

Schools - a rich resource on your doorstep

An interview with Peter Thomas

Q: Peter Thomas, where are you from and where are you now?

A: I am originally from Neath in South Wales. I've lived in the Yorkshire Dales for the past fourteen years.

Links

- [Craven Schools Partnership](#)
- [Happenings](#)

Q: What do you do?

A: I'm married with two children and I combine my role as minister at Grassington Congregational Church with being project director for the Craven Schools Partnership, a charitable organisation recently set up to oversee my ongoing schools' work. I report to them (a group of local volunteers) and they encourage me without curbing my creativity. I play an active role within Grassington village by volunteering my help with the multitude of events going on across the area at various times of the year.



Q: Tell me more about this school work. Are we talking about you taking assemblies in your local primary school?

A: That ...and a bit more. I have regular input into around twenty schools across the area; weekly contact with fourteen primary and six secondary schools. Yes, there are times of collective worship or assemblies. But I take part in lessons and weekly clubs. I run additional RE days, worship workshops, "Thought for the Day"

programmes and give advice to staff. I'm there to support schools when Ofsted and similar inspections take place.

Q: How do you know you're doing a good job?

A: The smiling faces of children and young people, their obvious enjoyment and the way they engage show me that I'm appreciated. I've been told that I am a very welcome part of the school community and that the children and young people look forward to my visits.

Q: Your 'congregation' is massive. You cannot get feedback at the door from everyone...

A: No. But I do get a written report, just like others at school: "The energy of his delivery and inspiration are fantastic, he is always well received." "Peter is integral part of the children and young people's learning and growing experience."

Q: I'm gathering you don't just do a lot of "God slots". Can you give me some examples of what you have done recently?

A: Over the past two years, I have developed projects across a wide range of themes with drama, story-telling and creative art projects. We've had some creative prayer days and the award winning 'Happenings' programme.

Q: We all know schools are under more pressure than ever before, that the education system is in a larger state of flux and the inspection process is shifting and tightening up every year ... and the ongoing pressure on finance. The key question is this: what does it mean to be good news to schools?

A: It is not about walking in with another new agenda or set of requests for the school, or building relationships on our terms. First we need to stop to listen, then learn and respond appropriately. If you can gain the trust of the school and offer help, support and your time – for them, this is like gold-dust. Our activities as Christians in schools vary enormously depending on our skills, the aims of our work and the particular opportunities within our area. We need to take the time to learn about the environments we are seeking to serve.



Q: So what does it mean to be good news?

A: I'm less convinced than I used to be that it is about delivering the perfect assembly or seeing how many lessons you can fit into a term. I suspect that it has more to do with entering into the 'mess' with staff and students - walking with them in the chaos of a new exam system; the anxiety a new student is experiencing; the isolation of being thrown into the care system at 13 years old.

Q: You see children at very vulnerable times...

A: Most of these young people would never walk through the doors of our churches, so schools are the most significant place you can spend your time as a Christian youth worker, Minister, Pastor, schools-worker. Find out what goes on locally and currently or join a team of people who visit on a regular basis. Schemes like 'Open the Book,' Re-wind and Excite operate in different areas of the country and are a valuable resource and opportunity for each of us to consider.

Q: I sense that you are respected in your community, within and outside schools.

A: Children, young people and parents know me well. I'm happy for all schools to have a piece of me. I know what I'm doing and am willing to be contacted for help, advice personally or to come to area assemblies or training days in your area.