This paper explores the contribution of campus ministry to the religious life of Catholic secondary schools and to the enhancement of a supportive learning environment. It proposes that a system-wide approach to campus ministry that funds, recruits, coordinates and provides professional learning to campus ministers enhances both the level of ministry to students within schools and the level of professional support for campus ministers in the role.

A campus minister in a Catholic secondary school works predominantly with students to enhance their experience of school life and to foster their faith development. They offer schools a way to engage students in the religious life of the school through a very direct involvement that places a priority on building relationships with students.

Campus Ministry in Brisbane Catholic Education schools

Campus ministry in Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) schools began as a trial across five schools in 1997. In 2005, 27 campus ministers are employed across the 30 BCE secondary schools - with positions becoming available as new schools enrol students into Year 10. Campus ministers are employed according to student enrolment numbers and range from a minimum of 18 hours per week to a maximum of 38 hours. Duties vary from school to school, determined by the skills of the individual role holder, the particular school circumstances and the number of hours of employment, but the variety of duties exist within the scope of a system-wide Role Description. However, the nature of the role is common across the schools and these common elements provide much of the strength of a systemic approach to campus ministry.

The initial rationale for BCE campus ministry was grounded in the then Vision Statement for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese:

Our Vision is to ... promote faith learning that is lifelong and life-giving ...
As followers of Jesus, we try to communicate, not just Christ’s teachings, but the power of God’s life in our lives... Through the experience of ongoing faith formation, the minds and hearts of adults, youth and children can be nurtured into fuller life so that individuals can grow to their full potential in Christ... Our commitment to lifelong faith learning means that local opportunities for ongoing growth and renewal are provided for through activities such as dialogue, study, prayer and reflection.

The introduction of the position of Campus Minister was a particular strategy designed to highlight, support and enhance the spiritual and faith dimension in the life of the secondary school, and to promote the practical expression of that dimension. (Gorringe: 1)

In 1996, when a Task Force was established to address the notion of ‘chaplaincy’ or ‘campus ministry’ in BCE secondary schools, a number of influencing factors were identified:

- Identifying effective strategies to nurture the spiritual and faith development of students was (and continues to be) an ongoing challenge for Catholic secondary schools;
- Various reports and projects had emphasised the desirability of developing and maintaining links between schools and parishes;
- Several Religious Institute Catholic secondary schools had introduced a position designed to meet some of the needs which the position of campus minister was intended to address;
- Chaplains, under the auspices of the Combined Christian Churches and coordinated by Scripture Union, had recently been appointed in a number of State High Schools;
- Classroom Religious Education had taken a much more focused educational approach and schools were seeking ways to enrich the faith development dimension of Religious Education;
- The demands of the multi-faceted nature of the role of Assistant to the Principal – Religious Education (APRE) were becoming more apparent, in relation to general leadership and administrative responsibilities, RE curriculum coordination, and leadership in specific ‘faith development’ activities.

(Gorringe: 3)
Trial Period

Following the development of an initial role description and consultation with Principals, APREs and Priests, the role of campus minister was trialled during 1997 in 5 secondary schools using five different models:

A Campus/Youth Minister, employed full time, responsible jointly to the College and to a collective of three parishes, under shared funding arrangements.

A Campus Minister/RE Teacher, employed full time in the College with responsibilities divided equally between campus ministry and classroom teaching.

A group of five National Evangelisation Team (NET) members, employed full time, based in the parish and working extensively in the College as a Campus Ministry team.

A member of a religious congregation, employed full time, with responsibilities divided between campus ministry and classroom teaching.

A part time Campus Minister, employed for 20 hours per week, working exclusively in the area of Campus Ministry.

The trial was extended to another 4 schools in 1998 with all 4 following the model of a role holder working exclusively in the area of campus ministry.

