

What does a Christian Priest do all week?

A class role play to explore issues in Christian communities

Monday Morning, the Priest's In Tray

Age 11-14

Overview

Christian communities want to engage with the whole of life, seeking to apply the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth to their lives in every way. This activity, a whole class role play, provides for students to think and learn about how the Bible and other sources of wisdom are applied in relation to some religious and moral issues.

This work intends to enable pupils to see the connections between sacred text and the life of Christian communities in the UK today, exploring for themselves in small groups and whole class presentations what they think about the issues addressed. Written for 11-14s, this work could also help learners preparing for examinations at 16+.

Essential Knowledge

Students will learn about the day-to-day life of a Christian minister. Do Priests only work on Sundays? No. In contemporary Britain, ministers of religion are often engaged in all kinds of religious and social activity for many more than 40 hours per week. Involvements vary hugely, but it might be typical for a Christian priest to do some personal counselling, some organising and managing, some civic and community activities and some specifically religious work in any week. Ministers have many varied ways of understanding and balancing their mission, to serve God, and their vision.

Activist Christian communities use the teaching and example of Jesus to inform their work. In this role play the students will read, use and apply Christian teaching from the Bible to the issues and dilemmas they face in this work. There are over 50 000 Christian churches in the UK today. Almost all have at least one priest (called by various names). Pupils may know some ministers themselves.

Essential teaching and learning

These activities are designed to develop some of the key skills of enquiry, analysis and problem solving that good RE always promotes, and connect simply to the requirements for GCSE and Standard Grade study as well.

Learners will particularly develop RE based skills of application: can the learners apply Bible text to some issues and problems in the minister's work? Many teachers would like to use role play and active learning ideas, but lack the time to create them. This 'off the shelf' group work role play enables students to think about the ways in which religious sources of wisdom and authority, beliefs and values might be applied in practice today. It explores the impact and influence of scripture and belief on ethics and practice. A teacher might also envisage and develop a similar classroom activity based around another faith tradition.

Context

This unit could work well as part of a course for 11-14s on Christianity, Bible and Community. It could also be useful as an introduction to GCSE or Standard Grade study (reflecting the fact that many students begin their examination courses aged 13, or even 12). Different Christians understand some aspects of their faith in different ways: the version of the activities on the next 6 pages sets up the context of a woman who is a minister in a Free Church. On the website, there is a virtually identical set of dilemmas, posed to a Catholic Priest. Either or both of these can be used, depending on the contexts.

Resources / links

- The nine situations which our priest deals with are paralleled by a set written as if the protagonist is a Catholic Priest. These can be accessed at: www.retoday.org.uk
- Students will find it helpful to learn how to look up and use Bible quotations. www.biblegateway.com is a very simple place to begin.
- It is worth looking at the websites of some churches, to see what they say about the kind of issues addressed in the role play. Find local examples for your pupils.

Learning activities

1. To begin: What do Christian ministers do all week?

Put students in groups of three for these lessons. Begin with a blank sheet of paper for each group, and a large felt tipped pen. Can they list ten things that they guess might be a part of a Christian minister's job during an ordinary week? Stick the nine or ten examples of these lists, from your class onto one wall and look at them together. Which are important? Which are difficult? If you made a combined list, how many ideas has the class had in all? Refer back to these lists later in the work. Give groups a copy of page 23, and ask them to connect the 'big ideas' of being a Christian priest to the tasks they have thought about.

2. Take one issue... then a second... then a third...

Explain the outline of the role play to the students. Give each group of three students one of the situation cards from pages 20-21, with little introduction. Give them a copy of the fill-in response sheet from page 22, and some research materials. These could be online references, or text books, or even use a Christian priest invited into the classroom to enrich their understanding of the work of the Christian community via a Q&A session. They are to read the situation card aloud, and discuss the information they gather in relation to the issue. They fill in the sheet, and prepare to present their findings and ideas to the whole class. After about 20-30 minutes (flexible, of course, to meet your class's needs) then give each group a second, then a third situation card, and a fresh copy of the fill-in sheet (page 22). In this way, each group considers three varied situations and practices the skills of applying scripture, advising the priest several times.

3. Presenting situations and dilemmas to the whole class

Ask each group of three to take two minutes to present some of their ideas about each situation in the next lesson. It might be good homework to prepare this – can they make a Prezzi or PowerPoint slide? If three different groups present about the same situation, then good learning will come from the diversity of their responses. Run the lesson as a fast-paced canter through the nine situations, and take swift votes whenever possible on what the class thinks about the options the Priest must consider. One out of three students from each group must present – but maybe it is fairer and more useful for them all to take a turn at presentation.

