

Abstract

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MTh Dissertation

'Until Christ is formed in you'

What is the significance of the intergenerational worshipping context for the Christian formation of the community of faith? What are the implications of this for the shaping of worship, initiation and nurture in the Church of Ireland today?

This research seeks to engage deeply with Paul's pastoral concern for the formation of the community of the church in the likeness of Christ. Its goal is to gain a biblical understanding of Christian formation, both its theological impetuses, and the practices and processes which are attached to it and allow it to take place in the life of God's people. It will investigate the scriptural links between formation and communal worship, and specifically the significance of the intergenerational worship gathering, incorporating people of all ages and stages of faith. Central to this is the formation of the whole community in the word of God, and so the study will attend closely to the worship practices which allow deep engagement with scripture.

The findings of this study are applied to the context of a contemporary Church of Ireland parish church, but with awareness that these issues are relevant and important for the whole Christian Church. Within the Church of Ireland, I suggest that this area of study is relevant to any type of community, be it a cathedral, a parish church, or a fresh expression of church. Equally, it is not limited to any particular style, tradition, or cultural expression of worship.

The study seeks to investigate how we might employ the resources of Anglican worship, both traditional and contemporary, to support and facilitate God's work of formation in his people, and to identify any areas of potential for the development of further resources. At the heart of this is a desire to identify the aspects of Anglican worship which feed our minds, hearts and imagination in the word of God.

The final chapter contains two proposals for the shaping of worship, initiation and nurture in the Church of Ireland. The first proposal is that communal worship, incorporating people of all ages and stages of faith, should be seen as the primary context of Christian formation in the life of the church, and that the entire community should therefore share in a main service of worship together every Sunday. The second proposal is that the supporting context of nurture and catechesis in age-specific and stage-specific groups should take place at other times and be linked to the main worship gathering through both contact between persons and the sharing of scripture.