



# The President for a Day



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He is a Damaris Team Member and a trained President for a Day Experience presenter.

## Imagine

Imagine groups of sixth form and KS4 pupils all around the country engaging in RE with enthusiasm and conviction. Imagine those same pupils questioning, discussing and debating contemporary issues from a standpoint informed and inspired by the Bible. And imagine all of this happening – not as a dutiful response to statutory requirements or non-statutory guidance – but as a consequence of setting aside three or four hours to see the world through the lens of contemporary Christian faith.

I am a full-time Christian Minister in pastoral charge of a Baptist Church in the London Borough of Bromley. Normally when I go into schools it is to share in an assembly or, occasionally, to be used as a walking talking visual aid in a lesson: ‘Do you pray all day?’ ‘What special/funny clothes do you wear?’ I value such opportunities and trust that they are helpful in all sorts of ways, but I always sense that my status as a ‘professional Christian’ goes before me and, at best, sets the agenda for any interaction. I am sure that sometimes it acts as an impenetrable barrier, preventing the free-flow of really positive/challenging dialogue.

## RE and Citizenship

For much of 2004, however, I worked as one of the presenters of the President for a Day

Experience, a half-day multi-media conference brought to life by the joint efforts of the Damaris Trust and Tearfund. The President for a Day Experience teaches about debt and poverty from the perspectives of both RE and Citizenship.

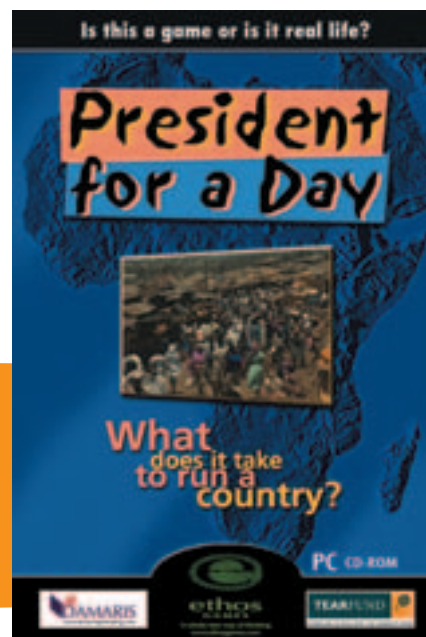
Thanks to this initiative I have seen young people responding to the Christian faith very differently. No longer is Christianity seen as a set of more or less believable doctrines offered up as a sort of take it or leave it package by an often less-than-attractive purveyor of general niceness. Thanks to the President for a Day Experience, Christian faith is understood, acknowledged and appreciated as a significant – even necessary – motivating factor in all our decision making and, potentially at least, as an inspiration for us all to change the world.

In the feedback, glanced through at the end of each course, what strikes me most is not the general high levels of interest – often in stark contrast to the low levels of expectation – but the expressed desire to continue thinking and (whisper it quietly!) discover ways to act in order to make a difference. I know such responses are the agreed goals for each conference, but we don’t really expect these things of teenagers... do we?!

## Challenge

At the heart of the President for a Day Experience is the challenge to make decisions that count for reasons that matter. Based on the best-selling computer game, pupils are invited to take the role of President Nulagi, leader of a newly independent African country, Mobesi. Supported by on-screen advisors pupils make decisions in a variety of ways (designed to mimic genuine parliamentary proce-

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# Experience

dures) on the future of their economy, health provision, education and so on. As the game progresses the realisation dawns that this is not a game that is fair. Debt is piled up. Decision-making power is compromised. People suffer.

But why is this the case? And what can be done? These questions are reflected upon by looking a little at the work of Tearfund, and encouraging pupils to reflect on the spiritual and moral issues which have underscored the experience they have gone through. A Christian perspective of debt and poverty is presented with particular reference to the spiritual inspiration of the Jubilee Debt Campaign as an example of faith in action making a difference.

## Cross-curricular

The 'game' is thoroughly interactive throughout, even including 'real-life' parliamentary debates and divisions. Handouts, feedback forms and a student booklet (providing opportunities for further reflection and suggestions about how pupils could take things further) are also provided. Supplementary information is projected onto a large screen or fed to the pupils at intervals via presenter input. At all times, pupils are encouraged to participate as much as possible.

The President for a Day Experience deals with serious issues in an engaging cross-curricular way, holistically drawing together insights from Geography, Politics and Economics whilst helping schools to meet statutory requirements relating to RE and Citizenship in the sixth form. A slightly adapted version of the half-day format has also

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been utilised by schools to effectively meet KS4 requirements across the curriculum.

At the end of the conference pupils deliver their own presentations; creatively and thoughtfully reflecting on one of the issues raised. Drama, rap, music, poetry, pot-plants and umbrellas have all been used to good effect!

## Working for God

The President for a Day Experience reminds me that 20 years ago, as a teenager, I was inspired to commit my life to a living God not only because of intellectual, theological arguments but because He both made sense of the world as I knew it and, more importantly still, offered me the inspiration and resources to change it, in His name. To allow the dangerous possibility of that thought to enter the world-view of young people today is an inspiration indeed.

Meanwhile, burgeoning demand for the conference has meant that Damaris is training additional presenters with the aim of being able to offer the President for a Day Experience across the UK. Work has begun to help address the specific contexts of Scotland and Wales. Our experience has been that the conference is equally well received by both staff and pupils working in all sorts of schools: rural, suburban and inner-city; comprehensive, grammar and independent.

## Contact

For more information about the President for a Day Experience, or to request a brochure or make a booking, please contact Steve Alexander at:

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