

Youth and Liturgy: an Oxymoron?

A summary of a study into how and why Anglican liturgy and the Anglican liturgical tradition are being used in worship targeting young people within the Anglican Church (Tikanga Pakeha) in New Zealand.

by

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A research project presented in fulfilment of the requirements of MINX591

and partial fulfilment of the

Masters of Ministry

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November 2009

Abstract

This research used a mixed method approach to explore how and why Anglican liturgy and the Anglican liturgical tradition are being used in worship targeting youth and young adults in the Anglican Church (Tikanga Pakeha) in New Zealand.

It comes out of my experience of attending a number of non-liturgical services at various youth events which seem hard to describe as Anglican. It also comes out of the wider church's concern about the future of liturgy, particularly as expressed in a recent memorandum from the Common Life Liturgical Commission.

In this study I have offered a description of Anglican liturgy and the Anglican liturgical tradition. Questionnaires were run in two dioceses, and four case studies were examined. These found that most of those with responsibility for worship targeting young people describe themselves as Anglican. It was also found that their decision on whether or not and how to use Anglican liturgy or the Anglican liturgical tradition was significantly influenced by their understanding and past experience of Anglican liturgy, their understanding of the service's aim, and their experience of similar services or gatherings. When the past experience has been negative they have looked elsewhere for models on which to base their worship. Even when they appreciate this tradition many still have questions about its appropriateness with young people. This has led me to question what is being done to make liturgy accessible to young people. The use of the Anglican liturgical tradition was also shaped by: the need to be missional; the desire by parishes to offer significantly different services; and the level of training, mentoring and support offered.

This study has led to some suggestions for future research, particularly on the issues of: the relationship between worship and mission; what help and support young people are receiving to participate meaningfully in Anglican liturgy; and what training and support for those running worship is being currently offered

These suggested areas of further research give rise to several recommendations for the wider church that will enhance our offering of the liturgical tradition to young people and will hopefully help liturgy live and breathe with a new generation.

Description of Terms:

Young people:

Young people for the purposes of this research includes two age groups: youth who are all those at intermediate and secondary school (about eleven to eighteen years old); and young adults who are all those from eighteen to thirty years old.

Anglican Liturgy:

Anglican Liturgy will refer to the authorised set of words that are found in A New Zealand Prayer Book, He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa.¹

The Anglican Liturgical Tradition

Anglican Liturgy is described as “a pattern of worship which derives from a heritage and tradition and scriptural interpretation that embodies the heart of what Anglicans believe and commonly understand. It is a taonga in every sense and has a ‘tikanga’ of its own. Our doctrine is found in our liturgy.”²

This is the larger tradition which shapes Anglican liturgy. This description is offered as descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is based on both the literature reviewed and my experience as an Anglican priest. The key elements of this tradition include:

The Anglican liturgical tradition is based on an understanding of corporate worship that is much more than singing praise songs to God. It is an encounter between the Living God and God’s church, which changes and shapes those who participate as individuals and as the Church. It is about the whole of life, rather than just what happens on Sunday morning. In worship we are invited by God into the life of the Trinity. In worship we are invited to join in God’s mission, acting as a foretaste of the world to come by being the people of God, living in solidarity with those who work for the transformation of the world according to God’s justice. Worship is not primarily an agent of mission, but changes people to be a God’s people of mission. All who

¹ The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia , A New Zealand Prayer Book, He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa, Christchurch, New Zealand: Genesis Publication. First published 1989. 4th edition 2005.

² Common Life Liturgical Commission, “Concerns for the Future of Anglican Liturgy,” *ibid.*

engage in worship are to participate in it, rather than observe it as an audience. It invites everyone to take part however they are able. As such the Anglican liturgical tradition at its best is accessible to those who attend.

The Anglican liturgical tradition has as a cornerstone the prayer books of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. But its genesis goes back beyond these to the earliest liturgies of the Christian church, both from the Eastern and Western streams.