Evaluation

In the evaluation of the trial, the most positive feedback related to the campus minister being a significant ‘presence’ within the school and making a positive contribution to the life and faith of the school community. Difficulties were identified in relation to a lack of clarity about the role and duties of the campus minister, the part-time nature of most of the positions and the lack of certainty implied by holding a ‘trial’. Overwhelmingly, schools valued the initiative and the position of campus minister established itself as a highly valued one within all of the trial schools. The report into the review of the trial found that the position fulfilled “beyond expectation the hopes of Principals that the new role would provide an impetus to the core mission of the school as a Catholic educational community.” (Gorringe: 24)

Further, the report found that, “a valid implication of the success of the trial is that the educational provision of Brisbane Catholic Education as a whole could be further enhanced if all systemic secondary schools were given the opportunity to establish a position of campus minister.” (Gorringe: 24)

One of the interesting considerations that surfaced from the evaluation of the campus ministry trial was the model emerging in many Religious Institute schools. In the majority of these schools, the position of Assistant to the Principal - Religious Education (APRE) was being replaced by two positions: a curriculum head of department, responsible for the classroom teaching of religion; and a leadership team position of Assistant Principal (or Dean) of Mission, responsible for the development and expression of the faith life and mission of the school. In BCE schools, the view is held that leadership in mission resides with the principal and ought not be delegated, so rather than following the RI model of overt, explicit leadership and authority in the area of faith and mission, it was decided that campus ministry in Brisbane Catholic Education schools would be one of ‘presence with’ and leadership from below and among, rather than from above. This was perhaps one of the most significant decisions that determined the nature and direction of campus ministry in BCE schools. This underpinning spirituality of presence has been a driving force in the development of the role.

The trialling of different models of implementation met with mixed success. Certainly, those models that had role holders operating exclusively in the role of campus minister were the most successful. Perhaps the least successful was the model of dividing responsibilities between classroom teaching and campus ministry. Given the decision to follow the model of ministry through presence, there was a perceived potential for conflict between the role of teacher and the role of campus minister in the eyes of students.

Implementation

Following the evaluation of the campus ministry trial in 1998, Brisbane Catholic Education determined to invite all BCE secondary schools to establish a position of campus minister. Specifically targeted funding was made available to schools wishing to take up the invitation, so that funding could only be used exclusively for the employment of a Campus Minister and was not ‘tradable’ for other positions. Campus ministers were
employed on the School Officer Award with hours allocated according to school size (increments of 18 hours, 24 hours, 30 hours and 38 hours per week). By 2003, all eligible secondary schools had taken up the invitation to employ a campus minister. In 2005, at the time of writing, of the 30 BCE secondary schools in the Brisbane Archdiocese, 25 currently employ a campus minister, 3 are in the process of appointing, 1 - a new school - will appoint a campus minister when the school reaches Year 10, and 1 school has determined that the part time nature of the position does not currently meet their needs. It is envisaged that new schools currently under development will employ a campus minister when each school reaches Year 10.

Of the 25 campus ministers currently employed, only one is a member of a religious congregation, the others are a diverse group of male and female; married and single people; some of whom have qualifications in education, theology, ministry, counselling or nursing and some who have not undertaken formal tertiary study; they range in age from 20 to over 50 – the majority are under 30; most have previous experience in ministry with young people - some through National Evangelisation Team Ministries (NET), some through parish or archdiocesan experience - but others are new to working with young people; most were new to working within a school setting; all of them are driven by a desire to make a positive contribution to their school communities; and all are passionate about making a difference in the lives of the young people with whom they work.

Having established the position of campus minister in BCE schools over a period of 5 years, and with an increasing number of role holders from diverse backgrounds and levels and experience, it was determined to review the Role Description for Campus Ministry and seek to better clarify the nature of the role.

