



LIGHTING THE CANDLE

Children's responses to sacred space

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Lighting the Candle: Children's responses to sacred space.

Sarah Arrowsmith

Farmington Report 2016-2017

Introduction

I work as Head of Schools and Family Learning at Hereford Cathedral. My department includes 25 volunteers aged between 50 and 70. Most of these volunteers are retired teachers or head teachers but the department also includes three retired priests, a midwife, a doctor and a dentist. Together we run school visits that provide 'Learning Outside the Classroom' support for the National Curriculum and the local RE curriculum.

Amongst the many visits and events we've organised for school children over the 12 years since I began working at the cathedral, there have been a number of memorable and unexpectedly thought provoking moments. I have had conversations and prayerful experiences with children and young people that have left me moved and often astonished by the depth of their thinking and their capacity for profound and spiritually meaningful experience. The importance many young people place on the opportunity to step out of the busy round of school and after school clubs to find time for a reflective moment is remarkable.

Of course this need is not something that is unique to children visiting cathedrals or churches. The benefits of meditative contemplation, both religious and secular, are recognised throughout the education system and widely addressed with the flourishing in schools of things like prayer spaces, Christian meditation, and the mindfulness curricula 'paws b' and '.b'. Like adults, children want time to ponder the deeper, wondering questions about identity, relationships, life, death and the wider world.

Yet in the UK today most children lead an increasingly busy life, juggling school, social commitments, home life and clubs against a background of insistent demands from various media and IT devices. For most children 'Religion' is an unfashionable extra practised by very few, if any, of the people who make up their close communities. 'Religion' is something to learn about in school, something to 'do' in lessons, in assembly or in a prayer space, but usually that's where it stays, because for most of them it's something their family just doesn't 'do'. The teaching, and even the practice of religion, can be seen by children as just one other subject to fit into the school timetable, like values education and maths and PSHE. For many, it is largely irrelevant to their world beyond the school gates. So I have several concerns.

Firstly, that although in many schools, especially church schools, children have opportunities to say and write prayers and to sing catchy songs with religious themes, even so, there is often no time, space, permission, or even the right environment, for moments of real quiet, or inner contemplation; the sorts of experiences that might lead to a different and deeper type of awareness. Or to put it another way, children's encounters with religion in school are often somewhat divorced from opportunities to, in the words of the psalm, 'be still and know that I am God'.

And another concern, which is totally bound up with the first, is that in this environment, where 'religion' is left behind with the maths and geography lessons as school closes for the day, children have few opportunities to experience a spiritual dimension that is meaningful and personal to their own developing sense of identity; their own sense of self within the world and, in Christian terms, within a relationship with God. In other words, children have few opportunities for a religious experience that might spill over into their wider worlds beyond school, and influence their lives in the future. But in our cathedrals and churches, with their tradition and atmosphere of prayer, we have a unique opportunity. Here we can offer children the occasion to 'be' in a place where they can feel a closeness with something other, and where they can feel that they are, themselves, with all their questions and hopes and cares, unique and valued in the sight of God.

Yet this is not an easy thing to do. Thousands of school children visit the cathedral each year, but during the course of a busy school visit this sort of experience is often difficult to find time for and impossible to manufacture. However needed or beneficial these sorts of experiences might be, they have an unquantifiable and inexpressible quality that makes them very difficult for a child to request. It's not like needing a drink or feeling hungry. Moreover, for a school visit where aims, objectives and outcomes need to be defined and delivered, there is a real difficulty with allowing true space for children to be still. School visits are usually focused on the quantifiable, factual or easily expressible. Historical details, local information and moral or religious discussions take precedence over opportunities for those unquantifiable experiences that do not readily tick the curriculum boxes. So even when space and time for prayer or contemplation has been found, it's difficult to adequately explain the moment. Words invariably fall short of a true definition of the experience, and to try to describe inner and deeply personal feelings can be to lessen the intensity of the experience, and devalue it. Words become trite, or formulaic, or insufficient. I'm reminded of T.S Eliot's 'intolerable wrestle with words and meanings' in his Four Quartets. A third concern, then, is that in the teaching of religion, with its the emphasis on identifying and quantifying learning outcomes, we miss those moments where we might offer children a personally meaningful experience, and in so doing we miss a vital opportunity. Without opportunity for personal, spiritual experience Christianity can be seen as a propositional religion to be proved or disproved by rational argument; little more than a moral rule book underpinned by a pre-scientific belief system.

But how to address the problems? School visits are always time constrained, there is always a wealth of material to cover, there are often a lot of children, and there are invariably buses to catch at the end of the day. Additionally, teachers have various reasons for bringing their classes to visit the cathedral but, perhaps surprisingly, only a few think about addressing

their personal and spiritual needs. The children's experience of the cathedral might well be enjoyable, creative and instructive, but their lasting memories and their impression of Christianity will almost certainly remain in the domain of the quantifiable and reportable learning outcome. Children may have had an enjoyable learning experience discovering, for example, the Tudor past of the cathedral, or finding out about the symbols and rituals of Christianity, or they might remember singing in the choir, or trying on a bishop's mitre, or meeting Henry VIII, or perhaps they may have enjoyed dressing up as a medieval pilgrim, for instance, but none of these recollections would be the sorts of things that might have personal resonances for them in a spiritual or religious sense.

With all this in mind, I wanted to think about how to create opportunities for children visiting the cathedral in school groups to respond to the sacred space in a way that might lead to a different sort of perception, one that perhaps might help 'light the candle' of spiritual awareness.

