues we can have between school and church / who are our bridge builders for these conversations? We must find ways of doing church for kids when they leave school – or else have a church based in the school (for those older than school students and students)

Concerns to be named – can sound like watering down the Gospel with these ideas and programs – a response is that we want to express the fullness of the Gospel // can worry that this focus on Gospel dilutes academic excellence – a response could review 'what does it mean to serve God faithfully in education – is it only academic excellence?'

1pm *Lunch*

2pm The "Teaching Christianly" Project at SACS –
Brad Swibel, Deputy Head, SACS

Brad Swibel – our culture has a strong influence on our thinking and how we express ourselves (c.f. China's national plan for education reform) // had critical friends to help think through the issues // workshops each term with Richard Edlin and Ruby Holland with Christian integrators [a nominated person in each faculty to guide and stimulate faculty based Christian Biblical thinking] // assisted by Chaplains

Mission and Vision – describes the core business of the school

Framework and Strategy – take Biblical truths and presenting them in a manageable way – God's Story as the basis of considering God's World,

Word, Views, Values. // Worked into different methods across time // and having a focus on different areas of the school's life – each developing their vision – then collaborative learning project and process – starting with a vision helped focus what they were doing (describe your dreams) // all aimed at getting the conversation started // also have a programming guide // www.whatifleaning.com site as well // and then collect responses from staff // SACS staff keen to visit other schools [please let Brad know]

Junior School – focussed on prayer and children's Bibles to read the stories with them – another example of 'cracking open a conversation'

Public interest – the more the school talks about Christian schooling, the more people are interested in coming because of it // rituals are important e.g. the integrators meeting // will start surveying students in 2017

2:30pm The Christian School Guarantee: A vision for mass spiritual renewal through Australian Christian Schooling – Dr David Hastie (Education Strategist, ASC). NB: Presentation given in a private capacity, not on behalf of ASC.

Dr David Hastie – given his background of a memory of revivals…

What is the lived experience? What is the phenomenon of Christian Anglican education?

The wager – affordable high quality education = opportunity for faith formation [a transaction, which is why it is called the 'guarantee', or 'wager' // we embarked on this when we started taking money for schooling children]

What do parents want – civic Protestant values – used to be in State education, but now less so; and want social mobility

Access – if we do the educational work well, then we have acceptance to engage in faith formation

Schooling context – Internationally, Aust has 5th highest non-State schools / highest access to school choice / parents of 1.2 million sending their children to Christian affiliated schools – why? Because we give affordable high quality education… and thus they accept faith formation

A unified vision for Australian Christian Education – Matthew 28:29-20 – Australian Christian renewal through Christian school education – why not expect renewal, rather than being apologetic only? // Prepare for a mass evangelical renewal // we need *unity* between the protestant school sectors (not talking about uniformity or one group) // rapid planting of new schools // Christian teacher training // Leadership training – as spiritual leaders and adept with money // Research // How do we measure the effect? // Christian education PhD Scholarships // Scholarly publications

and community // Strategic alliances with Australian Catholic Schooling // Long term support and funding - this is purpose driven (not just Foundation driven), and by the market ('game theory')

2:50pm Discussion – What is working? What doesn't seem to be working well? Where do we go from here?

Comment: Anglican School's Ordinance – included in it is that all Anglican schools will include how they will teach from a Biblical understanding, and teach Christian studies, and evangelise their communities // how will we give an account for the students we have // and we need to train Christian teachers

3:20pm Cardus releases 2016 Education Survey Report;
"Growing Young" book (2016);
Reminder: Australian Christian Higher Education Alliance (ACHEA) conference, Sydney Aug 17-19, 2017 – Call for Papers out now

More on this topic next year? Yes… including stories of positive examples

3:30pm *Close & Afternoon tea*