**Role and Purpose**

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to overcome in the introduction of the position has been a lack of understanding about the purpose and nature of the role in schools. I would guess that every single campus minister has been asked at some stage, “What is it that you actually do around here?” Part of this questioning is due to a lack of educating some school communities about the role and the role holder but a significant part is the counter-cultural nature of the role in schools. In a situation where the routines of the vast majority of staff are dominated by bells, timetables, curriculum programmes, assessment and reporting routines, professional meetings and behaviour management, the campus minister brings a spirituality of presence, a ministry of ‘spending time’ with students and a focused objective for the building of relationships and community. This can at times be misunderstood in the busyness of school life as ‘wasting time’ with students.

During 2004, a task group, chaired by the Director – R.E. and Curriculum, reviewed the Role Description for Campus Ministry and defined the scope of the role (the Key Result Areas) as being to “work in collaborative partnerships” to:

- provide pastoral and spiritual support to students
- create opportunities for faith development of students
- advance the religious life of the school community
- foster the experience of Catholic community within the school
- engage the school community in social justice and social action
- encourage and facilitate connections with Church / faith communities and agencies
- undertake ongoing professional learning

There are a few points to be made in relation to these key result areas. The first is that the lead-in statement is crucial. Campus ministers work “in collaborative partnerships” to perform their role. Prior to the introduction of the campus minister role, all of these activities were being performed to a greater or lesser extent by one or more members of staff within each school community. In effect, it may appear that there's ‘nothing new’ being achieved by the introduction of the role of campus minister. However, previously, schools were always seeking to meet these needs with staff already on full teaching loads or with members of administration teams who were juggling many other functions at the same time. The role of the campus minister is not to take over responsibility for these areas of school life, but rather to work with others collaboratively and in an empowering, rather than disempowering, way to advance and enhance the level of ministry with students that is otherwise provided. This enhancement of existing practice was noted in the course of the initial trial of campus ministry. In the conclusion to his 1998 report on the campus ministry trial, Chris Gorringe noted:
Some school communities may conceivably look at the objectives and activities of the role and claim to be meeting those objectives without the presence of a specific person designated as campus minister. The challenging question posed by the trial of the position is, “How well is the school meeting the objectives?” The answer indicated by the experience of the trial schools is that, with a campus minister, not only are the objectives met to a much more profound degree, but the horizons of the school in relation to what can be done are expanded and extended. The implications for the ‘core business’ of Catholic schools are exciting! (Gorringe: 36)

The second point to note in relation to the key result areas is the clear focus of the role on the dimension of Religious Education that addresses the development of faith and the religious life of the school. It is in this field of Religious Education, not the classroom teaching of Religion, that the campus minister (in collaborative partnership) makes a significant contribution. One of the most powerful contributions that campus ministers make to the faith life of the school is through the witness of their life and approach to their role. The impact of a ‘real’ person who takes a passionate interest in faith and its lived expression as well as in the well being of individuals cannot be overstated. Whilst the leadership of the Catholic school as a community of faith remains the responsibility of the principal and other members of the school leadership team, the campus minister also makes a significant contribution. The role of campus minister is not intended to replace the leadership of the faith community provided by the Principal and APRE in a school community, but rather, to support and complement it.

Finally, I note the ‘active’ nature of the key result areas. Campus ministers are called to provide, create, advance, foster, engage, encourage and facilitate, and finally to undertake. This is a dynamic and forward-looking position, it is not one of maintenance and management. One of the challenges to campus ministers is to breathe life into particular projects and activities, encourage and empower others to make them their own and then move on to light the fire under some other worthwhile enterprise. It is envisaged that a campus minister who remains in the role for a period of two to three years would see a dramatic change in the tasks with which they engage in the course of that period. Whilst they would still be working within the parameters of the specific key result areas, what that would ‘look like’ could be very different across a period of time. The dynamic nature of the campus minister role is a direct manifestation of the imperative to respond to changing student needs in the effort to provide a supportive learning environment within individual schools.

**A Systemic Approach**

The systemic approach to campus ministry began with the decision by Brisbane Catholic Education to make targeted funding available to each of its secondary schools. Very few schools would be able to independently fund a position such as campus minister - although it is noted that a number of schools across Australia, particularly Religious Institute schools, have seen the value of such a position and have indeed funded the employment of a campus minister. However, without a system initiative and encouragement to schools, it is doubtful that many BCE schools would have ever been in a position to employ a campus minister.