Before beginning this Farmington project my department and I had already addressed the issue in some respect by introducing moments of reflection into all of our standard visits, whether or not they were RE focused. One example is our KS2 'Tudor Trail'. During this visit, children meet a variety of rich and poor costumed characters from the cathedral's Tudor past. One of these characters is a beggar lady who tells a story about her desperately sad life. When they meet her, children invariably enter wholeheartedly into the role play; they are very ready to pity her plight. After the meeting the class are invited to light a candle and think about or pray for anyone they know today who is sad, or unwell or worried. Careful thought is given to the wording of the invitation to 'think privately' or to 'pray' so that children claiming not to believe do not feel excluded. This is just one example of how we try to encourage children to feel that they are in a place where the cares of their own lives are valued and where each of them is important.

My initial idea for the Farmington project had been to explore different ways of introducing similar moments into standard school visits and to discover how other cathedrals and greater churches with similar programmes address the issue. However, during the two terms between applying for a Farmington Scholarship and the official beginning of the project, my ideas developed in a different way. I began reading research into children's spirituality, and I started to think about the potential of our traditional sacred spaces to offer a safe and welcoming environment for children's contemplative thought or prayer as the main purpose of the visit itself, not simply as a short diversion during a curriculum focused school visit. In a cathedral setting this would, of course, take place within a specifically Christian framework. It would be important to consider how this unashamedly religious approach might sit with Ofsted's requirements for the development of children's spirituality within the SMSC agenda, but this was not my primary focus, and it did not influence the design of the project. Even so, the results did yield some interesting pointers in this direction, and comments about Ofsted made by the principal of the school I worked with are quoted towards the end of this report.

The final design for the project set out, simply, to explore children's responses to sacred space with a view to assessing the value they themselves placed on the experience. Ultimately, I hoped to use the results of the research to inform and create a practical

resource that could be used by educators and teachers working in and with cathedral and diocese education departments.

A few words about children's spirituality

Since the 1988 Education Reform Act teachers have been charged with promoting the spiritual development of their pupils in the broadest sense of the word, not excluding, but not limited to its religious context, and the current Ofsted handbook (Ofsted 2016) includes clear pointers for recognising a child's developing spirituality. It states:

The spiritual development of pupils is shown by their:

- ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values
- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning
- willingness to reflect on their experiences.

Moreover, in recent decades research and conversation amongst psychologists, theologians, philosophers and educationalists has wrestled with identifying and analysing concepts of children's spirituality and spiritual development. Where once children's spirituality was reckoned in extraordinary or other worldly experiences, in more recent years a different understanding has prevailed. Rebecca Nye (2009) succinctly describes how 'it [children's spirituality] is evident in very ordinary, *everyday* aspects of children's lives, and very probably a reality for *every child* – regardless of their religious or other factors in their upbringing.' Understanding of children's spirituality has moved on. However, the current small project is not aiming to examine Ofsted's agenda, and nor does it aim to add to an already extensive body of academic research. It is concerned, simply, with children's experience of a spiritual dimension in terms of their inner emotional and creative responses to sacred space. It looks at how, in a practical way, we in our cathedrals and churches, working with one-off visits from classes of school children, can help children's inner lives and well-being develop and flourish within a Christian context.

Methodology

Not being a psychologist or a social scientist, I had no previous experience of collecting and analysing data for a research project, however it was obvious that the nature of this research, being open-ended and looking to give the children freedom in their responses, demanded a qualitative approach that would capture insights into the children's thoughts and emotional reactions that a quantitative approach would be unable to reveal. I felt confident in designing the project, but wondered if I might need professional guidance with

the analysis of the results. The project would need a carefully shaped and focused visit plan, one that allowed the children semi-unstructured personal time for total concentration of their own thoughts. Importantly, it would need to include the means to capture what the children themselves felt had been their significant experiences. Being very aware that asking children to use words, especially written words, might inhibit or limit their ability or desire to describe their experiences, it was important that the questions on the feed-back forms should be open ended, and that the children should also have an option to draw, or write a poem, or talk about how they felt. The three questions would be:

What do you remember best about your day at the cathedral?

What was the most important thing for you?

How did being in the cathedral make you feel?

Additionally, children would have the opportunity to create symbolic representations of their thoughts by colouring a labyrinth design. In order to capture as much information as possible we planned, with permissions, to take photos and to video short interviews with selected children. Furthermore, I was interested to learn about the children's lasting memories of their visit, so towards the end of the school year they would be invited to draw a picture or write some words or a poem to describe what they remembered about how they felt in the cathedral.

The visit plan itself would need to be evaluated, re-drafted and tested in the light of experience before it could be finalised and produced as a resource. I initially planned to run three visits, with each consecutive visit building on the experience of the previous visit. Unfortunately, for a number of practical reasons, the third visit could not be arranged. Even so, everyone involved felt that the two visits that did take place had been successful, and I was confident that I had enough material to go ahead and write the resource pack. Finally, although this was to be very child centred research, feedback from the teachers and adults involved would be instructive, and, even though this was not an objective of the research, it would also be informative to consider the results in the light of Ofsted's criteria.

Inviting schools to take part

I approached teachers and head teachers from 5 different schools, and arranged meetings to talk about the aspirations for the project. At this point I wanted to have an open mind about which year groups to work with. I talked with teachers from year groups 2 to 7 and initially wondered if there might be interesting comparisons to be made between older and younger children. It became obvious, however, that for practical reasons to do with the time, both my time and that of the teachers, this would not be possible and would in any case detract from the project's main focus. Perhaps this is an area of research that might be followed up in the future.

