

Acting Strategically to Support Holderness School's Spiritual Health

The motto of Holderness School is and always has been “Pro Deo et Genere Humano,” “For God and Humankind.” Even though I am not an ordained minister (only the second of nine headmasters in the School's history) it is vital that we provide our students with a spiritual foundation grounded in our Episcopal tradition. Equally important, we need to be certain that the spiritual program is dynamic and promotes student involvement and leadership.

To achieve these goals we embarked on a comprehensive and inclusive strategic planning process. After extensive questionnaires of our constituency, we conducted a spiritual life retreat, which included faculty, students, board members, parents, students and administrators. The end results was a plan that will help keep Holderness School a dynamic, faith-based school, grounded in our high calling “For God and Humankind.”

R. Phillip Peck
Head of School
The Holderness School
P.O. Box 1879
Plymouth, NH 03264

Project's Focus:

The goal of this project was to create a strategic plan for the spiritual life of Holderness School to insure we continued to live up to the School's high calling expressed in the original motto, "Pro Deo et Genere Humano." In the course of every day, every week, and every year, Holderness School has multiple opportunities to express our faith. We have chapel twice a week, daily prayer at meals, a daily service requirement (job program), a semester theology requirement, and required service outreaches in our local community and beyond. My goal is that we are reflective about each of those programs and be sure that they continue to improve and are as dynamic and effective as possible.

The timing of this project is especially important for a variety of reasons:

1. In our 130 year history, we have only had 9 headmasters. I am only the 2nd non-ordained headmaster. Even though I am not a minister, I want to take every step possible to keep the school's foundation vibrant and moving forward. The planning process allowed the opportunity for participation and "buy in" from our entire constituency, especially the Board of Trustees.
2. Since our inception, the Episcopal Bishop of NH is the honorary "President" of the Board of Trustees. For a variety of reasons, Bishop Gene Robinson has not been able to fulfill this role. Nonetheless, he assigned a proxy (Rev. Randy Dales, who is a past school chaplain and past parent) to attend meetings in his stead. We have also reengaged the former Bishop of NH (and former "President" of the Board), Rev. Doug Theuner to be active on the Board.
3. We have the opportunity to take full advantage of our Chaplain's "Sabbatical" program this year, where he is able to spend time visiting and researching other schools (both Episcopal and non-Episcopal) and their programs throughout the country.
4. We are in need to a significant expansion of our chapel, and we need to fully understand that depths of the program's needs before we embark on that renovation.

Description of the method/process by which you completed the project:

During my tenure as head of school, Holderness School has undergone two comprehensive strategic planning processes. These have been very helpful in guiding the School, getting input and ownership from our various constituencies, and keeping the board and administration accountable to our strategic goals. We replicated this process in order to develop a dynamic, inclusive, and strategic spiritual life plan.

In early August 2007, the steering committee met: the chaplain, assistant chaplain, former Bishop of NH, the Bishop's proxy, and I met to agree on a process and plan. At that time we decided to enlist John Bird to help guide us through the planning process. John was the former head of several faith-based schools, and was the consultant who led us through the 2003 and 2007 strategic plans.

Before the opening of School the above group conducted two conference calls with John Bird and one meeting on campus to work out the details of the planning process. The following steps took place between September 1st and November 2nd, the date when the retreat occurred:

- A simple questionnaire with three questions was given to the entire returning student body (180 students), the faculty and administration, the Board of Trustees, a cross section of 25 parents, and a cross section of approximately 25 alumni. After a brief introduction, either done in person or in a letter the following three questions were asked:
 1. What aspects of the spiritual life of the School do you most like and why?
 2. What aspects of the spiritual life of the School do you least like and why?
 3. What would you change about the spiritual life of the School and why?
- The results of over 250 questionnaires were tabulated by John Bird. Themes as well as sample comments were produced.
- We selected a representative group of 18 faculty, students, board members, parents, and administrators to attend a full-day retreat
 - Early October a notebook was mailed to each of the 18 participants, which included readings about the historical importance of the spiritual life at Holderness, the mission of the school, and the chapel program, the results from the surveys.
- On November 2, 2007 we embarked on a full-day strategic planning retreat in order to develop a vision statement and a set of five program priorities for the spiritual life at Holderness School.
- Based on the notes from the retreat, John Bird worked in conjunction with our director of publications to put together a draft of the strategic plan which was circulated to all the retreat participants. Input was gathered and a final draft was completed in early January.
- At the February 2008 board of trustee meeting, the draft of the spiritual life “review” was submitted to the School Life Committee for review. The following day at the full-board meeting the Spiritual Life Strategic Plan (Review) was affirmed by the board of trustees (see below).
- Phil met with the chaplain several times during the spring to discuss ways that his sabbatical work would support the goals identified in the plan.
- June 15, 2008 the steering committee met to do a final review of the Spiritual Life document and to develop an action plan.

Project’s results:

A strategic plan, with a vision statement, policy goals, and action steps:

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF HOLDERNESS SCHOOL
2007-2010

Vision Statement:

Pro Deo et Genere Humano
(For God and Humankind)

A spirituality of connectedness—to others, to that which is greater than oneself, and to the breadth of God’s creation—is at the core of the Holderness Experience.

We embrace our Episcopal heritage. We are respectful of others and appreciate our responsibilities to both the immediate community and the human family. Students play an active leadership role in our spiritual community and in our practices of worship. The chapel is a daily center of community life, drawing together the sacred and the secular, sheltering every member of our community, and fostering an ethos in which spirituality is not only respected, but celebrated.

