



REFLECT:

Stimulus exploration of the Christian narrative with which to think together

“Human dignity, the ultimate worth of each person, is central to good education. The basic principle of respect for the value of each person involves continual discernment, deliberation and action, and schools are one of the main places where this happens, and where the understanding and practices it requires are learned. This includes vigilant safeguarding.”

(Church of England Vision for Education, 2016)

“Strength and dignity are her clothing; and she smiles at the future.”

(Proverbs 31.25 NASB)



Treating one another with dignity is foundational to effective approaches to grief, bereavement and the traumatic experiences of loss. Dignity chooses words wisely and permits silence patiently. It seeks to honour the other, giving space and time again and again, and provides safe space for things to fall apart, listening attentively, whilst offering time and gentleness before seeking solutions and action plans. Dignity recognises that there are rarely any easy answers, and yet gradually enables the small building blocks of the next steps to be brought together. In times of crisis, children and adults cleave to the organisations they trust and schools are central to this, providing spaces for support and reconciliation, showing empathy and resilience to the benefit of all they serve.

In supporting staff, parents and children in these times of challenge, school leaders will seek to ensure they preserve the dignity of each member of their community, valuing each of them as one of God's children. When Jesus went to the family of Lazarus following his death, John tells us he saw Mary weeping and was moved to tears (John 11:33-35). He wept because he was fully human, he felt the pain of those who loved Lazarus and cried in his compassion for the bereaved. Jesus showed us that from respect for those who have suffered loss, we can mourn alongside them. In reaching out to all in society, Jesus modelled for us the qualities of dignity, respect and love we should seek to show as we lead our school communities.

Experiencing grief and bereavement will change each of us personally in our outlook and attitude, so schools need to provide space to understand each person as an individual, providing dignified spaces, timescales and processes to enable each member of their community to reconnect. The loss of opportunity, occasion or connection (even without the deep challenge of death itself) requires deep resources of dignity in our interactions and processes.

Managing such situations and processes may hit leaders themselves harder than they expect, and therefore particular attention should be paid to providing support mechanisms for those carrying leadership responsibilities for others. While the short-term management of such a crisis will require deep resources and wisdom, handling grief and bereavement is a long-term leadership endeavour. School leaders can develop practices, habits, events and experiences that can enable the community to come together regularly with dignity and respect that lasts for the long term.

Providing space for quiet and reflection can bring us closer to God. There is comfort in the biblical narrative - "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8). Christians believe that God is aware of every single need one has: financial, spiritual, physical, social, and emotional - so taking time to name and acknowledge these needs may help us to feel heard, giving us the dignity of feeling understood. In seeking to support others, we are reminded "...we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

In coming to terms with personal grief and bereavement, school leaders will encounter the loss of opportunity and of rites of passage now missed. This could include examinations and transition activities, as well as celebrations, trips and events. Giving students (adults) permission to grieve for these lost opportunities in ways that allow them to retain their sense of dignity yet equipping them with the language to do so requires

schools to actively plan. To do so well requires time and will include new and different practice for years (rather than weeks or months) to provide safe and reassuring spaces for adults and children as we emerge from the initial phase of loss. Enabling our communities to acknowledge what has happened, to develop the language to name and explore what it means and to then move forward is a deep expression of each individual’s ultimate worth and intrinsic dignity.

Read: Philippians 2.5-11; John 13.1-17; Luke 10.25-37



DISCUSS:

Questions *to consider together as a team*

- What does love require of each of us in the relationships we hold? What could ‘flourishing together’ look like in this challenging season?
- Who are the most vulnerable members of our community? How can we support them? How do we do this and ensure we are preserving their dignity?
- How can prayer or reflection help me to understand my feelings about what is happening?
- How might some needs be misunderstood by others? How can we mitigate this?
- How can we practically support those grieving who were not permitting to attend the funeral?
- How has God kept me safe? ‘What can we learn from what the Bible teaches about the way Jesus comforts people who are sad?



PRAY:

God of the wilderness,

We are not always sure how to endure these testing times,

Or where to find nourishment for our souls,

But we choose to trust in you.

Please grant us refreshment.

God of all strength,

We don't always have the capacity to keep going,

Or the ability to see a way through,

But we choose to trust in you.

Please grant us perseverance.

Through Jesus Christ our teacher and our Lord.

Amen.



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