Almost all the teachers I spoke with were interested in taking part, however the staff at Holmer C of E Primary Academy, which is within walking distance of the cathedral, were particularly keen. The Principal and Deputy were both supportive and wanted to develop links with the cathedral, and all four of the Y4 and Y5 teachers were especially enthusiastic.

This guaranteed the full support of the school, and the age range had, in effect, chosen itself. I initially hoped to work with a local non-denominational school as well as a C of E school, but unfortunately that particular school was eventually unable to give a firm commitment. Later on in the planning, a Y5 teacher from Lord Scudamore Primary Academy, another non-denominational school within walking distance of the cathedral, asked to join the project. We arranged provisional dates for the school visit, but by this time coordinating the school timetable with the cathedral's commitments to services and events was difficult, and in the end the visit was not able to take place. However we are hoping to work with the children from Lord Scudamore sometime during the autumn term.

Holmer C of E Primary Academy

Holmer Church of England Academy is a large primary school in Hereford. Its demographic reflects that of Herefordshire, where the population is predominantly White British and few people speak English as an additional language. There are approximately 400 children on roll and 2 forms in each year group. The latest Ofsted report (2013) states that the percentage of pupils claiming free school meals is below the national average, the proportion of disabled pupils and pupils with SEN supported at school action is just above the national average, and the proportion supported at school action plus is below the national average. There is a strong Christian ethos throughout the school, and the latest SIAMS report (2017) grades the school as 'Outstanding'. For the purpose of the project it is important to note the strong Christian foundation for education at the school and, in particular, the latest SIAMS report's recognition of SMSC development in the school:

The school has a well-developed understanding of spirituality so that its distinctive Christian character makes a significant contribution to the SMSC development of all pupils. The much-loved spiritual garden, planned and created by the school council, is seen by all stakeholders to exemplify the partnership between the church and the school.

This partnership, which has grown in strength over the last two years, has seen a number of exciting initiatives including a chaplaincy, Open the Book sessions, I Sing Pop and an after-school Bible class. These provide pupils with regular times when they can ask difficult questions, such as 'how do you pray' to trusted adults, supporting the school's spiritual work. There are regular, planned occasions for children to engage in high quality experiences so that many pupils are beginning to develop their own spiritual journey.

It is probably a fair assumption that the strongly Christian ethos at Holmer meant the children were already pre-disposed to be receptive to reflective activities in a Christian sacred space. The influence of the cultural context cannot be ignored.

Lord Scudamore Primary Academy

Lord Scudamore Academy is another large school. With a three form entry and around 620 pupils on roll it is particularly large for Herefordshire, where small village schools are the

norm. Its demographic, like that of Holmer Academy, is predominantly White British with few children speaking English as an additional language. According to the latest Ofsted report (2013), the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and supported through school action plus is below average. The school website lists four aims for preparing children for life, with SMSC development second in the list, behind academic development. They aim to:

promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through all appropriate curricular opportunities, with particular reference to issues of equality and diversity.

The visit plans

The design for the project was initially planned by me and then discussed collaboratively with the two Y4 and Y5 teachers from Holmer who would be working most closely with the children. The framework and content of their cathedral visits would be influenced by 'relational consciousness' as understood by David Hay and Rebecca Nye (2006). Following an extensive, qualitative study of children's spirituality which categorised spirituality as awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing, Hay and Nye identified 'relational consciousness' as 'the most fundamental feature of their [children's] spirituality' (Hay and Nye 2006). David Hay describes relational consciousness as the way in which children relate 'to the rest of reality, that is, other people, the material world, themselves and God.' (Hay 1999, 2006). Although there are recognised problems with Hay and Nye's understanding of children's spirituality (Daniel G Scott, 2003, 2005; Ruth Wills, 2012), there is also considerable support for the concept (Champagne 2003, Hyde 2008), and using their four-fold identification to underpin the project would provide a pragmatic and useful framework. After all, my focus was not to identify and define children's spirituality, but instead to bring children into the cathedral and to offer them the possibility of a personal experience of the sacred space.

With this in mind, I planned the cathedral visits around three spaces in the cathedral that would support three dimensions of relational consciousness; relationship with self, with others and with the wider world. The first two visits would be with the Y4 and Y5 children from Holmer Primary Academy, and the third was planned with Y5 children from Lord Scudamore Primary Academy. Each successive visit would build on the evaluation of previous visits to reshape, refocus and build in practical measures where necessary.

During their visit to the cathedral, children would spend time in each of the three designated spaces. They would be encouraged to become attentive to their own inner thoughts and feelings by taking part in creative and symbolic activities inspired by the architecture, history, windows and atmosphere.

The cathedral spaces

The main nave: Relationship with self.

The cathedral nave has pillars and arches dating from the original Romanesque cathedral. Many of the capitals are intricately carved, as are the arches and ceiling bosses. In the nave the children would think about the stones that build the cathedral. They would visit the stone masons' yard to talk to the masons and see the work of carving the stone in progress, and they would think about the transformation of the stone into the intricate carvings of the ceiling, arches and columns. Then, praying with stones, they would think about themselves, their feelings, their gifts, their talents, and their 'special things'. They would think about how each one of them is special and different, like the stones of the pillars and arches supporting cathedral, and how each one of them brings their own special qualities to help build their friendship groups, family, clubs, class and school. Each child would draw or write something personal onto their stone, which they would take back to their classroom to build a class cairn.

The North Transept: Relationship with others.

