

Two World Views

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Published in the Ministry District of Yorke Peninsula

Sunday, November 5, 2023

Some years ago, I wrote a sermon called VCRs and Crystals. It was not a great sermon, but it was pivotal because it gave me a new understanding of the world. At the time, I visited with Stuart McDonald from the Uniting Church, and he was speaking of the tensions in their church council with the clash of the Conformist and the non-conformist members. He was saying that there was a difference in how each group thought, bringing about the tensions. What he said took me back to this sermon I had written, and I realised it still has a relevant message for us to hear today.

Much research and many books have been written on the Baby Boomers and the Busters, and Generation X and Y and Z and now Alpha. These are all very well for the professionals, but what does it mean to us? While thinking about these things, someone told me why it was essential to have grandchildren because they could come and programme the VCR.

I realised that this was the clue to the change in society. When my father's generation bought something new, they would read the instruction manual before carefully setting up things. When my son does it, he will have a go. Try to determine the logical set-up and put it together, and then if it did not work, he would try again. It represents a fundamental difference in learning style between the generations, but also a difference in the way the generations view the world. Stuart's reference to these as the conformist and the non-conformist generations are handy labels as they illustrate the starting point for the contrast between the world views.

We need to go back to each group's experience in education to understand. An ordered school life shapes the world of the conformist: Desks were in rows, and the teachers taught facts from the front, which were learned and regurgitated to pass exams. Students marched into school in rows and were disciplined for being out of step.

In the non-conformist generation, students sit around tables; teachers teach investigative skills, and learning is from experience, problem-solving and teamwork. Students move as individuals to class.

Conformists were trained for set jobs and stayed in them for life. Often with the same firm. Speaking with a primary school principal, he commented that they were preparing children for jobs that still needed to be created. Non-conformists, therefore, need skills to move to new fields of endeavour and expect multiple career changes in a lifetime. Even males might contemplate a time as Mr Mum.

The conformist then expects that there will be a set of rules that will explain everything. You learn the rules, and you master the situation. Non-conformists believe in themselves and expect to find how things work independently rather than relying on another to explain the rules. Thus, they will experiment to find the way. This is one

significant reason many couples will try living together before marriage. Being educated to discover rather than accept authority is a significant difference.

But this is all philosophical speculation and academic unless we try to do something practical from all this. The task for me, and indeed for all of us, is to ensure the continuation of Christian Witness beyond the current generation. From where I sit, it is evident that no matter how long we live, health and death significantly threaten this continued witness to subsequent generations. We all know that few young people are sticking in the church, and now the generation that is marrying often is two, not one, generations away from the churchgoers. I often hear the excuse that they do not come, but perhaps we have not made it easy for them to do so.

The difference between the conformist and non-conformist generations shows a difference in how the new generations learn, and we need to recognise this. To the generation where conformity is comfortable, the Anglican Church is satisfied, but what of the next generations? They are used to seeing new things, innovation, etc. They do not want to hear us talk about God; they need to see God experienced in our lives and their own.

We have tinkered around the edges, but changing the language and a little of the shape of liturgy still needs to change the underlying idea that we will teach and they will learn. No, they wish to observe God in action in our lives. This is what the process of renewal is about. Not just finding new patterns but rediscovering and redefining our relationship with God and opening ourselves to the possibility that God hasn't quite finished with us yet.

As I meet with different ministry units, the most pertinent question is about finding the way forward. It is not about finding a magical programme or doubling our fund-raising, but rather recognising the difference in thinking of the missing generation and making them comfortable in the church space. One of the discussion points that arises is about the powerful influence of testimony – speaking of God's actions in our lives. This encourages others in their faith journey and helps us focus on God acting in our lives.

Now, I believe that each of us has a testimony – a story of God in our life and that I could choose any of you to speak. I also believe that most would be horrified if they thought I would.

But if we do not speak, how will those we are close to know of God's action in the world today? Our starting point must be to reflect on our walk with God consciously. Let us put aside the things we have done for God and look for the points where God touches our lives – Answered prayer, Serendipity – chance discovery or encounter.

Testimony is merely collecting these points and putting them together to tell others.

As God's people, we face the most significant challenge to bring the coming generations to Christ. This may mean we must put our preferences aside to win others to Christ.

Jesus said, "The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

AMEN