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Transforming Classroom Practice

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TRANSFORMING

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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Is it possible for an in-school soup kitchen to provide a vehicle for practical Christianity, lessons in prayer and a changing school culture?

Ian Baskin, Bible teacher at Northpine Christian College wanted his students to understand the concept of healthful eating using 'pulses'. What began as a "Taste and see" experience during a study of the book of Daniel grew to become a culture-changing feature of the school community.

About once a fortnight after the question, "What are pulses, sir?", the Bible Department made a couple of pots of pulse-based soups—peas, lentils and beans—combined with different



Discipleship in Action: Seniors Alexis Ball and Victoria George help prepare today's pot.
Photography: Ian Baskin

vegies and a blend of herbs and spices and opened the door to students. They called it *Daniel's Kitchen*.

A beautiful spring day in October, 2014; offered a 'teasing' catalyst for something that has transformed more than just a classroom: a Year 7 girl in tears because she was teased for being hungry and a Year 8 boy teasing another student because he had not eaten that day.

The biblical message is practical. "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality" (Romans 12:13). That day the Bible Department at Northpine Christian College resolved to offer a cup of soup every lunchtime until . . . well, until God said "Enough."

The senior students enthused by the idea of religion being practical, promoted the idea throughout the Middle and Senior classes. On their return they suggested we may need to add a little water—ninety cups of soup left the room that day. They called it the *Matt 14 Kitchen*, because when one student asked, "Why is food frequently around the Bible Room?" the auto-response came from Matthew 14, where Jesus said to His disciples, "You give them something to eat." A slice or two of bread or a bun is also provided. These are yesterday's loaves obtained from a local bakery.

In excess of 40 teachers, parents and students have so far provided either foodstuffs or money to keep the concept alive! Parents at times express their appreciation in emails, letters and cards—often with a cash donation. One such note says, "my boys have asked me to stop making their lunch . . . it seems they like your soup instead." And currently about 80 other students—and more than a dozen staff—regularly help empty the pots on a daily basis. When a puzzled observer commented to Principal Graham Baird, that a large number of users were not really short on food, he replied, "That's actually the beauty of it. It can only really work when those who are not so needy normalise the situation for those who are. This is what makes it comfortable for them."

One day when the bread supply was limited to less than 50 buns, it was suggested that people take either a top or bottom of a bun so that there would be something for everybody.

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Tara May enjoys soup too.
Photography: Ian Baskin

The colour-coded mini wheelie bins filled with various pulses are replenished with donations. The number of staff on Ian Baskin's team of helpers is commendable. As Ian noted, "We are simply here to serve. If the kids see God through what is happening, that is all we want. All credit goes to God."

Please pray that God will continue building a community of faith as the team at Northpine place their trust in Him. It is their prayer that having encountered God in such a practical way, more and more students will transition this approach into their personal walk with Him.

Matthew 14:16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

“We are simply here to serve. If the kids see God through what is happening, that is all we want. All credit goes to God.”



Sharing soup available for all.
Photography: Ian Baskin

There were two and a half buns left at the end of the day! The fact that students chose to care about someone else was a beautiful thing to experience! God's love is at work.

Visiting guest at the College, Ari Herber, President of Queensland Jewish Community Services loved the soups and recommended the idea to three other schools the very next school day! Spending just 25 minutes in the *Matt 14 Kitchen* at Northpine left him in awe of what a soup kitchen can achieve in generating a closer sense of community. He could feel it. Deputy Jaco Tams added, "There are significantly fewer discipline issues for this time of the year." Clearly the students want to be enjoying the food and the sense of community. Indeed it has transformed more than just the classroom.

The *Matt 14 Kitchen* runs on prayer. Donations are never solicited, yet they are prayed for. The kitchen has been operating for a full year on November 1 and stories of how God is providing are shared with Bible classes.



Matt 14 inspired a response.
Photography: Ian Baskin