

CONSOLATION AND HOPE IN A TIME OF CRISIS:
BRINGING CHAPLAINS TOGETHER TO CULTIVATE
HUMAN FLOURISHING AND SPIRITUAL
RESILIENCE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-RELATED
LOSSES FOR YEAR 7 PUPILS



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HOPE IN THE SHADOW OF LOSS

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The National Institute for Christian Education Research

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INTRODUCTION

Amid the COVID-19 disruption, people's lives were thrown into disarray as the 'norms' of life were ambushed, dismantled and in many cases destroyed. It was during this time of global disorder that many people turned towards religion and spirituality for comfort. Data collection from 95 countries on Google searches during the month of May 2020, that included the word 'prayer,' reached the highest levels ever recorded and demonstrated an increase of 50% when compared to previous searches for prayer (Bentzen 2020). At its height, the pandemic crushed our world of routine and predictability, confronting us with our human fragility and mortality.

As our world now starts to restructure from the impact of the pandemic, holding a sense of hope helps navigate us towards renewed optimism. In some way the pandemic has impacted all our lives and reflecting upon the multitude of consequences it leaves in its wake, the ramifications continue to be revealed.

Within the school context, it is emerging that the pandemic has influenced the lives of students in various ways, emotionally, academically, mentally, and spiritually. Although schools are working hard to help students recover, this is a challenging and continuous undertaking. (Nuffield Foundation: 2021).

School leaders feel the government's current approach to learning recovery is misconceived. They see the emphasis on academic 'catch up' as unhelpful and want an equal focus on emotional/well-being recovery and enrichment alongside academic catch up.

(Nuffield Foundation, 2021)

HOW IS THE TERM HOPE GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD?

The definition of hope is multifarious. According to the Oxford Dictionary, hope means 'to want something to happen and think that it is possible'¹ To embrace an optimistic outlook on life and what the future might hold is akin to hope. Future optimism in a general understanding of hope tends to be restricted to aspirations of what this world can bring.

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other – not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.

Nelson Mandela

We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

HOPE WITHIN A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

Hope within the Christian faith is underpinned with a sense of trust and expectancy of what God has promised. That through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been forgiven, redeemed, and restored. Hope in a Christian context looks to the promise of eternal life. Hope and faith are intricately interwoven as "faith is confidence in what we hope for" (Hebrews 11:1).

For in this hope, we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?"

Romans 8:24

Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.

Psalm 31:24

¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/hope_1

HOPE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah speaks of the Babylonian exile and captivity, during which the people of Judah were plunged into an all-encompassing spiritual crisis. They found themselves captives in a foreign land, having to worship without the Temple in Jerusalem and feeling distanced from God. Initially they were compelled to lament honestly on the reality of the situation they found themselves in, and then eventually look anew at God and life (Lawrenz, 2020).

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars
we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs.*

Psalm 137: 1-3

*...but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 40:31

Persevering with hope for the exiled was challenging when everything they cherished had been destroyed. Encouraged by the insights of their prophets, psalmists and scribes, their focus turned to the very foundations of their faith. Amidst their experiences of mayhem, they reflected on the origins of life and Creation, of God bringing order and life out of chaos. In the shadow of loss, the prophets proclaimed a sustained message of hope (Dowling, 2020).

*The experience of exile was a catalyst for developing a new understanding of
themselves and of God's presence in their life.*

Dowling, 2020

The suffering and loss caused by the bitter experience of the exile was traumatic for the people of Judah and yet transformative. From the tribe of Judah, 'Judaism emerged as a religion of hope' (Wilson, 2020). While they still longed for their Temple, they adapted to their current situation to ensure their covenant with God was maintained. Synagogues became their place of gathering; oral traditions were written down and the rich heritage and wisdom arising from traditional faith stories were recited and interpreted for their new context (ibid, 2020).

*We are in coronavirus exile. We have a chance to reflect upon what was, to
experience what is, and to hope for and work toward what might be in the months
and years ahead.*

Wilson, 2020

HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

1 Peter 3:1-5

Woven throughout the New Testament is the idea that because of Jesus, Christians are a people of hope. As St Paul states, Jesus is 'our blessed hope' (Titus 2:31). Such hope anchored in Jesus has the resolve of God's promises. It reinforces the conviction that what God has proclaimed will come to pass, irrespective of the trials and tribulations life can present us with.

New Testament devotion is consistently oriented to this hope; Christ is "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1) and we serve "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). Faith itself is defined as "being sure of what we hope for" (Heb. 11:1), and Christian commitment is defined as having "fled to take hold of ... this hope as an anchor for the soul" (Heb. 6:18-19).

