



Transforming Worship conference

Stephen Burns, Ecumenical Anglican, Melbourne scholar

Session 1 Intergenerational discipleship

The reality of that many – most? – of our communities are not intergenerational.

The census data is also stark:

	In 2016	In 2011
Anglican	13%	18%
UCA	4%	6%
No religion	30%	

Anglican literature about mission says that big decisions need to be made about the way ahead, and that meantime the church is sitting on a demographic time bomb – or a bit like standing on a burning platform with no escape.

There are some things we have to stop doing:

How can you expect energy from above when you continue to receive energy from below and are content?

1. One size fits all (and everybody does everything). Small congregations need to collaborate.
2. “Church” is only on Sunday.
3. Liturgy is (only) words; worship is in fact a shared event.
4. It only happens in the official buildings; we need to find out how to take the church out into the street. [While at the same time remembering that appearance matters.]
5. The hymn sandwich
6. Worship that includes Holy Communion being the full HC service only; that actually keeps people away.

The lectionary

The principle behind the lectionary is great – not least that churches using it are sharing the same scripture readings across the whole world.

BUT what do visitors think when they encounter the scattered bits of texts? The lectionary assumes a level of biblical literacy that simply does not exist.

Unison prayer

Congregation responsive prayer, especially if the responses are long, does not work for mission worship; unless the people are invited to join in the responses in a way that gives permission to refrain, eg, “All so moved may say ...”

Session 2 Worship and mission

What does the church say? Do we go on as we are, or must there be change?

Whatever our (stated) purpose, eg mission, the question is how we engage in word and sacrament.

Does our worship help people to encounter the divine self-revelation? God’s gracious self giving?

If that’s what we want, then they will be the main focus of the worship.

1 Word

Always, always, we must clarify the good news of Jesus. 2 Cor 11 talks about the simplicity that is in Christ – but what is the simplest way to say the Gospel? [Bearing in mind that most people outside the church know nothing.]

Note that:

- If you draw a line with you on one side and others on the other side, Jesus is **always** on the other side.
- God is as God is in Jesus.
- Preaching – what we say doesn't matter that much – what matters is how what we say is coherent with how we live.
- The word is made flesh in us.

So what happens if your life is in a bad way, your mood is bleak, you are in pain and grieving – and you go to a church that does “monochrome joy”?

Diarmaid McCulloch [??] with reference to Abraham and his descendants, notes the name change of Jacob to Israel, a name that means “one who struggled with God”. That is, the Jewish people, bearing the name Israel, are a people who proclaim by their name that they struggle with the God they worship. Even as they struggle they are being given hope and a glimpse of getting closer to God.

That is – with God, everything is OK. No matter what struggle, God is with us.

Lectionary

The UK Anglican Church uses a “Pillar Lectionary”. That is, preachers are enabled to be selective with the lectionary and use local context where appropriate.

So – or as an alternative – use the lectionary for the 4 main seasons and sets of High Days, and feel free to look elsewhere the rest of the year. That leave a preacher free to address local needs.

There is an Anglican Common Worship website.

- Allow more space for talkback, as in talking back to the tradition – and the preacher. Example – after each reading, ask: how do you respond to that? How do you feel about that? (The preacher needs to be able to pick up on any issues raised.)
- Learning the Bible outside the liturgy is essential – small groups, questions, ...
- What are the few essentials that we keep always at the front of our consciousness?

2 Sacraments

A story – the occasion of a baptism, and after the formal rite, “All of you, come forward and touch the water and remember your own baptism”.

UIW2 has wonderful resources for re-affirmation of baptism, such warm language. See pp 1-80.

A story – Holy Communion: a congregation of young people: a largish group (as a proportion of the total) take a piece of bread from the table and take it to a few others, then return to their place to receive it from someone else – rethinking the ceremonial ritual.

There's nothing that says doing things a different way has to be irreverent.

A story / report – some convents have the practice of placing a set of cups on the altar so that the nuns can each take one, and so not need to take the wine only from the priest.

Gathering and Sending

Why don't we gather outside more often?

In the park?

In the gym?

In a school?

Or outside [at Scf - under the pine tree MH] and process in together?

Or have morning tea outside.

Some churches read the Gospel from in the aisle in the middle of the church.

A creative way to do Harvest Thanksgiving – what do we thank God for?

Finally

Take the liturgy home – one Anglican church has established a system by which people gather in each other's homes on weekdays for Morning Prayer: they ended up inviting their neighbours.

Collaboration – across denominational boundaries or parish boundaries – is becoming more necessary.

Session 3 Love and care in the making of worship: different kinds of persons

"One size fits all" no longer works.

The poem "Phoenix" (D H Lawrence):

Are you willing to be burnt to nothing? No? then forget it – you'll never change.

Another poem, by David White:

It's a big mistake to think you are all alone. Look around – there is an abundance of grace.

1 Cultural Christians

In 2011, in an area around Melbourne and the nearby bays:

463 000 identified as Anglican

25 000 actually went to a church

The gap in between are the "cultural Christians".

The UCA will have smaller numbers but a real contrast just the same.

Research suggests that many of these do have a prayer life, and even a lively one. But many will also not have a doctrinal interest – their most likely point of contact will be the Golden Rule. They see that as enough to merit identification with the Christian Church.

SBNR – Spiritual But Not Religious – is quite a significant group. These people still go to a pastoral minister for counsel at a time of need. OR – they belong but do not believe; or maybe they believe but don't want to belong.

But they ARE about the business of making meaning – maybe less so than once was the case. And this group is shrinking, scandalised and damaged by abuse of children by the church, et al.

Young people do not seem to be a likely field of growth for the foreseeable future – but we need to keep on caring for them – all of them – just the same.

2 Immigrants

Immigrants are of huge significance for Australia and its churches. Melbourne gained 430 000 over the period 2001-2011; 21 000 identified as Anglican, which suggests quite a lot for the other denominations as well.

Immigrants tend to go to church twice as often as home grown Australians. Many come from deeply traumatic contexts – and they are a source of richness for the church. They include the Chinese Underground Church, South Sudanese, and from Nigeria.

Ways of thinking what it means to be a multi-cultural church include:

- If a mono-cultural "host" church wants others to "assimilate", that is an imbalance of power, and it may be unduly loss-making for people coming from troubled contexts.
- Ethnic-based churches have value – they create visibility for minority groups; but they also inhibit integration; sometimes such churches get formed *because of racism* from churches of the dominant culture.
- Multi-cultural churches – the process must keep moving always: which group constitutes the dominant one will always need to be examined.

- Inter-cultural churches – everyone is in the in-between space.

Diversity is God's normal.

3 Fresh Expressions

The inherited church may be the last place people are going to look when seeking help with spirituality.

Reaching out to different people means, necessarily, doing different things.

^ The UK Methodist Anglican enterprise is a form of church for changing culture, primarily for the benefit of those who are not members of any church.

It means listening to people, entering into their context and culture.

It has the potential to become an enduring undertaking:

- Not abandoning tradition but knowing it more deeply
- Culturally apt
- It won't be worship that we are familiar with.