Program objectives in the next three years and action steps:

1. Emphasize spirituality not only as a daily, weekly, and yearly priority, but as a powerful way of connecting and integrating the different aspects of the Holderness Experience. Provide that all aspects of school life are informed and united by our spirituality.

Action Steps:

- a. *During Rich Weymouth’s Chair/Sabbatical year he will investigate other schools and the way that they integrate the spiritual life into other aspects of school life.*
- b. *We will reinforce prayer at all beginnings, both school wide as well as for individual programs run by faculty and students.*
- c. *For individual programs, we will begin as voluntary.*
- d. *This fall at our opening meetings, Bruce and Phil will invite all faculty to be more active in their use of prayer, especially at the beginning and closing of programs/events/sports’ teams for which they are responsible.*
- e. *Students will be part of a rotation with adults and delivering prayers at meals and in chapel.*

2. Continue to embrace our Episcopal heritage in our worship as we honor and respect other spiritual traditions and perspectives.

Action Steps:

- i. *Continue to affirm the Eucharist with 11 scheduled Eucharists. We will continue to honor the Christian celebrations so that students know what the church year looks like.*
- b. *Confirmation classes continue with support of Bishop Theuner.*
- c. *Made a conscious effort to bring in other perspectives and traditions:*
 1. *Islam minister*
 2. *Jewish holidays*
 3. *Other Christian pastors: Catholic Priest, other Protestant Ministers*
 4. *Dedicating chapels to world religions.*
- ii. *Music: create a voluntary student/faculty choir that meets during the period after dinner at least once a week. Look for dynamic alternative expression of worship beyond the traditional organ.*
- iii. *Worship manual: Rich Weymouth will assemble for 2009-10, which will include input from the steering committee and student chapel leaders.*

3. Enlarge and transform the chapel into a multi-purpose facility that accommodates the entire community and a variety of worship experiences, one that serves also as a center for other student activities.

Action Steps:

- a. *Rich Weymouth will visit NAES and ask the Executive Director, Dan Heishman, the name of schools that he can visit which have dynamic programs and facilities.*
 1. *Short term is to check out local D.C. facilities and programs.*
 2. *Before Thanksgiving Rich will also visit three or four national programs and facilities.*
 3. *Rich also look at churches who have created dynamic designs.*
 - b. *Rich will visit at least ten schools/churches that are exemplary and do a write up with recommendations for us by Thanksgiving.*
 - i. *Conference call in early December to review Rich's recommendations.*
 - ii. *Early in 2009 hire an architect to do renditions that can be used to support fund raising efforts for the expansion.*
4. Provide not just the opportunity, but the expectation, that students will assume greater leadership and a degree of ownership in the worship practices and spiritual life of the school.

Action Steps:

- i. *Create a committee that takes responsibility to be sure that students take responsibility for the service (Margot Moses, Renee Lewis, John Teaford).*
 1. *Acolytes*
 2. *Servers to help with communion*
 3. *Ushers*
 4. *Student readers*
 5. *Voice of the students in shaping the year, offerings.*
 6. *Service committee: meals for many, bridge house, circle program, whole village, Pemi-youth center...*
- ii. *Seek volunteers and then allow it to become their formal job as part of the job program.*
 1. *Weekly meeting to plan logistics.*
 2. *Monthly meeting for an hour to plan bigger.*
- b. *Doug Theuner or Rich Weymouth will instruct students in general about "how to pray." Doug or Rich will also train a small group of students who will regularly lead us in public prayer.*
- c. *Musical involvement in the service, seek out student leadership, including a role in the future choir.*

5. Ensure that faculty will support and honor the centrality of the spiritual life at Holderness.

Action Plan:

- a. *The chaplain will be involved in the interview process of all candidates. After the chaplain talks about the role, then the head of school states that participation is an expectation of the job.*
- i. *There will be time scheduled at the new faculty orientation talking about the expectation.*
- b. *In faculty meetings we will take time to reinforce it throughout the year, not threaten but reinforce its importance.*
- c. *Some of the adults' involvement in the chapel program can be to take students to a service down town on Sunday.*

Your analysis and commentary on what you learned through the project:

Seven years ago in my induction speech I stated three goals for our community during my headship: to be reflective; pay attention to details; and care for one another. I have found that in order to be reflective strategic goals are necessary; otherwise we tend to function in a reactive fashion to every issue. In order to be deliberate, transparent, and planful in leading the School forward, I have found the strategic planning process incredibly helpful. The belief has been reinforced through the work around the spiritual life plan.

In addition to creating a framework for reflection, several goals have been achieved through the process: there has been a chance to gather specific data about what is working and what needs to be improved; there has been the opportunity to benchmark against exemplary programs and facilities; because it is a collaborative effort, there is "buy in" to the plan throughout the community; and the overarching goals provide direction for proper governance from the board. Finally it is a way to keep a healthy school from being complacent. Proverbs 11:2 states that "Pride cometh before a fall." Presently Holderness School is very healthy and I worry about being content with things as they are and have always been.

Being content with the status quo has been a problem with the spiritual life at Holderness. Until this effort, I have felt frustrated with my inability to single-handedly push the program forward. In the context of a school whose motto is "For God and Humankind," being merely content is unacceptable. To paraphrase theologian Oswald Chambers, this process calls the Holderness School community to strive to "give our utmost for His highest."

Until we went through this process, there has not been a framework that truly addresses the spiritual needs of the School. Now the community has agreed upon set of goals. With this mandate, I am confident that we can take the right steps to continue to live up to God's high calling for our little Episcopal school.