The North Transept houses the shrine of St Thomas Cantilupe. Cantilupe was a popular saint in the Middle Ages, and in the late 13th century Hereford Cathedral became a focus of pilgrimage. Today that notion of pilgrimage has been re-vitalised, with many people lighting candles and leaving prayers. We would lay down a labyrinth mat in the North Transept and the children would learn about pilgrimage. They would think about life as a journey or pilgrimage that we walk with the significant others in our lives and, holding a glass bead in their hands, each child would walk to the centre of the labyrinth thinking of all the things that make their chosen person or people special. They would pause in the middle for personal thought or prayer, then walk slowly out of the labyrinth thinking back though all the memorable times they've shared with their person or people, or thinking of times they are looking forward to in the future. At the end of their labyrinth walk, the children would place their bead in a 'pond'. While one child was walking the labyrinth, the other children would colour in the outline of a labyrinth with whatever colours and patterns they chose to represent their thoughts.

The Audley Chapel: Relationship with the wider world.

The Audley Chapel at Hereford Cathedral is a Tudor chantry chapel with modern stained glass windows designed by Tom Denny and installed in 2007. The windows represent the poetry and thought of the 17th century mystic and poet Thomas Traherne. They contain pictures, half-hidden images and representations of the Herefordshire countryside, including fields, rivers, animals and mini-beasts as well as the city and people of Hereford itself. Children would sit in the chapel, learn about the poet and how he found the love of God in the countryside all around him, and then discuss what they could see in the windows. They would share thoughts about places in the countryside or their gardens that they especially

like to visit, and discuss caring for the world and all the creatures in it. Then they would go into the cathedral's dedicated education space (the Cathedral Barn) to create their own collage picture of something they find special or meaningful in the natural world.

Detailed notes of these three sessions are appended.

Organisation

The 60 children would divide into 3 groups. Over the course of the day they would work through the three sessions in a carousel approach. There would be breaks for mid-morning drinks and for lunch. After the children had arrived and been welcomed to the cathedral, we would set the ethos of the day by taking them all into the main chancel to sit in the choir stalls and listen to music recorded by the cathedral choir. It would be essential to the project to welcome the children into the heart of the cathedral as a demonstration of their 'worth' and 'importance'. We wanted the children to feel they were welcomed, special and valued in the eyes of God, and that they, too, as well as adults and 'important people', had a rightful place at the centre of the cathedral.

At the end of day, time would be allowed for the children to complete their feed-back sheets.

Changes to the organisation after evaluation of the first visit

The first visit had to begin later than planned because of unavoidable problems with the walk from school to the cathedral. This meant that the morning sessions were slightly short of time, but despite this, the organisation of the visit and the content of the sessions had worked well. The children's feedback was stunning. Their engagement had been total. Every feedback form had been completed thoughtfully and with a great deal of care. Consequently, in our post-visit meeting, the teachers and I felt that so long as the issues with timing were overcome there was little we would need to change for the second visit, but we did feel that more emphasis on the introduction to the day would help support the message of welcome. So for the second visit we would begin by sitting all the children around the high altar and as well as listening to music, we would choose a child to light a candle on the altar. The candle would remain lit for the whole of the visit, and the introduction to this little ceremony was carefully worded:

Christians often light candles to represent the light of Jesus in their lives. While you are in the cathedral today we'll light a candle on the high altar. The flame will be for each one of you, and it will be shining as you do your activities and think your own special and important thoughts.

Capturing the importance for children: the children's feedback

Not being the class teacher, not knowing any of the children beforehand, and within the limited scope of the project, there was no time to get to know the children and to develop trusting relationships with individuals, so there was no opportunity to talk with children at length or to discover each child's authentic 'inner' feelings on a one to one level. Even so, evaluating the video clips, the words and drawings on the feedback forms, the labyrinth colourings and the images captured in the photos revealed a great deal about the children's responses.

Photos

The overall impression of the photo collection is of children who are happy, focused, engaged, and interested. Some photos in particular stand out as representative of notable moments. A number show individual children walking the labyrinth lost in thought, with their bead folded in both hands. Other photos show children looking closely into the bead pool as they let their own bead float into the water. Letting the bead go was an important part of the whole experience. For many children walking the labyrinth was an encounter with intense emotions and feelings. They were in a very personal space where the 'everyday' world was held in suspension. Afterwards it was important to have a moment to re-adjust, to move back gently into their more 'everyday' self. Allowing their bead to float down amongst the other coloured beads and glittery water, and watching it, gave the children time to gather themselves before moving on.

There are also a number of photos of the children praying with stones. They sit with heads bowed, cradling or stroking their stone. And there are photos of children carefully scribing their personal or special drawing or word onto their stone. One photo in particular has a boy holding his drawing to the camera, while behind him a girl holds her stone up to her face with both hands, as if to kiss it. Her gaze is into the middle distance; she is totally engaged with her stone and what it means to her. This was not an unusual reaction. The stones had become so important to the children that they wanted to take them home instead of building the cairn in their classroom. Another photo recalls me with a group of children praying with their stones. What the photo doesn't reveal is that at the time, workmen installing a new stained glass window had finished their lunch break and had begun hammering loudly and calling to each other across the scaffolding. I was anxious that the children's experience would be destroyed, but I was wrong. Unbelievably, afterwards, the children talked about their moment of 'peace'. Perhaps we seriously underestimate children's capacity for concentration.