4. Select two dilemmas for extended writing

After the presentation and discussion, set learners the task of choosing two of the dilemmas to write about in more detail. They should particularly focus on the questions:

1. What was the item you dealt with?
2. Why is this 'a tricky one'?
3. In what ways does the Bible guide the Priest?
4. What alternatives or choices does the Priest face?
5. What is your advice to the Minister?
6. What difference will the Priest make? Is he 'following God' in this situation?

5. Write your own: new partner, more ideas

Change the classroom groupings and set students to work with one new partner. They share the writing each has done, and take all nine of the dilemmas that the class has considered. What should the minister, faced with these 9 items, do first? In what order should he tackle the work, and why? Which situations are the hardest to deal with, and why? Set two extension activities. Students must write one extra chapter to two of the situations (no more than 200 words are needed for each), and share these extensions with other pairs in the class, exploring what might happen next. They must write 'Situation 10' – another aspect of what a Priest might do in a week. They try out their examples of 'Situation 10' on each other, on a Christian visitor, or on you, the teacher!

Outcomes

Students aged 14 can demonstrate achievement if they can say 'yes' to some of these 'I can...' statements, from the NBRIA Standards, 2018.

Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of:

- doctrine, belief and theological concepts - the nature, structure and authority of communities of belief, both locally and universally
- questions of meaning and purpose, philosophy and ethics and the significance of the answers for personal choices and commitments
- the structure and meaning of different forms of worship for believers.

This work gives them opportunities to demonstrate progress towards these outcomes:

Beliefs and Values

- Compare their own and others' responses to questions of belief and values, leading to reasonable explanations of their own and others' views, in the light of religious teaching

Use of Sources as Evidence

- Use sources of wisdom and authority appropriately to explain aspects of each area of study and as evidence for particular points of view

Role Play: Nine Pieces of work for a Christian Priest on a Monday Morning

You will be working in a group of three for these tasks.

One Monday morning, after a busy Sunday taking church services, the Priest has a look at what he has to do in the next week. There are nine things waiting for her. Your class are going to advise the priest what to do about each of these nine situations. Your group will need to discuss, research and report on three of the situations. Other groups will work on some other examples. You will each have to speak to the class to explain what you have found out, and what advice you will give. Start by reading the situation aloud. Then get each person to say what they think in turn. Record your ideas.



The job of helping others, serving God, fulfilling the vocation, following Jesus, teaching, leading and inspiring the community, evangelising and pastoring, caring for the sick, the lonely and the dying, challenging the successful, the rich and the selfish...

