

Liturgy – *the work of the people: old and young*

Michael Lemanu – *Tauīwi Children, Youth and Families Ministries*

This past Easter, I was privileged once again to head to the annual Epworth Easter Camp, hosted by the awesome Waikato-Waiariki Unite (WWU) and Youth Activities Committee (YAK). It was the usual awesome weekend of high energy, fellowship, food and good vibes. The theme chosen was 'Hope Remains' and this was interpreted and expressed via many different activities across the weekend.

On the final night, during what is known as the "Celebration Service", we asked camp groups, in their allocated group time, to consider the events of Easter weekend and theme and compose a *prayer of hope*. This prayer was then presented by each group to the wider camp as a liturgical presentation in the service.

The prayers created were powerful and inspirational, speaking to the context and lives of the young people – many who were not from a church – in such a way that isn't always reflected in our typical 'Sunday' worship setting. After the service was finished, many of the campers remarked to me how difficult they found the task of writing their own prayers. In churches where they are so used to hearing or reciting the prayers of others, it was a foreign experience for them to pray something publicly that was specifically from their own mind and spirit, and was unapologetically their own words.

I've reflected on this experience greatly since and have wondered how we might be able to look at our liturgical worship and encourage young people (and any other people for that matter) to see their own creativity and voices more visible and evident in this setting.

Now before you ask – I'm not suggesting to get rid of traditional forms of liturgical worship that are still deeply meaningful to many in our churches today. I regularly advocate for an intergenerational approach to church that attempts to make space for both the old and the new workings of God to coexist harmoniously. There is space for both, if we are willing.

So how can we, as church communities become more willing? Some thoughts.

Teach young people the 'why' behind the 'what'

Education and understanding are crucially important. Take the time to explain why certain things in liturgical worship are done a certain way. What is the significance of our sacraments? Language? Symbols? Hymnody and so forth? To explain the value and worth of something goes a long way towards understanding. For young people, that might not necessarily mean that a hymn they didn't like will suddenly become a fave, but perhaps it can open up ways in which they be able to find and express meaning for themselves in ways not previously considered.

Provide opportunities to contribute towards liturgical materials

In my home church, one of the regular practices in worship is to have children compose prayers for the intercessory prayers of the service. It is often in these prayers where children will bring to light a group or area that needed prayer, or articulate Gods love in a newfound and meaningful way. Crucially, the prayers are always unedited and raw – often with the odd grammatical error and all. The point though is to make children feel like they are able to meaningfully contribute to worship. Finding ways for this to happen is crucial.

Don't be dismissive of 'youthful' expression

Encourage young people to express their relationship with God without any desire to conform them to a particular way of doing. This is a big one. Churches cry out for youth participation, but only if it

fits within a criteria or expectation of what they envision. This needs to be challenged in my view. Elements of creativity and language that make no sense to one generation, can indeed be just as meaningful and authentic to another. This is the other side of the earlier point of education and understanding of tradition. Church leaders must be also willing to do the same of young people. Attempt to understand how social media, technology and contemporary worship might meaningfully connect young people with God in today's context.