Videos, including children's descriptions of their labyrinth colourings

The video interviews were made during the labyrinth activity. As well as their words, the children's body language and eye movements were interesting. Feeling I needed some

professional help to properly understand these responses, I discussed the videos with a child psychologist, Dr Jennifer Sole. Many of the clips revealed a lot about the value the children placed on the day, they evidently felt relaxed and comfortable with both the cathedral setting and with the activities. The responses to questions were often immediate and were given freely, looking directly at the interviewer. However there were some children who obviously preferred not to share their thoughts, and they were not pressed for answers. Amongst those willing to share, words like calm, peaceful, joyful, happy, were frequently used. Surprisingly, many interviews revealed a preoccupation with separation. This was an unexpected outcome. Children were balancing conflicting emotions, feeling sad at the loss of or separation from a loved one, but glad because they also remembered happy shared moments. Some children thought of estranged parents and others of pets who had died; one boy thought about his grandparents in Bulgaria, and several children remembered family members who had died. It's possible that association with the tombs in the cathedral prompted children to think of death and separation. Perhaps their age and cognitive developmental stage had something to do with a developing awareness of the meaning and impact of death on living relationships. Whatever the reason, this was a particularly difficult concept. The children were engaging with a very personal experience.

Some interviews took place while children were colouring their labyrinths. The depth of the children's thought about these colourings, and the way they used colour and shape to represent ideas of relationality and connectedness, or philosophical notions, was unexpected. The language they used was unsophisticated, but the concepts the children engaged with were complex. They embraced thoughts about human diversity, the balance between happiness and pain, light and dark, forgiveness, and the unity of family groups.

Transcripts of selected videos are appended.

Feedback forms

The children's choice of words and pictures on the feedback forms was in keeping with the video interviews, and there was a similar use of affirming vocabulary with words like peaceful, calm, warm inside, and joyful. There was also notable use of words that expressed a sense of awe, mystery or the unknown. Many children commented on the opportunity to think about feelings and family and to be reflective about difficult events and situations. One or two children used specifically religious language and wrote about feeling religious, close to God or safe with God.

All of these outcomes point to children reflecting on how they feel inside about themselves, about their relationships with significant others in their lives, about loss and death, and, additionally, about their connectedness with the wider world. For a child beginning their life's journey, searching for identity and meaning, perhaps the opportunity to encounter and be attentive to these reflective thoughts and deeper, inner feelings in a sacred space, within a Christian framework, might be a personal experience that shapes and nourishes an emerging religious belief.

I was pleased that, months later, the children's follow-up feedback during the summer term indicated that the cathedral experience was one that would have lasting importance for them. Working in their classrooms, the children were given time to think about and remember the visit, and some of their drawings are particularly meaningful. Several drew themselves inside a sort of bubble of calm or peace, and one boy tried to express a sense of felt closeness with his cat by drawing himself as half a boy and half a cat. One image I found particularly meaningful was a girl's drawing of herself standing in reach of, but not actually holding, the string of a balloon representing her 'great nan' in heaven.

Five of the children's drawings have been selected as examples and appended.

Ofsted, SIAMS and teacher feedback

Although Ofsted was not uppermost in my mind when I began the research, I think, reading through their definition of spiritual development, a by-product of the project is that it does support Ofsted's criteria, albeit in a specifically religious way. The teachers and the head teacher from Holmer were asked to consider this question:

Bearing in mind Ofsted's definition of spiritual development in the evaluation section of the School Inspection Handbook, in your opinion, are the 'Lighting the Candle' activities a useful tool in helping children's spiritual development; and if so, in what ways?

This is the head teacher's response:

The children have gained confidence to talk about their own feelings, relationship with each other and their relationship with God. The day's activities was a catalyst for the children seeking out and exploring their own inner thoughts and feelings. Our own spiritual garden has become far more relevant to the children in these year groups as a place to explore and find peace.

Having had our SIAMS inspection a few weeks after our second visit we were able to clearly show the ways in which we were supporting pupils on their own spiritual journey and the impact of this. However, irrespective of OFSTED and if OFSTED was not looking at this area of children's education, I would value it as wonderful way to help children connect with what can be a difficult concept for many.

A valuable and unanticipated by-product of the project has been the response of the adults taking part. Many felt that the experience of the day had re-kindled their own faith as well as causing them to re-assess their opinions of a number of the children. Without exception, all the adults who had taken part felt the day had been valuable to them personally, as well as to the children. These are the words of Holmer's Principal:

The day reminded me of the need to take time out in a busy life to listen to myself and my feelings. It gave me time to think, consider and reaffirm thoughts. I left feeling the balance of what was important to me had been somewhat realigned.

Final words

So where do we go from here? In September 2016 I gave a presentation about my plans for the project at the Cathedrals Plus annual conference. At the conference this September I shall be able to share the results, and I think the children's own evaluations speak for themselves. They were engaged and focused and, importantly, the overwhelming consensus was that their visit to the cathedral had been a personally significant experience. From the Autumn term onwards I hope to be able to organise similar visits with other schools, and I'm currently working on the resource pack, which will be called 'Lighting the Candle'. I hope it will be useful to other churches and cathedrals.

Working in a cathedral I feel tremendously privileged. This is a place where the tradition of prayer over the centuries has left an extraordinary atmosphere. My hope is that in welcoming children to our sacred space and allowing them time to wonder, reflect, and perhaps experience a sense of the other, then maybe some children might find that Christianity does have a relevance to their own lives, and perhaps they'll find, too, that religion is something they don't want to leave behind at school when the bell goes for the end of the day.