The Anglican liturgical tradition has a flow and structure that includes: gathering with others and God; confession –acknowledging our failure to live as we and God desires; hearing God’s word in scripture and sermon; responding to God’s word in prayer (and sermon?) or other activities; gathering around the table for communion; being sent out to live in God’s world. In the Anglican Church in New Zealand this is simplified to this basic structure: GATHER – We gather with God and with each other; STORY: we hear from the Bible; GO: We are sent out to join God in mission.

It invites people to worship in common, with those who use the same texts, all who claim use of this tradition and with all who have and will worship in common with the ancient liturgies on which the Anglican tradition is based. This is expressed in the use of plural language. The act of worship is not about “me”, but about us and God and God’s world. For Anglicans, identity is shaped in this worship in common rather than adherence to either a confessional faith or particular theology.

The Anglican liturgical tradition belongs to the whole church, not just any particular parish or congregation. Those who seek to use this tradition creatively need to respect this and remember this tradition is more than a resource. These are Spirit inspired structure and texts which preserve and proclaim the universal faith of the Church in God and ensure truly sound and orthodox worship.

The Anglican liturgical tradition is imbedded within a certain theological framework. Part of this framework is Trinitarian in scope – we’re encouraged to participate with the Son in the power of the Spirit in the worship that is already taking place within the inner life of the Trinity. Part of this framework is Incarnational, that is it understands

God to be at work in the world and inviting us into that missional activity. This framework is derived through the three lenses of scripture, tradition and reason.³

The Anglican liturgical tradition is formational; it shapes both the individuals and the community of faith to be people of mission. It is also transformational; it changes people especially over the long term. It is not primarily missional in itself, but can have a transformational effect on non-Christians who may attend.

The Anglican liturgical tradition places high store on the use of scripture. This includes ensuring that large segments are read out loud at each service so that those participating can hear it for themselves. It is normal that a lectionary is used for regular services, to ensure that that as much of the scriptures are read as possible over a two or three year cycle, rather than just the preachers favourite passages. At its best the preaching places the story we are hearing within the larger story of scripture – creation, fall, redemption, new creation.

Anglican liturgical tradition is much more than words. It includes the use of symbols and actions that enhance and/or interprets liturgy's words. At its best it uses colour and drama and is multi-sensory.

As such, the Anglican liturgical tradition is outward focusing. At its best it reflects the five-fold mission over time: To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, to teach, baptise and nurture new believers, to respond to human needs by loving service, to seek to transform the unjust structures of society, to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.⁴

The Anglican liturgical tradition engages with culture in four distinct ways. It is transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural and cross-cultural.⁵

³ A description of Anglicanism can be found in "An Anglican Covenant - The Third Draft." <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/ridley_cambridge/draft_text.cfm> (8 August 2009).

⁴ Anglican Consultative Council, *Mission in a Broken World: Report of ACC-8: Wales* (London: Church House Publishing, 1990), 8.

⁵ This list is not exhaustive and omits the sacramental nature of the Anglican liturgical tradition, a rather large oversight. The research also revealed that several of those interviewed described the Anglican liturgical tradition as being inherently about exploration and experimentation and described their services as part of that ongoing innovation.

Summary of the Research

Introduction

This research comes out of my growing concern over the number of non-liturgical services I have attended at various youth events with an almost complete absence of anything Anglican. It also comes out of the wider church's concern about the future of liturgy, seen in a recent communication from the Common Life Liturgical Commission which states, "it appears that there is a danger that this liturgy is evaporating and losing its relevance."⁶ One of the concerns raised by the Commission was "the engagement of persons as youth workers, chaplains in Anglican Schools and some vicars who are not Anglican or have limited understanding of Anglican kaupapa."⁷

In light of this the following hypothesis was proposed: that those who are given responsibility for organising and running this worship have little experience of Anglican liturgy or the Anglican liturgical tradition, and have only experienced worship with young people in a non-liturgical setting. As such they have never considered the formational value of liturgy for young people and instead either ignore liturgy and the liturgical tradition or see it as offering nothing for young people. They therefore choose to use little if any of either Anglican Liturgy or the Anglican liturgical tradition, even when the community of faith they work in is more conventional in its use of liturgy.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to establish a description of Anglican liturgy and the Anglican liturgical tradition. This list was not exhaustive.

