

Interview Continued

HDD: Did you have any previous experience of a school chaplaincy? i.e., did you attend any church related schools growing up? How does a church related secondary school differ from a state related or other type school?

CGD: I attended the preschool at Christ Church, which certainly included Chapel services, but the rest of my primary and secondary education was at public, secular schools. While I had a mostly positive experience in my secular schools, I have come to deeply appreciate the advantages of the private, church-related school system. For one, our students have opportunities for theological education and Christian formation built into the curriculum and the weekly rhythms of the school year whereas I had to seek out these opportunities beyond my own school walls. In fact, Spiritual Life is an essential “pillar” of our school alongside Academics, Fine Arts, and Athletics.

HDD: What are your areas of responsibility as a chaplain at Episcopal School of Jacksonville. I understand it is a team ministry. Who else is part of the team? How do all the chaplains work together and separately?

CGD: As chaplains, we all share many responsibilities: teaching and preaching, planning Chapel services, visiting our Lower School campuses, supporting the student leaders on our Vestry, and providing counsel and just checking in regularly with all types of members in our community. One of my main responsibilities is overseeing our community service program. That often means tracking the service hours earned by our students, but it also means helping them to develop a deeper awareness of issues in our communities and to explore the ways they can use their time, talent, and treasures to meet the needs and enrich the lives of others.

One colleague on our team, Reverend Farmer, shares and collaborates with me in teaching our Middle School students, coordinates our student clubs, and takes on many athletics-related chaplain needs, an area in which I am not at all fluent. Another member of our team, Mrs. Maples, contributes her expertise in planning and logistics to make our visions realities as well as her wealth of experience in clinical counseling. Our fearless leader is the Reverend Teresa Seagle, who constantly inspires us with her administrative skill, her gracious and joyful spirit, and her passionate commitment to creative, student-centered, and student-led ministry. It is thanks to her keen discernment and management of our skills and resources that we are all able to share in such a dynamic ministry.

HDD: Do you have a teaching role in the school? Tell us a bit about what you teach and the challenges and what you enjoy about your subject and sharing it with young people.

CGD: As a faculty member of the Theology Department, I primarily teach Middle School Bible classes. Through these classes, we give students an overview of the entire biblical story in sixth grade, a focused look at the Hebrew Scriptures in seventh grade, and a survey of the New Testament in eighth grade.

I enjoy getting to dig into the cultural and historical contexts of our Scriptures with our students, to help them develop an appreciation for both how the biblical story is rooted in the language and experience of ancient Semitic and Hellenistic peoples yet also vitally relevant to our lives and the

world today. But what I enjoy most is exploring big questions with my students, seeing the deep theological thought of which they are already capable, and giving them opportunities to engage Scripture and express their own perspectives and learnings with creativity.

Because of our baptismal commitment to respect the dignity of every human being, I also feel the great challenge and responsibility to cultivate a classroom culture where all voices can be heard and where the pursuit of truth and understanding is embraced as a process that none of us can master alone.

HDD: What happens when a new school year rolls around in August? Are there specific challenges and responsibilities for the chaplain related to starting a new school year?

CGD: Each August sets off a rhythmic cycle very much like the rhythmic cycles in our liturgical calendar. We have a Faculty-Staff Holy Eucharist to kick off the new year, campuses to be blessed, and we have our first Chapel and our first Holy Eucharist with the students as well, which is often an educational opportunity as new students become acclimated to Spiritual Life at ESJ. The many new community members bring the challenge and the joy of new names to learn and new connections to be made.

A particular responsibility I have taken on is being a chaperone and chaplain on the annual Ninth Grade Orientation Adventure trip. I've never been much of an outdoorsman, but the challenges of camping with a group of 200 students are outweighed by the fulfillment I get from helping to usher students who were once my Middle School Bible students—and students new to the school—into their Upper School years as a part of our Episcopal community, helping to ritualize their entrance into a new phase of life.

HDD: What have you learned about your students and school life? If you were sent on the road to speak for Episcopal School of Jacksonville—to potential new students and their parents—what message would you want to convey?

CGD: The fundamental principle of the Godly Play program that children—and, I would add, our teenagers—have both an innate sense of the Holy and the capacity to wonder deeply and meaningfully about God continues to be affirmed more and more as I continue my ministry at Episcopal School of Jacksonville. But beyond my experience in Bible and Theology classes and with our various Spiritual Life programs and activities, I am also constantly amazed by the high level of academic promise in our students, their determination and discipline in athletics and other extracurricular activities, and the variety of ways they reflect God's glory and grace at work in them through their God-given talents and well-nurtured skills. Episcopal is a school where students are loved and supported from all angles, and I feel tremendously blessed every day to get to serve such a wonderful and unique congregation.

HDD: Add anything else you might want to share not included in the questions above.

CGD: One interesting blessing of being a school chaplain is the flexibility it allows me on Sunday mornings. I enjoy the opportunity to visit other congregations to preach and preside at the Eucharist, support my colleagues in ministry, and get a sneak peek into what's going on in the many, diverse parishes in our diocese. And when I'm not otherwise booked on Sunday mornings, I get to worship together with my wife and support her in her work as the Director of Children's Ministry at St. Mark's in Ortega.