Appendix i

Visit Organisation

Timings for 1st visit from Holmer Primary School

60 Y4 & Y5 children

9th November 2016

9.30 arrive, sit in nave

	• children welcomed to the cathedral and invited to look around and ask any questions
	• format of the day explained
	• bags put into trolleys to be taken to College Hall for lunch
	• children taken up to sit on the floor around the high altar
9.45	children invited to listen to music (recording of choir)
9.55	Divide into 3 groups.
10.00	1st group session
11.00	Meet in the retroquire for juice and biscuits. Use toilets if necessary.
11.15	2nd group session
12.15	lunch in College Hall (bring bags to the cathedral when lunch is finished)
12.45	3rd group session.
1.45	Meet in the nave to complete feedback sheets. 2.30.
2.00	Return to School

Timings for 2nd visit from Holmer Primary School

60 Y4 & Y5 children

25th January 2017

9.30 arrive, sit in nave

	• children welcomed to the cathedral
	<i>There has been a cathedral church here for hundreds and hundreds of years. And over those hundreds of years many, many people have come in through the doors. They come for very important reasons. Can any of you think of reasons why people come into a church building? Today each one of you will have a chance to do some very special and important thinking of your own...</i>
	• format of the day explained
	• children taken up to sit on the floor around the high altar
9.45	Lighting the Candle
	<i>Christians often light candles to represent the light of Jesus in their lives. While you are in the cathedral today we'll light a candle on the high altar. The flame will be for each one of you, and it will be shining as you do your activities and think your own special and important thoughts.</i>
	• a child is chosen to light the candle
	Listening to music (a recording of Hereford Cathedral choir)
9.55	Divide into 3 groups
10.00	1st group session
11.10	Meet in the retroquire for juice and biscuits. Use toilets if necessary.
11.30	2nd group session
12.40	lunch in College Hall (bring bags to the cathedral when lunch is finished)
1.00	3rd group session.
2.10	Meet in the nave to complete feedback sheets. 2.30.
2.30	Return to School

Appendix ii

Notes for teachers and group leaders

Session 1 The Cathedral Nave

Thinking about the stone that builds the cathedral and thinking about ourselves

Resources/Equipment

- Enough large stones for the children to have one each. Stones collected from a chalky or limestone area where flint is present are ideal because they have a distinct edge, but are also likely have a very smooth where the flat surface.
- Felt pens for drawing on the stones.

Building with stone

Take the children to visit the stone masons' yard to talk to the stone masons, find out how the masons plan their designs, see what tools they use, and watch the carving in progress. Focus on the transformation of the stone into intricate carved shapes.

Thinking about the individual stones that make the cathedral, and thinking about ourselves as special members of a community

Return to the cathedral nave.

Ask the children to lie on their backs and look upwards at the pillars and at the ceiling and notice the carved capitals of the pillars and the carvings of the bosses where the arches cross in the painted roof space.

Ask the children to:

- Think about the stone that makes up the pillars and the walls and the arches. Think of the way the stone has been carved and changed into beautiful and intricate patterns
- Think about how each stone in each pillar is interesting and different from the other stones. Even those stones that look the same shape have different lumps and bumps on their surfaces and edges. Yet together all these stones make up a beautiful pillar which in turn helps to hold up the whole cathedral.
- Think about yourself. You too are unique and special. There's no-one else who is the same as you, and you are an important part of each group you belong to, whether it's your family or your group of friends, or your school, or any other group you belong to ... Brownies or cubs or a football team or dance group, or a netball team. And all those groups are like the pillars in the cathedral. They are all an important part of the whole wide world.

Thinking about the way we feel inside and thinking about what makes us special

Ask the children to sit up and choose a stone, then hold their stone in both hands and think about what it feels like.

Praying with stones

Use the following outline to lead the children in praying with their stones. Allow plenty of time for reflection.

- First of all, feel your stone in both your hands. Does it feel cold? Get to know its lumps and bumps and sharper bits...
- Now find a smooth bit. The smooth bits are like the times when we are kind to people and help others, or do things that make other people happy, or when other people do kind things for us, and we feel happy because of their kindness. Run your fingers over this bit of your stone and get to know how it feels. Think about times in your life when you've tried to be kind or helpful or considerate, like Jesus, and times when people have been kind and considerate to you ...
- Now find a rough bit and run your fingers over it. Sometimes in our lives things don't go quite as we want them to. Maybe the TV or computer doesn't work properly, or maybe your new toy or bike is broken, or maybe someone you thought was a friend has been mean to you. Sometimes life isn't smooth, instead it makes us feel cross and disgruntled like that rough bumpy bit on your stone. Think about times when you've felt like this...
- And then go back to your smooth bit again. Remind yourself about the happy, kind, calm times in your life...
- Now feel for a sharp or pointy bit on your stone. Sometimes when we're cross or upset we say things to other people that can be hurtful, and then we're like that pointy bit on your stone. Think about a time when you've felt like that...
- And now feel for the smooth bit again and remind yourself about the kind and smiley you ...
- Now feel for a bit of a dip, or part of the stone that you can put a finger into. Sometimes we feel sad or unhappy or unwell. The dippy, hollow bits in the stone are like our sad and unhappy times... Is there a time when you've been sad? ...
- Now go back and find the smooth bit. Remind yourself that even at unhappy or sad times, sometimes there's a happy memory that makes you smile, or a happy thing to look forward to, and people can be kind and loving towards you, and then things don't feel quite so bad...
- Now fold both hands around your stone as if you want to protect it, and think about yourself and all the things that make you special. You might be the sort of person who is good at helping tidy up, or the sort of person who helps someone if they've fallen over in the playground, or perhaps one of your special things is that you are good at maths, or art, or football. Just think for a minute about all the things that make you the special person that you are. And, if you want to, say thank you to God for all your gifts and special things...
- Notice that your stone has become warm. I'll let you think about your stone quietly for a couple more seconds. When you've finished, look up and open your eyes so I can see that everyone is ready ...