The review also explored the literature around the wider sociological context in this country, how liturgy is being used with young people (of which there was very little written) and the factors identified that affect that. While the lack of research on the use of liturgy among young people is significant it would seem that liturgy has much less of a place in worship with young people than it once had. Three different

⁶ Common Life Liturgical Commission, "Concerns for the Future of Anglican Liturgy," *ibid.* See Appendix One.

⁷ *Ibid.*

vantage points were used to explore the factors influencing the use of liturgy: the depth of formation young people have received in Christian faith and liturgical worship; generational theory; and an analysis of postmodern culture. The review concluded with a survey of some of the material produced in recent years to help the Anglican Church in particular rethink its practice of worship with young people.

Methodology

A mixed method approach was chosen to develop a broader and more accurate picture of what is happening. This approach allowed for the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and offered a way to validate the information from different sources using different methods. A questionnaire was run in two dioceses, a large urban diocese and a smaller provincial diocese. A group interview was also conducted with the respondents from the urban diocese to clarify some of their answers. Four in-depth case studies were carefully selected,⁸ and included observations of at least one service, and interviews with at least three people involved in the service.⁹

Results

In contrast to the hypothesis, the questionnaire revealed that the majority of those who had responsibility for worship with young people in both dioceses named themselves Anglican and have had some experience of Anglican liturgy. It found a significant factor in choosing whether to use the Anglican liturgical tradition was the nature of their experience of that tradition. In the urban diocese this appeared to be exacerbated by a lack of clergy input.

The case studies validated the findings of the questionnaires. They found the three main influences on those organising worship was their previous experience, the priority of mission over formation, and the desire to offer something different. It also found that even when minimal liturgical text was used, the services could still be described as using the Anglican liturgical tradition.

⁸ One with a perceived absence of that liturgical tradition in the service, two others because of their varied use of that tradition, and one because it was identified as an emerging church.

⁹ These included the person who was responsible, (who in three cases was an Anglican priest, and in the other had significant theological training) and the vicar or chaplain.

In describing the Anglican tradition, the clergy in particular described most of the features offered in the initial description. In addition this tradition was also described as being inherently about exploration and experimentation, and several described their services as part of that ongoing innovation.¹⁰ The Eucharist was also named in every case study as an important aspect of the liturgical tradition. There were also some significant omissions. Liturgy was described as a block to the work of the Spirit rather than a vehicle by which the Spirit formed those taking part. There was no acknowledgement made of liturgy being the property of the whole Church and little discussion around the relationship between liturgy and culture.

Discussion

In light of both these results the original hypothesis was found to be inadequate. The following were found to be the significant factors in the organising of worship for young people in an Anglican setting:

- These services largely rely on one key figure, who works with at least one other, to shape and organise the service, and they nearly all described themselves as Anglican;
- The decision on whether or not to use Anglican liturgy or the Anglican liturgical tradition was significantly influenced by their understanding and experience of Anglican liturgy, their understanding of the service's aim, and their experience of similar services or gatherings;
- From their experience, many young people found Anglican liturgy inaccessible so they looked elsewhere for models on which to base their worship. This raises questions as to what is being done to make liturgy accessible to young people, both in terms of formational experiences that allow them to develop the faith and spiritual practices that undergird it, and changing liturgy to allow them to connect with it.
- Contrary to the position adopted from the literature review the primary function of these services was mission.

¹⁰ A1 described liturgy as a set of criteria on which services could be critiqued, developed and changed. I did not ask what those criteria might be sadly. B1 described liturgy as offering structured liberation, the word based rock on which fresh expressions could be developed with a biblical watchdog.