Packer, 2020

Luke 24:13-25 tells the account of two disciples on the road to Emmaus following Jesus' death and subsequent initial rumours of his resurrection. They were discussing the recent events as they journeyed and when joined by Jesus walking along side them, they failed to recognise him as they were consumed by their own distress. When Jesus spoke to them, 'they stood still, their faces downcast' (Luke 24:17). On recalling the recent events of the crucifixion, the two disciples said what a powerful prophet Jesus was, 'but we had hoped...' (Luke 24:21). The past tense 'hoped' reveals to the reader that whatever aspirations they once held had now expired because, from their perspective, Jesus was no longer present amongst them. It was not until they broke bread together at the table (Luke 24:30) that once again their hope was restored as they experienced Jesus' presence. In reflection the two disciples asked 'each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

...my prayer is that we will each recognize Jesus once again in the situations and circumstances we find ourselves today so that we too can be restored and have our hope renewed.

Lepp, 2020

HOPE FOLLOWING THE PANDEMIC

Before we think about the future, we must acknowledge the past...Lament is a huge part of the biblical tradition: God is big enough to hear our anger and stand with us in our sorrow.

Archbishop Justin Welby, 2021

Archbishop Justin Welby points out that in moving forward, when all around us is shattered, there is still the opportunity to rebuild and renew in such a way that the new reflects the world God hoped for us all. The cross stands as a beacon of hope (Welby, 2021)

Pope Francis has noted that the pandemic has not only challenged us with death but also the uncertainty of existence and has therefore

changed our way of living (Wooden, 2022). He said, *'All of us saw certain freedoms curtailed, while the pandemic generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation.'* (Wooden, 2022). Referring to the next Holy Year of Jubilee in 2025, Pope Francis has chosen the motto, 'Pilgrims of Hope.' (ibid, 2022). He states, there should be a renewed commitment to restoring 'the fruits of the earth for everyone' especially the poor and vulnerable (ibid, 2022). Pope Francis calls for a *'Church that is bruised, hurting and dirty because it's been out in the streets, rather than a Church that is unhealthy from being confined to his own security" or being caught up in "a web of obsession and procedures".'* (Kostoff, 2020)

We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision

Pope Francis in Wooden, 2022

HOW CAN CHAPLAINS CULTIVATE HOPE AMONGST STUDENTS?

What chaplains said.

1. Giving space for reflection first.

As a whole school, we lamented the things that we'd lost due to Covid. And then with then with the 7s and 8s last year (2021) as part of prayers, we did quite a bit that was on lament and what we've lost, and I think that was really helpful actually to give space within the school community for that. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

I did some training with all the staff at the beginning of this term about use of our worship time in tutor groups and to make those tutors aware that this isn't just another school process and to just slow everything down and create that sacred space... I kind of thought "Is this going to be a bit patronising?" but it was really well received actually, people needed permission to stop, to slow down and to be. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

2. Planning ahead with confidence

Schools are great at planning, we know what we're going to do on the 3rd July now but actually that kind of giving people confidence, the students confidence, and staff probably, to start planning ahead, planning nice things, planning things where you can be together. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

I think it does come from the adults first. Working in schools, whatever our role, we're in the business of hope, aren't we? We're taking these young people and hoping the very best for them. Sometimes we have to push, sometimes we have to pull a bit, but that's what we do, and I think maybe just reminding the adults of that and then that comes out in the classroom and other interactions with children. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

3. Inhabit the ministry of hope

I do think there's a significant role for chaplains to inhabit the ministry of hope. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

I think there needs to be something that a chaplain can communicate about the fact that they have a still centre, that they are rooted and their role within school is about providing for the school, that still centre... it's not all about the chaplain it's about the whole school but one of the chaplain's role is that kind of representative role...the chaplain as the individual person needs to be able to embody the hope that we talk of as being a distinctively Christian hope. And it's the intangible stuff, the soft stuff that you couldn't put on a job description, or a job advert necessarily but you know when you've been in contact with someone who embodies and inhabits some of that, that there's just something about that person that make life seem better of whatever it might be. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

Why is it that we are called to be chaplains? Well, it's God has called to that still centre inside us and said "I want to speak out of that to others and you're the person I'm doing that to" and we're in that particular place. So, something about that calling of the individual person to embody the hope of the Christian faith. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

4. Point to the direction of hope

For me there was something about, you know in terms of hope, the first bit of chaplaincy is about listening and acknowledging and reassuring, and from that reassurance we can point the direction to hope. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

...there's always something in our history where we are challenged and where we can be floored and derailed by what's going on and I think that our history is quite important to share with young people, to say look, you know, we've got through Covid and, yes, there've been casualties along the way but look, we're still here and we're still working through it and what have we learnt by this? And look at how we've grown. So, I think there is something about acknowledging that this is part of life, it's part of things that happen across the generations, you can go back to the biblical times and what was happening to the Israelites and them having lost their homes and all these different kinds of scenarios, it's part of life, the ups and downs of life. And I think that kind of listening and acknowledging and reassuring is a huge part of chaplaincy in terms of hope. (Chaplain VCoP 7)

REFLECTIONS

- Does anything in the literature above resonate with your own thoughts on hope?
- Has your school community had time and space to lament on the impact of the pandemic in your context?
- What does hope look like in your school context?
- Do all in your school community have the same vision of hope?
- What do you do as a chaplain to hold hope in your school community?

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