Making the stones truly ours

- These stones are yours, so to make them even more yours, you can colour them or draw something on them, or write something on them.

Session 2

The North Transept

Thinking about life as a journey or pilgrimage that we share with other people.

Resources/Equipment

- Labyrinth spread out on the floor of the North Transept
- Labyrinth drawings for the children to colour
- Coloured felt pens

The story of St Thomas Cantilupe

Tell the story of St Thomas Cantilupe using the pictures in the embroideries displayed on the wall.

Then explain that:

After his death, Thomas Cantilupe became a saint and many people travelled long distances, often on foot, to visit his shrine. They were ordinary people like you and me, but they were often people who were sick or couldn't walk properly, or couldn't see, or people who had a troubled life. They came to the shrine because St Thomas had been a good and holy man who was close to God, and they wanted to feel close to God themselves and to pray for healing. They were called pilgrims, and the journey they made was called a pilgrimage. The pilgrims travelled together in groups, sharing food and drink, telling stories and getting to know each other.

Christians today think of life as a bit like a journey or a pilgrimage. Along the path of life you walk with all sorts of people. Some of them have always been beside you and have always been important and very special in your life, and some others are people who you meet along the way and who become special and important to you.

Explaining the labyrinth

This pattern on the floor is called a labyrinth. It's like a special pathway that you can walk along to make a special journey. People can walk into the centre of the labyrinth thinking special thoughts, and then walk out again feeling calm and peaceful. When Christians walk into a labyrinth like this they often say prayers. We're going to do something very special. We're going to think about the people in our lives that are important to us; people who we love, people who have taught us things and people who we've enjoyed special times with - these could be people that you see everyday, that you see once in a while or even people who have passed away. Take a bead and fold it in your hand. Let this bead remind you of someone, or perhaps more than one person, who is important in your life. You might like to think of people who you see every day, or perhaps people who you don't see very often. They might be people from school or they might be from home or they might be from somewhere else entirely. Fold your bead in your hand and think of them.

Walking the labyrinth

Holding it carefully folded in your hand walk to the centre of the labyrinth thinking about the special people in your life. Then stop in the very centre. Here you can take your own time to think about or say a prayer for your special people. Then slowly walk back out of the

labyrinth thinking of all the things that you have enjoyed with your people; perhaps the places you've been to, perhaps times you've spent together, perhaps special occasions you've shared, and, if you like, think about things you plan to do in the future.

When you've finished, drop your bead into the pond and watch it fall through the sparkly water.

Then go back to the table and continue to colour your own labyrinth.

Colouring a labyrinth



On the table there are some drawings of a labyrinth and some coloured pens, including gold and silver pens. These drawings are for you to carefully colour as though you were walking along the labyrinth path. Start at the opening of the pathway and begin colouring the patterns with your favourite colours. While you are doing this, think about your special people and special things. Continue colouring carefully and thinking until you get to the centre. When you get to the centre, draw a special pattern of your own, or write a word to remind you of your thoughts. After you've done that, you can put down your colouring pens and use your finger to follow the path back out of the labyrinth, or you can use different colours or patterns to colour the pathway out of the labyrinth. While you're doing that, we'll take it in turns to walk the big floor labyrinth.

Session 3

The Audley Chapel

Thinking about the world of nature around us.

Resources/Equipment

- Drawing tools, paper, card
- Collage materials
- Glue

Introduction

The Audley Chapel is a Tudor chantry chapel. Its recent stained glass windows were designed by Tom Denny and dedicated in 2007 to celebrate the life and work of Thomas Traherne, a seventeenth century poet and mystic from Credenhill near Hereford. In his

writings Treherne expresses the overwhelming warmth and love of God that he sees reflected in the Herefordshire countryside.

Explain to the children:

This little room is called a chapel. It's a place where people often come to sit and be still and to feel close to God. Lots of people come in here because the windows are so lovely. They help people to think about nature, the countryside all around us, and the wonderful wildlife and plants that grow and live in the fields and hedgerows of Herefordshire. Sometimes when we're very busy in school or at work or in the city centre we forget about the wonders of the countryside and we forget how important it is to care for it.

The windows were made by a man called Tom Denny, and he made them to tell a story all about poems that were written a long time ago by a man called Thomas Treherne. Thomas Treherne loved to be outside in the fields and the woodlands because when he was at one with nature he felt very close to God. His poems are all about the Herefordshire countryside and feeling close to God,

Discussion

Allow time for the children to look silently at each of the four windows in turn, then discuss what they can see. There is a surprising amount to discuss. Specifically Christian images and concepts are juxtaposed with images of the natural world and life in the countryside. As well as asking the children what they can find in the windows, let them talk about their own thoughts and experiences of the natural world or of caring for the environment.

A moment of contemplation

Close the discussion with a few moments of silence:

Let's close our eyes for a minute and think about something or somewhere in the countryside or in our gardens that is special to us. ...

And to finish:

I'm going to say a prayer and if you like, you can join me by saying 'Amen' at the end.

Lord, you know the special places and creatures and plants and trees that are important to each of us and to everyone. Help us care for this wonderful world that we live in. Amen.

Creative Activity

Take the children to the Cathedral Barn to create a collage. Each child can design and create something to do with the wider world that has particular significance for them. If possible, the children's work can be displayed inside a representation of a large stained glass window.