- The level of formal training in theology and worship received by those responsible for worship, and the level of mentoring and support offered by the senior clergy in that setting.
- The desire by parishes to offer services that are significantly different to attract those who are not currently attending that church.

This study suggests a number of areas for future research. The most pressing is to research what is understood by worship, and in particular the relationship between worship and mission.¹¹ This is made more urgent by the growing adoption of Mission-shaped Church and Fresh Expression ideology from the Church of England. This study suggests that this focus on mission is largely understood in terms of offering new ways to engage non-believers in worship. The literature and the experience of the case studies suggest this is problematic.

Another area of research suggested by this study is around what help and support young people are receiving to participate meaningfully in Anglican liturgy.¹²

A third suggested area is what training and support for those running worship is being currently offered, and where might the gaps be? This recognises that in some dioceses young people are given responsibility to organise and run this worship. This study suggests there are currently significant gaps in this support.

The literature review also briefly touched on the importance of music in worship, which was outside of the scope of this study. This could be a really useful area of future research.

Finally, from the suggestions above and the urban questionnaire respondents comes a question about what young people understand being Anglican to mean. The group interview in the urban diocese was very limited in this topic.

¹¹ Having no question about this was a significant limitation in this research.

¹² For example, in what ways are young people being resourced in the faith and the spiritual practices that undergird the use of liturgy? What role does liturgical formation play in confirmation and youth ministry programmes? How are young people being resourced to create their own liturgical text which honours the liturgical tradition?

Recommendations to the Wider Church

These suggested areas of further research give rise to some recommendations to the wider church. These come out of the belief that the task of the Anglican Church is not to preserve the prayer book, but for “liturgy to live and breathe today”¹³ As D1 said, “We need to reinterpret tradition; tradition is good when it connects with us.”¹⁴

- One task in this study was to develop a description of the Anglican Liturgical Tradition. This description helped me understand what was happening in the case studies in particular. The interviewees seemed to value doing this through the interview questions and gained a deeper appreciation of the Anglican nature of their services. It would be helpful if the Anglican Church in this country could encourage this discussion and offer its understanding of this tradition.¹⁵
- The relationship between worship and mission needs to be clarified at every level of church life. This needs to be part of any programmes on worship and liturgy run at the national, diocesan and local level. It also needs to be part of any conversation or event exploring the place of Mission-shaped Church and Fresh Expression.
- Resources need to be developed and offered that aid in the faith and liturgical formation of young people.
- Resources need to be developed to help liturgy be accessible to young people so they can participate in a meaningful way. The fourth case study offered a list of initial ideas and these could act as a good start.¹⁶
- Resources to train those with responsibility for worship with young people in the local setting need to be developed. Encouragement also needs to be given by Bishops for clergy to mentor and train those currently organising this worship. Policies might need to be developed about who can be given this responsibility and what prior training is needed and what oversight is to be provided. There seems to be nothing at present offering guidance in this area.

¹³ D1, see page 92.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ I suspect that the simple answer that would be offered is that the Template and A New Zealand Prayer Book already do that, but I would question how useful or accessible they are to most people.

¹⁶ See page 92.

Conclusion

In this study I have offered a description of Anglican liturgy and the Anglican liturgical tradition. Through the research I have found that most of those with responsibility for worship with young people describe themselves as Anglican. I have determined that the decision on whether to use Anglican liturgy or to base the service on the Anglican liturgical tradition was significantly influenced by their understanding and past experience of Anglican liturgy, their understanding of the service's aim, and their experience of similar services or gatherings. When the past experience has been problematic they have looked elsewhere for models on which to base their worship. But even when they enjoy this tradition many still had questions about the appropriateness of liturgy with young people. This raises questions as to what is being done to make liturgy accessible to young people. The use of the Anglican liturgical tradition was also shaped by: the need to be missional; the desire by parishes to offer significantly different services; and the level of training, mentoring and support received. I have also offered some topics for future research, and some recommendations for the wider church that will enhance our offering of the liturgical tradition to young people and hopefully will help liturgy live and breathe today with a new generation.

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