

The role of the principal: A multifaceted role

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Principalship in the twenty-first century is complex and diverse. A principal is responsible across the domains of educational leadership, curriculum development, teaching and learning theory and classroom practice, spirituality/values education, student welfare and discipline, including reporting to agencies, school finances and budget, property management, risk mitigation, litigation management, staff welfare and industrial relations, marketing, selection and dismissal of staff and students, strategic planning and vision, outdoor education, and depending on the governance of the school, reporting to statutory authorities, School Council, Church or denominational hierarchy. In addition to these roles, the principal will often be expected to be a prominent member of the community, a visible attendee at evening school cultural activities, and a sideline observer of school Saturday sport activities. The principal is also expected in many settings to be in Church on Sunday, and in so far as he or she is a model husband or wife, father or mother, and citizen, to be a pillar of the community. The context in which these functions and attributes are to be manifest is in a contemporary society which appears to be, at least in Australia, if not the western world, suspicious of authority and sceptical of the claims of any person to lead, manage or arbitrate.

The Biblical mandate

The Bible is clear on the efficacy of authority as part of the Divine order. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans,

Everyone must submit to authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves. (Romans 13:1–2)

The principal is therefore invited to exercise authority, but exercise it in a Godly fashion for

the sake of others and not “lording it over those entrusted to you”. (1 Peter 5:3)

The principal who is equipped and trusted to lead, must “govern diligently” (Romans 12:8). In a position analogous to a father, he or she must avoid exacerbating subordinates (Ephesians 6:4).

Constructing leadership

The principal of an Anglican school will seek to construct leadership according to Biblical precepts. In so doing, it is necessary to distinguish between models of leadership which are Biblical, and others which are secular or cultural, but which may be commonplace in schools.

A key metaphor for Christian leadership is that of the body. Paul in Romans 12:4–8 and in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 stresses the interdependence of the believers that form the body of Christ, employing their various gifts for the benefit of all. This metaphor is applicable not just to the Church, as a congregational meeting of believers, but to the Christian organisation, with its Christianity defined in its key goals and the faith of its staff. Furthermore, Paul's injunction in Romans 12:3, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement”, is a helpful corrective to the tendency for community and sometimes staff to put the principal on a pedestal as a solo and sole leader.

The body image, with its limitation on the self reliance or hubris of the principal, is well supported in the leadership literature. Fullan (2001) has popularised the notion of “distributive leadership”, stressing the importance of reciprocity, mutual obligation and shared knowledge. Indeed Fullan (2001) insists that a large part of the role of the leader is to develop the knowledge of the organisation's people. He goes on to say “Those in a position to be leaders of leaders, such as the CEO, know that they do not run the place. They know that they are cultivating leadership in others” (p. 134). It is a point well reinforced by Fullan's colleague Andy Hargreaves, who at a Sydney conference (2003) had participants chant the mantra “Don't try to do everything yourself, otherwise you burn out, get sick, retire early and die!”

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Metaphors and models

It follows then some other common metaphors for leadership: the authoritarian, Olympian in his or her (usually his!) loftiness and unapproachability; the heroic 'strong man' who does it all unaided; the messianic figure who has all the answers and maintains the mysteries of leadership in unassailable secrecy; the priest/king who alone can mediate access to the sacred rites of the school, are deficient in a Biblical understanding of the place of the leader under God. Some of them in fact focus too much unhelpful attention on the leader, rather after Louis XIV's famous aphorism "l'état, c'est moi!" [I am the state]. The role of the leader in a Christian school is ultimately to attract attention to Jesus, not to him or herself. Moreover, the leader needs others to share the vision and to share the work, just as Moses needed Aaron and the armies of Israel (Exodus 4:10–17). Such is the interdependence of the body of Christ. Nonetheless, the principal ought to be Moses to his or her school, that is, spiritual leader, despite the presence of a 'Levi' in the form of the Chaplain.

The Biblical model of servant leadership is well known and apt for the principal of an Anglican school. The well known Christ-hymn of Philippians 2 provides an effective exemplar. In summarising the import of these verses, Paul editorialises in Philippians 2:4 "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others."

