

Young Adults Missioner presentation to Ashton Deanery chapter 7th April 2014

Update on work and two things to think about - ministry in a foreign land!

Update on scope of work

- Three year review - very positive about the post and agreed that should be extended to five years
- Five strands to work:
 - α IMAGINE – exploring the question ‘what might church look like for young adults in our Archdeaconry?’ One example of this is some work at Oldham Parish Church – request received to help church find ways of engaging with a group of young adults currently attending church. Planning a ‘Taste and See’ event at the church for early May.
 - α INITIATE - responding to opportunities to create ‘church’ for young adults
 - α INFORM – maintaining awareness of Young Adults Missioner role; developing understanding of issues surrounding mission to young adults; sharing good news and good practice of mission to Young Adults; Work includes setting up Young Adults Champions in each church as a point of contact, producing newsletters (sent to churches via Champions), running website, exploring use of social media in mission/ministry to young adults, visits to synods, chapters, DMPCs
 - α INSPIRE - supporting churches in their mission to young adults, includes: Mixed Blessings: building up network of churches with families seeking church places, organising termly events; ‘hands on’ work in parishes; visits to churches; preaching in churches (last Sunday of the month)
 - α INVIGORATE – providing opportunities for young adults to sustain/develop their spirituality/faith/vocation, including exploring online/mobile resources on nurturing faith, spirituality, prayer, etc. for busy young adults/families; retreats/ Quiet Space either in reality or through social media; Vocations: membership of Young Adults Vocation Fellowship and Rochdale Archdeaconry Vocations Task Group

Other areas of work include membership of national Fresh Expressions Young Adults Round Table

Ministry in a foreign land – two things to think about!

1. 'Digital natives'

Those born 1980 - 2000 have grown up in a very different world to those of us who are older. The term 'digital natives' is often used to describe them as they've grown up in a world where technology has always been part of their life - initially the internet and email but now social networking, tablets, smartphones and gaming consoles. Music and films are digital, games are online and planning of events is instant as they remain permanently connected to 'friends'

Impacts of this

- Need for speed, everything to be instant
- Blurring of boundaries - expect to remain connected to friends while at work and blur boundaries between work and play
- Personalise everything - Facebook page, smartphone cover, and expect this in other areas of life
- Information overload - quick to find out things and believe should have access to information, but may not have the wisdom to discern what to believe or how to use info
- Hierarchy out, network in - eg in work situation would think it appropriate to wander into bosses' office for a chat
- Multitasking - used to doing multiple things at once, putting up with distracting levels of noise, but may not have ability to focus on one thing for any length of time
- Global connection - connected to people around the world

So why does this matter to us in the church? I think that this can be a source of tension and may add to a sense of alienation felt by young adults

Question: What is your view/policy about the use of phones in services? Off, silent, photos? Would you allow Skyping of baptism service?

In a meeting or a service, using their smartphone to post on Facebook is normal. Asking friends about an item that is being discussed to find out further information just seems sensible, why wait till later? Responding to text messages while in conversation with someone else is simply a good use of time through multi-tasking. If you hear something profound in a sermon, why wouldn't you share it by tweeting it to others?

On the other hand, to those in earlier generations, someone texting while they talk to you can seem appallingly rude. They expect people's full attention during meetings, sermons or conversations and someone posting on Facebook can't surely be paying attention.

Leads to frustration. Challenge for the church is not to simply fall back to the default that the behaviour expected in church should be decided by a particular generation's outlook.

One way of addressing this is by talking about it - what is acceptable behaviour as we gather together as the people of God. Also not jumping to conclusions! If you are preaching and someone is using their phone, how do you know whether they're texting a friend about meeting up later or looking up the bible passage?

2. 'Mind the gap' - the disconnection between people and Christianity, use of language

In some research carried out by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, they asked how the Church should appeal to people today. One response, entirely seriously, replied 'knock the cross down, make it more modern, user friendly. Take that church bit away from it'. This isn't uncommon in surveys of this type - often interviewees want to remake the church in their own image and dispense with all that they see as irrelevant.

The church's response can often be to outrightly dismiss such comments, 'we know best'. And this can add to the perceived gap between the majority of people and Christianity.

So how can we manage a careful balancing act? People's opinions can't be used to reshape the gospel itself but we do need to think about how we embody and communicate the gospel in an unfamiliar culture.

Perhaps a good example is 'sin'. This as a concept is central to the gospel, yet for many outside the church the word 'sin' is archaic, meaningless, exclusive. Instead of being seen as describing our moral, relational and God-focussed direction in life, it conveys to many people a sense of institutional bullying, self-righteous pronouncements or a petty-minded interference into people's lives.

So how do we translate the concept? Obviously if people genuinely don't believe that there is such a sense of right or wrong, then we've got a hard if not impossible, job! But some research has shown that most people still do have a sense of right and wrong, Few would hold to an absolutist view in which making moral decisions is straightforward, based on absolute rules. For many it is more about how you feel, about what the end result of a decision is, rather than what the law says, that helps you determine right and wrong. But a common finding was that people talked about right and wrong in terms of abuse. There is a sense that there is a right and proper 'use' of an object or person and actions that are not right and proper are 'abuse'. Perhaps this isn't so far away from the Christian understanding of sin, in terms of it relating to fractured relationships. If we are to be effective in sharing the gospel with those outside the church, maybe we need to learn a new language. In the case of sin, perhaps conversations about the concept of healing us from and forgiving us for abuse we have suffered and dealt may have more resonance.