Appendix iii

Selected examples of interview responses to the labyrinth activity in the North Transept.

After walking the labyrinth, children were interviewed around three questions:

What did you think about?

How did it make you feel?

Why did it make you feel that way?

Children colouring in their own labyrinths were asked;

Why have you chosen these colours/this design for your labyrinth?

What did you think about?

My grandad, my nanny, my aunty and my daddy ... because my mum and my dad split up and I don't get to see my daddy much.

I remembered when my brother was born

My mum because she's nice and she's kind

It made me feel really happy because it my me think for what my family would think for me to do in my life

My grandma and my grandad

How did it make you feel? Why did it make you feel that way?

Joyful because everything make me feel happy

Sad because I really loved my aunt Diana and I just remembered how she died and passed away.

But she's still with me here. (Putting her hand on her heart and smiling to reinforce her words)

Happy. Peaceful. Because it gave me time to relax

It made me feel happy and a bit sad because it made me forget some of the things that I'd done wrong and a bit sad because it reminds me of when my nan's dog died because she was a very kind dog to me and we were, like, very best friends.

It made me feel happy because I still remember my great nan and grandad and they're still in my heart but sad because they've left me.

Sad because my nan, my great nan, hurt her leg and she died but she's still in my brain because I think about her.

Special because I had time to think about important things in my life.

Happy for all the things I've done so far.

Quite happy because my grandma and my grandad live far away from me. In Bulgaria. I see them about twice a year.

Upset because my grandad died recently but it was good because I can reflect and remember him.

Why have you chosen these colours/this design for your labyrinth?

My step grandad died when I was 6 and my step cousin had more fun with him so I left gaps in the colours on purpose for all the fun bits I could of missed out on.

I put 'HOPE' in the middle cos I hope that great things in my life will happen.

I've got dark colours for the dark times and light colours for the happy times. I've got pink to represent my family and yellow for all the happy times we have together.

All my colours are for something different. The orange is like, so when, if I'm having fun with my friend and then, like, we're falling out in a problem and we sort it out, I feel quite happy about it.

I put different patterns on my labyrinth because everything and everyone should be different.

The white spots represent nice rays cos they shine brightly in the sky. And the light blue represents the nice rays as well. On the other side I've got red crosses cos they're the opposite of nice and also the dark blue is gonna be the opposite of light blue. And me in the middle. I've got light blue on one side and dark blue on the other side.

I've chosen red because it reminds me of my mum. I've chosen orange because it reminds me of my dad. Yellow is my sister, green is my grandma, blue is my nanny and purple is all of us. Then altogether it reminds me of family.

Appendix iv

Selected written responses to initial feedback Q3. How did being in the cathedral make you feel?

It was peaceful and made me think about how I feel

Amazed at how the walls and floors were detailed

Being in the cathedral made me feel special because I don't get to come in here very often

Happy because I got to do really fun activities like making my rock

Happy, impressed and sad of all the loved ones gone

Like the bad feelings have been washed away

It made me feel calm, relaxed and peaceful

It made me feel religish [child's own spelling]

Close to God

It made me feel sad inside because it made me think of my nan's dog Molly

Calm because it is quiet

It made me feel that I was light as a feather

It made me feel calm and peaceful because it is a calm and peaceful place to be

Quite sad but happy because it was fun and sad because all the tombs were lying there

It made me feel very warm inside

It made me feel relaxed

Excited and I remember God and happy

It made me feel peace

Happy and amazed and I would come here again

It made me feel I'm with God

It made me feel all light because weights from bad things I have done were holding me down and now they are gone

It made me feel special because I was by lots of important people

Happy. spiritual and nervous

It made me feel happy and calm and I could have a nice time

It made me feel peaceful and relaxed because it was quiet

It made me feel relaxed and graceful because it was very quiet

It made me feel calm and peaceful because of the prayers and music

Excited, happy and amazed

It made me believe in God more

It made me feel calm and still

It made me feel peaceful

Excited because it was really fun

Very scared at first

Amazed and really happy to actually take part and to go into the cathedral

It made me feel very happy and I have learnt new things about the cathedral, and more experienced and amazed and now I know lots of different things

It made me feel proud of myself and I suddenly felt like the proper Christian I know

Tiny and happy

It made me feel excited but calm at the same time

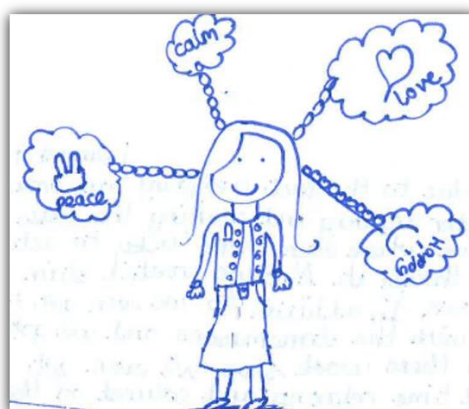
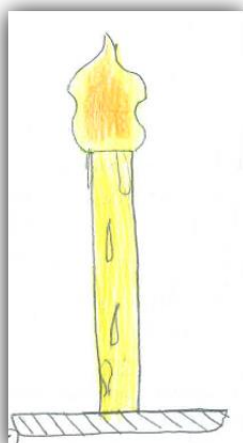
It made me feel excited and happy because it is very big and beautiful

Amazed how they make all of the things in the church

Churchy

Appendix v

Selected children's drawings from final feedback



Appendix vi

Collation of written responses from feedback forms

[illegible]

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