Nine Problems: all in the Priest's In Tray on a Monday Morning

<p>Talking to an RE Class You are visiting a local secondary school to give a talk tomorrow. They have written and asked you to take an RE class of thirty fourteen year olds, and answer two questions: Is God real? What is God like? They want you to talk for 15 minutes, and answer questions. The letter says most of the pupils are not sure about belief in God. Plan what you will say in detail: you could make a handout that you will give to them. Can you teach them the key ideas of Catholic teaching about God? <i>Bible: John 1: 1-14, Romans 1: 20-23.</i></p>	<p>Helping a troubled marriage. There is a message on the answering machine from a woman in your church. She sounds as if she is crying. She feels that her marriage is in danger of breaking up after serious rows with her husband. They are both in their forties, and have two teenage children. She wants you to help. What will you say when you ring her, or visit? Make some notes, and pick any Bible passages you might read with her. (This could lead to role played telephone conversation). Can you help her by bringing spiritual comfort at a tough time? <i>Bible: Matthew 5: 31, 32. Romans 8: 38, 39.</i></p>	<p>Trouble with the worship. There's an Email from one of your regular church attenders, complaining about the service yesterday. This person didn't like the music, or the noise made by children in church. It finishes 'How can we be expected to worship God when the building is full of noise, whether from children playing around in the aisles, or a sub standard pop group singing all these modern songs which older members of the congregation don't know or like?' Write your reply in an email of less than 200 words. <i>Bible: Psalm 150, I Corinthians 12: 14-27</i></p>
<p>A new crib set to buy for Christmas? Your crib set (figures of Jesus and the shepherds, wise men, etc) has been stolen, and you want to buy a new set before December, when they're used. There are three alternatives: a hand made set, carved by one of your own congregation, rather ugly, but free. A plastic resin set, very colourful and child friendly, but no work of art, for £45, and a lovely set from Nicaragua, a real work of art, produced through a Fairtrade organisation, for £300. What will you choose and why? Write a note explaining your view. <i>Bible: Luke 2: 1-20.</i></p>	<p>Phone urgently: I think there's poltergeist in my house. There is a message on your answerphone: 'Hello, Father, you don't know me, but I live two streets down from your church. Last night we heard strange noises and wailing, and this morning there is a broken plate in the kitchen. It could be a poltergeist, and we can't stay in the house. Please ring up and tell us if you can help. We are terrified.' You know that there is a priest who does exorcisms in your diocese, but you haven't ever done this yourself before. The phone number follows. What will you say and do? <i>Bible: Luke 8: 26-33</i></p>	<p>A planning task: a funeral is coming up. Last week, one of your parishioners died, and this Thursday you will be taking the funeral. You need to make a 4 page order of service for the funeral, with some hymns, prayers, Biblical readings and a short talk in memory of the woman who has died. She was a widow, in her late 60s, with two children and four young grandchildren. They will be at the service You knew her well, and the family have asked you to plan the funeral yourself. Devise the service, and make some notes for your talk. <i>Bible: Psalm 23. I Corinthians 15: 51-58</i></p>
<p>Fax Which new hymn book to buy? You have tatty old hymnbooks to replace. Money isn't a problem, but members of the church have made three suggestions, and you have to choose one. You can have 'Catholic Hymns, Old and New' (middle of the road). Or 'The Catholic Hymnal' (traditional). Or 'The Catholic Songbook' (much more modern). The book you choose will last for a number of years, so you have to get it right. Make a table or list of the advantages and disadvantages of each of the books, and put them in order, 1 - 2 - 3. (This requires provision of a copy of each of the three books (or three others). Maybe local churches would be happy to loan them) <i>Bible: 1 Corinthians 14: 26-33, 40.</i></p>	<p>Three requests for help from different charities. You have three appeals on your desk today, each one asking for money from your congregation, and for you to publicise their work and find some volunteers who will work for them. The first is from the local Donkey Sanctuary, where old donkeys are cared for. They need £5000 to stay open beyond the end of this month. The second is from CAFOD: Would your church like to send money to support their work among refugees from the famine and war in Somalia? The third is from the local homelessness shelter, asking for a donation to their hostel. You have about £500 in your charity kitty at the moment. You usually pass these appeals to your treasurer, giving your view of the appeal and telling her what to do in a note. Write the three notes. <i>Bible: Luke 6: 35, 36. Matthew 25: 31-40</i></p>	<p>Abortion? At the very end of your evening service yesterday, a 16 year old girl from your church youth group stopped behind in tears. She told you that she is pregnant by accident from her boyfriend, and can't tell her parents. She thinks that an abortion is the only way out for her, and can't imagine having the child. She has no one to help her, and so turned to you. She is in the ninth week of the pregnancy. You talked to her until she was calmer, and took her home, but she is coming back to discuss what to do later in the morning. What advice will you give her? Will you try to make her tell her parents? What will you do to help her? Will you support her even if she wants to go ahead with the termination? How? <i>Bible: Psalm 139: 13-17.</i></p>

The Priest's In Tray, Monday Morning.

Fill in the Situation Sheet, quoting the Bible and other sources, and making your opinions and learning clear. You will use this sheet to present your thoughts to the whole class for 2 minutes, so either write it so you can read it aloud, or make clear notes to speak from. Decide who, in the group, will talk (one of you? All of you a bit?). Make sure everyone contribute fairly to the work!

<p>1. What is the situation you are giving advice about? You might have to imagine some 'back story' to it. Put it into your own words. Tell the story!</p>	<p>2. Why is this a tricky one? What problems if belief and behaviour are involved in this scenario? What is the basic problem of issue?</p>
<p>3. In what ways does the Bible guide the Minister? Does the Bible tell him / her what to do? Read and quote from the Bible references you have been given.</p>	<p>4. What alternatives or choices does the Priest face? Make them clear.</p>
<p>5. What is your advice to the Minister? Give several detailed ideas and suggestions. What might happen next if s/he follows your course? What impact will this action have?</p>	<p>6. What did you learn from this activity?</p>

What do Christian ministers say about their work?

"I see the job of a Christian priest in a very simple way. I try to enable people to see the presence of God in their everyday lives. That's it really."

"I always wanted a job that helped others. As a Christian, that brought me to the church. I try to live out Jesus' values: love, hope, prayer."

"What would Jesus do? I find myself asking this question about twenty times a day. The answer is usually about love and self sacrifice. I try!"

"Christian ministers are supposed to serve God and serve the local community they are part of. So whatever people need, I try to meet their needs in the name of Christ."

"Jesus said 'Love your neighbour' and he meant everyone, no exceptions. I try to do my job with love for each person God sends my way, every day."

"One part of being a Christian priest that I enjoy is leading worship. It is great to see a community losing themselves in praising God. As a music maker, this is a privilege to me."

"During the week, I am involved in a food bank, a homelessness project, and mums and toddlers club, and being a hospital chaplain. It is all done in the name of Jesus."

"The Bible tells me – and all Christians - what to do: Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Easy to say, hard to do."

"A Christian priest must try to bring God into every life. I preach the gospel, pray for people to be healed and lead people from fear to faith."

"Most of my work is pretty ordinary, but just occasionally I see God change a person's life in a very dramatic way. That keeps me going. It can feel like a miracle."

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