The literature has adopted strongly the notion of servant leadership in schools. Murphy (1992) argued that principals needed to be servant leaders, moral educators (motivated by deep personal beliefs and values) and social architects (addressing people's needs). Beare, Millikan and Caldwell (1998) argued for transformational leadership which would be driven by vision and values, and function through communication and collaborative decision making. None of this is to suggest however, that servant leadership is by its servanthood prevented from being authoritative; although it is clear one cannot be an authoritarian while still serving. Authoritative leadership will provide clear direction rather than bend with every conflicting opinion and demand. And in so doing, it will be robustly committed to truth and the good of others, even when they don't recognise it. It will avoid being naive or weak, knowing the context in which it operates is not optimal. As Jesus said, "I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. But be on your guard against men" (Matthew 10:16–17).

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The principal as visionary

One of the key roles of the principal is to establish and enunciate (often) a clear and compelling Christian vision for the school. As the writer to the Proverbs said, "Without a vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 AV). The literature supports the central importance of the principal's vision. Sergiovanni (1999) describes this role as establishing a strong culture and a clear sense of purpose which defines the central thrust of the school and the nature of life for its stakeholders. To Sergiovanni, this is part of transformative leadership, which unites leaders and followers in the pursuit of goals. Evans & Lake (1998) regard the projection of strong vision and clear goals as critical to the success of schools. An important role of the principal is therefore to tell and retell the school's 'story', ideally in an attractive and compelling manner, which promotes and inspires the allegiance of stakeholder groups and energises them to carry on the mission of the school.

The principal as advocate and defender of faith

In a secular age where secular humanism is the dominant paradigm and the prophets of 'New Atheism' are making considerable incursions into the thinking of young people and indeed adults, an important role of the principal in an Anglican school is as theologian and defender of faith. The principal will need to take a clear and visible stance on the truth of the Gospel, as Paul writes, in what to some degree might be seen as a leadership manual to Timothy,

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. (1 Timothy 6:20–21)

He or she will be keen that the Bible is taught faithfully and accurately within the school and that there is a Christian apologetic active in the school that defends and commends the Gospel, but in a way which is engaging and respectful (1 Peter 3:15–16). The Chaplain also, in alliance with the principal, will have a strategic role, as theologically trained and usually ordained, in the focus on gospel ministry. The preaching and teaching of the Chaplain will be strategic in the defence and confirmation of the gospel.

In attending to these matters, the principal will wish to ensure that there is a viable model of Christian education operating within the school. In this he/she has some choices to make. Grimmitt

(2000) has developed an eight point typology of models of religious education: phenomenological, liberal, revelation-centred, constructivist, multi-faith, experiential, critical realist and human development based. The Evangelical will want to stand in the revelation-centred tradition and so will give primacy to the Bible.

Pedagogical and philosophical paradigms will need to be well considered. The model needs to take account of the fact that truth is a contestable commodity in a 21st Century pluralistic society, and therefore it cannot assume a Christian consensus. To be honouring of the status and rights of students as immature dependents made in the image of God, it should not seek to be coercive or indoctrinative (Thiessen, 1993). It needs to be engaging with students and provocative in terms of their thinking, rather than essentially liturgical or relying on catechisms (Harkness, 2002). It needs to allow the discussion of dissenting views (Hill, 1965) in order to prepare students for rigorous Christian faith as adults in a secular culture. It needs to consider carefully, related to maturation and age appropriate pedagogy, the balance between nurture and exposure of students to uncomfortable and challenging world views (Anderson, 1983).

Ideally, the Anglican school principal would want to ensure that Christian faith permeates more of the contact time with students than just those small parts of the week devoted specifically to Chapel and Christian Studies/Divinity/Christian Living, under whatever nomenclature a specific Christian curriculum proceeds in that school. Not to be concerned about such permeation risks a school, even with worthy Christian aims shared by the School Council and Executive and even most or all of the staff, remaining in effect a secular school (Green, 2009), in so far as there is a real disconnect for students between Christian Studies on the one hand, and the rest of school and life on the other.

Ideally, Christian faith will be part of the academic curriculum, in that teachers will be able to skilfully and accurately critique the world view emanating from secular syllabi and text books, as they assist students to be transformed in their thinking away from slavish adherence to peer group norms (Romans 12:2). In this way, as they help students to think Christianly, or at least be aware of the radical implications of the Gospel, they can move towards what Paul enjoins in 2 Corinthians 10:5,

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

This is an aspect of what Cooling (1997) calls making Christian faith the primary culture of the school.

