

Young people and the church

Well here we are in 2010! And if ever I needed confirmation that we live in a different world in this new century, my recent trip to Melbourne produced it. It started as I ambled down Bourke Street on my way to catch the airport bus. I stumbled upon not one but three bands of evangelists. I passed young people, dressed in colourful t-shirts proclaiming their message, all eager and making their evangelical pitch, getting passer-bys to sign up and to donate. And you guessed it, they were not Christian evangelists. Two groups were raising money for Oxfam for the earthquake victims in Haiti, but they were not just receiving money, they were engaging in conversations about human poverty in general and about the agency that they were willing to give their time too. Similarly the other band was waxing eloquent about the work of Amnesty International. Again the volunteers were all in their early twenties, full of enthusiasm and infecting other young people with their enthusiasm.

And I have used the term “evangelism” advisably because it was indeed “good news” that these young people were preaching by their actions.

As I strolled down to the bus depot I reflected upon the church of a different era, where these young people on the street might have been Christians, keen to share their faith in Jesus Christ in the safe confines of a church building . And I reflected on a church growing older and tired and wondered if what I was witnessing during my mid-city stroll was a changing of the guard, one that perhaps holds some hope for the future of God’s body on earth. Here in the middle of a busy city were young people willing to act on their principles of peace, compassion and charity – all Christian values. Could it be that instead of trying to replicate the youth groups that most of us grew up in we need to free our young people to work for peace and a more equal world?

At Pilgrim I have seen some evidence of the liberation in the prayers that they produced for a service before Christmas. These 9-12 year olds produced a power-point prayer that showed real concern for the suffering, poverty and violence that beset the world. And then there was the fund raising that our young people have been engaging in to provide gifts to the Third World through Oxfam cards. You can see their results at the back of Pilgrim’s worship space.

As I See It if we want to retain young people in the church we need to give them practical projects that they can get their teeth into. And perhaps we need to accept the fact that their future church will be a different one to the one in which we were nurtured.

My prayer for 2010 is that we will continue to nurture our children and young people here with the gospel of Jesus Christ and so prepare them to take their place in an increasingly fractured world seeking to bring healing and wholeness to the whole of God’s creation. After all isn’t that what church is really all about?

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article with anyone who wants to.
Rev Tony Duncan
31 January 2010
pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au