

Abstract

Title:

In its mission to young people, how might the Church of Ireland negotiate the tension between the pragmatism of contextual tailored approaches and the aspirational vision of the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ?

Author: Sarah Marry

Mission to young people is established as an urgent priority in the Church of Ireland and is grounded in its stated commitment to proclaim the gospel afresh to each generation. As many young people are understood to be 'outside' the church, the issue is explored from a missiological perspective. Mission is most effective when shaped by context. The church is also called in itself to be informed by and grounded in scripture and tradition. It appears that the church is torn between being true to what it is called to be in itself and being true to its call to mission. It is this tension that the thesis explores in relation to mission to young people. In its methodology, the thesis is dependent on the traditional Anglican sources of authority for its theological direction and thus navigates a path which holds in conversation scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

The current practice of the Church of Ireland attests to a lack of contextual research and longer term strategy. In seeking to proclaim the gospel to young people in a way that is coherent and intelligible, the church has embraced the pragmatism of tailored and targeted mission. The pragmatic character of the current approach is a commendable starting point given the urgency of the task. However, this work identifies potential long term pitfalls as yet not considered or foreseen by the Church of Ireland. The suggested corrective is to hold short term pragmatism in tension with a longer term intergenerational vision of church. In this way tailored mission becomes provisional and contingent. In the long term an all-age approach is recognised as more theologically sound while in the short term a more homogenous targeted approach is seen as entirely appropriate. While it engages with the realities of a broken and fragmented society on its own terms, the church must also retain a perspective which considers such brokenness as contrary to God's purposes for the world.