In order to ensure appropriate Christian teaching in the school, there will be some procedural considerations which are worthy of attention: Chaplains must have extensive access to students, Christian Studies lessons must be taught by staff fully equipped to teach the work of God accurately, school culture must demonstrate the importance of Christian Studies, as an alternative to marginalising such studies to the periphery of the school. An appropriate focus should be placed on evangelism; the notion that Anglican schools are really about (or should be about) teaching Christian values independently of doctrine or salvation by faith must be resisted. To nourish such a notion relegates Anglican schools to moralism and a theologically errant quest to make students good by teaching them virtue. Nonetheless, Anglican schools will want students to be tutored in the growth of Christian virtues, not as a means of salvation, but as a practical outworking of faith for Christian students, and as the ministry of 'salt' and 'light' to the student body in general.

The literature indicates the difficulty of conducting effective Christian programmes, even in Christian schools. Astill (1998) demonstrated that Christian schools habitually made little impact on the thinking of students unless their Christian input was replicated in student homes. This is particularly manifested in areas of values, where students are unlikely to adopt what is discernibly a Christian stance, unless such views are upheld by their parents. It follows that Christian education programmes within Anglican schools must be compelling, engaging and relevant if they are to impact strongly on student thinking.

Maple (1997) also comments on another potential shortfall in Anglican schools, which often so dominate the actual time of students (with sporting, co-curricular and academic obligations) that there is no time for Christian involvement, for instance, through the local church, and therefore students' experience of Christian faith is entirely, or almost entirely, administered through the school. The deficiency in this situation is that when a student graduates, there is a cessation of student faith involvement. Principals therefore need to consider how best to interface their work in schools with the work of local churches and para-church groups, so that after graduation there is articulation of students into other faith sustaining environments.

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The principal as steward and custodian of the school

As the current incumbent, the principal needs a longitudinal perspective of the school. Unless he/she is foundation principal, the school has existed before the present incumbent and will exist after that person's tenure. The commission therefore as current principal is a role held in trust. Part of the obligation of trust in an Anglican school is to maintain the essential character of the school and particularly its Gospel focus. This requires clarity from the principal, as well as a personal modelling of Christian truth and grace. Paul puts it to Timothy thus, "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good faith of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:11–12).

In this quest, and particularly in its public stance, the principal will need to privilege the school's Christian position above all other core values, for instance, academic success, pursuit of personal happiness, social cohesion, material success, environmental sustainability (Matthew 5:33). This will require considerable wisdom and insight. Schools are not churches; their core business is to educate, albeit in an Anglican school within a Christian paradigm. Furthermore, schools that do not aim at academic excellence, in a way which provides passports for students into adult immersion in the world, will run the risk of losing their students and having no one to evangelise.

The principal as shepherd

The 'sheep' of the school, defined pre-eminently as its students, but also including the staff, are infinitely valuable as they are made in the image of God. An enduring Biblical metaphor is that of the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus himself is the good shepherd (John 10:11). However, just as Peter was instructed by Jesus, "Take care of my sheep" (John 21:16), so the principal is in an analogous position as shepherd of the school's flock. This operates on multiple layers. The principal has a role to defend the sheep against heresy, but also to protect and defend them pastorally. For this reason Anglican schools appropriately major on quality pastoral care, which exhibits a deep love for and care of students. Indeed, the community see love and pastoral care as a defining hallmark of Anglican schools. The other person centred nature of this care is clearly outlined by Peter in his first letter,

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants

you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2–3)

The principal as academic champion

The principal of an Anglican school needs to resist the reductionist tendency observable in some Christian schools that understate the importance of academic excellence and emphasise more exclusively the evangelistic mission of the school. This is not to underestimate the importance of evangelism and Christian nurture, which are fundamental to the purposes of Anglican education. However, Anglican schools are in the first instance schools, accepting parental fees and government grants in order to educate across the cognate disciplines. These, although they exist in a fallen world, are worthy of study, as part of the created order which owes its allegiance to the Creator God; many demonstrate aspects of God's faithful provision for his world, and his common grace:

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praise worthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

The principal will want students to strive for excellence in all these areas of learning, knowing that God wants us to use our talents effectively (Matthew 25:14–30). There should be no conflict in schools between the academic and the spiritual focus of the school. Christian schools should be characterised by an emphasis on excellence in both areas, as Christian staff and students seek to do all things well as to the Lord (Colossians 3:17).

