

John Hebenton interviewed by Paul Fromont

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Recently the Ministry Educators from each of the dioceses that make up the Anglican, *tikanga Pakeha* got together with **Steve Taylor**. I asked one of those present – **John Hebenton** – to give a bit of an insight into what it was all about, and what invitations it might extend to the Anglican Church in this province.



John is an Anglican Priest, working as the Anglican Youth Network Facilitator; *tikanga Pakeha*, for the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

He offers himself as a Spiritual Director and Ministry Supervisor.

And, he is a member of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis.

Tell us a little about the purpose of the gathering?

This is an annual meeting of the Ministry Educators from each of the Dioceses within the Anglican Church, *tikanga Pakeha*. Most are involved in the training of people for ordination, both before and after they have been ordained. One of the number is the archdeacon for mission, and I advocate and resource youth ministry.

What hopes or needs were being highlighted in the choice of Steve Taylor as the speaker?

I think for several of those present there are real questions about how we do church currently and for all of us a desire to see our church engage in mission within our various contexts. I think there is a growing realisation that we cannot keep doing things as we have. We will die if we keep that up, or become so small as to be of little use. So I guess there was a desire to be pushed a little further on how to resource others to ask questions, to experiment and to step outside the square.

Tell us a little about the content? What in particular about that content energised you?

Steve did the first two sessions of his two day course on emerging church stuff. We then ranged widely in the afternoon.

The first part of the afternoon was spent with Steve doing some stuff around the multi congregation church he is developing in Opawa, Christchurch. It was nice to hear what he was doing, but also to get a feeling for how some of that could be called “fresh expressions” – doing church stuff with church people in new ways, and how some could be called emerging church, like the café based group that is exploring journaling.

The thing that really energised me was looking again at the Zeffarelli “*Romeo and Juliet*” [1968] and comparing that with Baz Luhrmann’s [1996] I was struck by the layering in the Luhrmann version, with text, music and images reinforcing what the voice was narrating [see Postcard 1 in Steve’s book, *The Out of Bounds Church?*]. I wondered how liturgy could be constructed that would be layered.

It linked in with some stuff we did recently in Auckland at the *Bringing Christ into the post –Christian world* conference. Tex Sample talked about how young people get a lot of their information through screens. Yet in many of our churches there are no screen, or the screens are not used all that well. Much of the time we do only one layer, two at the most – music and words. It would be crazy to multi layer all the time, but the scope is there.

What “takeaways” have you come home with?

This is a continuation of my comments above. I’m going to takeaway the multi layered stuff in relation to worship. I was struck by the reality that it’s not an either/or issue in terms of liturgy, i.e. – text only *or* music only. Very rarely in Anglican contexts do we get beyond a single layer. In the Luhrmann clip, I was struck by the multiplicity of layers [Steve calls this “fast-cutting”] – images (lots of them) and symbols, music, voice (narrator), and text or narrative(s). Multiple layers - juxtaposition!

I recalled a worship experience with a congregation called *JOY* in Oxford (UK) – there was a 3-fold and sometime 4-fold juxtaposition of layers – layer upon layer. Youth in particular are very adept at operating at any one time on multiple layers, e.g. my son can be watching TV, txtng on his mobile phone, and having a conversation.

Multi-layering, it seemed to me, was about acknowledging the depth and breadth of what it means to be human; the multiple layers we operate at, and the multiple ways we nourish our growth and formation. It’s also about encouraging interactivity – about how we *enter into*, and *participate* in worship (i.e. we’re not simply observers; worship is not something done to us or for us. We should be full participants). We watched some material on Web 2.0 which reinforced this point and reminded us of the changed world we live in in the West

Ultimately we were encouraged to keep what’s good about Anglican liturgy / worship and to add additional layers. We were being invited to create something more multi-sensory, something more engaging and inviting.

I'm also going to takeaway the Lenten material that Steve had put together around good practices. I really liked this. It reminded of the Irish Penitential's, which were about developing the virtues, rather than penance for the sin. I have tried to approach Lent in that spirit this year (I may even blog about that) I hope to remember it next year and promote it.

Finally, in working with Steve Taylor, what opportunities, challenges or invitations come to mind as you think about the future of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Harder question. I guess the invitation to be creative, get people involved, and build relationships with people inside church and in the community.

I think too, we so often want to change what we are doing. The thing that has stuck for me out of this and the post Christian conference is that rather than change what is happening now, in terms of services, start new ones at different times. And still value and love those you have now, get them supporting you rather than antagonising them. I sense that with the publishing of "Mission Shaped Church" a couple of years ago, people are more interested and feel they have permission to ask more questions and to experiment. We shall see!