The second aspect of a systemic approach is that Brisbane Catholic Education was able to provide central support to schools in the processes of recruitment and employment of campus ministers. In the earliest stages of implementation, few schools had much knowledge of what might be possible through the employment of a campus minister. BCE staff, initially Chris Gorringe and later Peter Crombie, were able to work with Principals and APREs to discuss the potential of the role and offer guidance and support in the employment processes. Since 2004, the Religious Education Team of BCE have been given responsibility for the coordination and support of campus ministers.

For the last few years, a program of professional learning has developed for campus ministers that consists of three stand-alone Network Days and two series of three days for more in depth and intensive learning and sharing. Bringing the campus ministers together several times each year serves two important purposes. Firstly, the collegial support that campus ministers are able to offer one another is crucial to their individual performance of the role. As the only person in a school who performs the role, there can at times appear a situation in which no one else knows what it’s like to be a campus minister; no one else understands exactly what is occurring for the role holder; no one else, at times, appears to speak the same language. To gather together with others who share the experience of being a campus minister is life giving and sustaining. The quality of professional learning that can be offered and appropriated by bringing together a sizable group of campus ministers is far superior to what might be achieved by individuals in the role. This has been upheld.
by the fact that four campus ministers employed by Religious Institute schools regularly avail themselves of
the opportunity to join our professional learning days. Without the network provided by Brisbane Catholic
Education, they would probably remain working for the most part in isolation in their individual schools.

Secondly, bringing campus ministers together to share practice and to enhance their knowledge about
ministry with young people in a Catholic school ultimately improves the quality of ministry that is provided to
students in schools. Network Days provide campus ministers the opportunity to share ideas about practical
skills and initiatives that work with young people. They also provide an avenue to build relationships with
others involved in ministry with young people: members of the Australian Catholic University Campus
Ministry team; Archdiocesan youth ministry services; movements from within the Church that work with
young people. Networking with such groups means that campus ministers are able to speak with young
people in their schools about ways that they might become involved in the wider Church while at school or
on completion of their secondary studies. The extended three-day professional learning opportunities allow
an in depth exploration of elements of theology, spirituality, ministry and Catholic schooling. In recent years,
campus ministers have been able to undertake an intensive program offered by a guest lecturer and follow-
through with assessment tasks to gain credit towards post-graduate courses. These extended days have also
allowed the opportunity to explore elements of the *Jesus, Communion, Mission* vision that emerged from the
2003 Brisbane Archdiocesan Synod. Undertaking this professional learning together enables considerable
collegial support but also ensures a broad appropriation of the information and better adoption into practice
across all schools. Bringing campus ministers together as a whole group has also led to the formation of
smaller regional groups who meet regularly and provide each other ongoing support and the opportunity for
professional sharing.

**Conclusion**

Campus ministry in Brisbane Catholic Education secondary schools has become firmly established in a
remarkably short period of time. BCE campus ministry is one of the most recognisable and significant
contributors to ministry with young people in the Brisbane Archdiocese - impacting on the lives of some
15,000 students across BCE secondary schools. Campus ministers make a direct contribution to fostering the
faith development of students and the religious life of a Catholic secondary school. The approach taken by
Brisbane Catholic Education to employ campus ministers in each of its secondary schools and to centrally
provide coordination and support has meant that in the space of just 7 years, campus ministry has been able
to move from a trial in a few schools to being an established and valued position within all BCE secondary
schools. Approaching campus ministry as a system initiative, rather than by stand-alone schools, has
provided a strong sense of collegiality across the group of campus ministers; it has facilitated quality
programs of professional learning to be undertaken; and it has provided a level of ministry with young
people that would never have been possible otherwise.

Unpublished report, Brisbane Catholic Education.