The principal as a member of the educational community

As an educational leader, most principals accept the responsibility to contribute to educational discourse, mostly by being active participants in educational associations and peak bodies. This is an opportunity for the Christian principal to attempt to inject Godly wisdom, as he or she can bring it to bear on the educational issues of the day. It is also an opportunity to attempt to shape the agenda, in a way that is at least not antithetical to faith-based schools.

The principal as exemplar

The principal will need to model the graces of Christian faith in his/her dealings with students, staff and parents: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control" (Galatians 5:22). This will be difficult to maintain given the inevitable provocations from within all

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stakeholder groups. In order to maintain such equilibrium, the principal will need to take steps for the sustaining of self for the long haul of leadership. This will include resting in God rather than expecting to resolve everything oneself (Peter 5:7).

Maintaining one's self as a spiritual leader whose life and conduct is appropriate, requires the spiritual disciplines of holy living. The qualifications set out by Paul for eldership of the congregation (1 Timothy 3:1–10 and Titus 1:6–9) are equally applicable to the 'eldership' position of school leader. They include

...not overbearing, not quick tempered, self controlled, upright, wholly and disciplined. (Titus 1:8,9)

...above reproach, temperate, self controlled, respectable, gentle, not quarrelsome, a good reputation with outsiders, worthy of respect, sincere. (1 Timothy 3:3–8)

Moreover, the principal will need to remain steadfast to the Gospel calling. As Paul writes to Timothy:

Be diligent in these matters...Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them. (1 Timothy 4:15–16)

and to Titus:

Hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine, and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9)

The principal and conflict management

Resolution of conflict between various stakeholders: students and students, students and staff, staff and parents, will be one of the most testing aspects of a principal's leadership. Within the community of an Anglican school, it is important that proper Biblical principles of conflict resolution be undertaken (Matthew 18:15–17) and that unhelpful gossip and slander be minimised, if not eradicated (Ephesians 4:31–32). Even in a school which itself aspires to be a Christian community of staff, gossip and slander can be manifested in a way which is quite damaging of persons.

The principal and succession planning

The nature of leadership is that it is temporary, for a season. Much leadership within Anglican schools is 'home grown'. Principals need to be alert to the possibilities and indeed necessity of cultivating leadership. It may not be quite the situation of passing on the mantle from Elijah to Elisha (2 Kings 2) but opportunities will abound to teach as Jesus taught his disciples, that is, by modelling,

demonstrating and didactic teaching as emerging leaders learn 'at the elbow'. In demonstrating and encouraging such leadership, principals help create sustainable leadership for the future.

The uniqueness of the Christian principal

Many of the attributes of good principalship discussed above could be said to be generic, rather than particular to Christian leaders, or leaders in Christian schools. What then is distinctive, or even unique, for the Christian principal? The answer to this question will essentially relate to the Christian world view vision of the Christian person in the role, the primacy such a person affords to the gospel, the desire to build the kingdom of God amongst staff, students and parents, their Christian humility as a person in need of redemption and who understands that the school is not focussed on them, but on the Lord Jesus.

The Christian principal of a government school

When in a state or territory system of education, the governance of the school will, by definition not hold a distinctive Christian belief nor privilege a Christian position. Rather, as part of a pluralistic society, where secular humanism is the dominant paradigm, such a school, including its leader, will have less freedom than a principal of a Christian school to articulate a personal faith position. However, such a man or woman can and should seek to function as a Godly leader, humble and caring, and indeed to manifest the gifts of the spirit and function as shepherd of the school's students and staff. Such winsomeness will often provide opportunity informally to give an account of the Christian motivation which drives such a person. In this context Paul's comment to the Philippians is apt, "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe" (Philippians 2:15).

The Christian principal of a government school will also seek to encourage meetings of Christian voluntary groups, and, in states where such opportunities are possible, the presence and activity of the School Chaplain and the ministry of Special Religious Education ('Scripture') provided by representatives of local churches. Such opportunities are strategic for the ministry of the word of God.

The role of the principal is multidimensional and multifaceted. Sergiovanni (1999) describes aspects of the role as technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural, all requiring

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Educational Administration

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adequate attention if the role is to be performed well. Principals of Anglican schools need to be purposeful and thoughtful as they conceptualise their leadership to the greatest advantage for all parties, and particularly as they function as visionaries, theologians, shepherds and stewards, seeking to defend and commend the Gospel to their charges, the young people of our schools. **TEACH**

Endnote

John Collier has been principal of three schools: a government high school, a pre-kindergarten to Year 12 Christian grammar school and a Kindergarten to Year 12 Anglican school.

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