

The Radical Reset

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Ever since restrictions were put in place that meant we couldn't meet as we're used to there's been people starting to talk about using this COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for the church to 'reset' (as opposed to simply returning to how we've been doing things).

We do need a reset, though not it's not as simple as most commentators are suggesting.

In IT parlance a reset is switching your computer off and turning it back on again. Many desktop PC's have a reset button – press the button and everything stops, and the computer restarts and boots up just like new. Problems vanish, frozen and broken programs are shut down, and the operating system initiates without any of the hangover issues you may have been experiencing. At the same time though many struggled with pressing the reset button as it meant all the work in that document they hadn't saved would be lost, or hours of data not correctly entered would be wiped from the computer's memory.

Gone.

For good.

It meant they had to start again. It cost time and energy; sometimes money; and it even meant they might have to try a different way (starting at times from scratch) to complete the task they were working on.

The church faces very similar issues when we talk about a reset: if we do so it will cost time and energy; it will cost some money; and it will mean we will need to try a different way as a church to complete the task Jesus Christ calls us to – that of making disciples.

Churches are very comfortable places to go when you're a part of that community. People know your name, you know where to sit, and you understand when to stand and sit, and what the right responses are at the end of prayers and communion. Churches are very comfortable places where spiritual immaturity is rife because then church is all about you (e.g. "I don't like that music, why can't we just have these kinds of songs?" "Don't you think it's fair that the church can serve me, now that I've done my time serving?" "I like it when that person leads because they understand how we do things here.")). Churches are very comfortable places when there is little expected of you, independent of your age, culture, or background.

God never set in place a time when we could step down and stop serving his mission.

Our service may change as our physicality changes however the important work of the Gospel must continue throughout our lives as we run the race, right to our very last breath. Following God and making disciples is a life-long commitment that *should* cost us everything – especially costing us the things that *we* want and make us comfortable.

As a movement the Uniting Church is staring down some harsh realities that come from years of complacency, neglect and argument. Bums on seats in Uniting Churches are, across the board, in decline (with very few congregations bucking that trend). The average age of people

attending Uniting Churches puts attendees in their mid-60's and only getting older. We're sadly looking critically at congregations that have a history of faithful service and tradition and seeing the number of faithful who attend dwindle and those that remain cannot afford to maintain their buildings or the placement that pastors them (even in a half-time capacity or less). This leaves us with seemingly no option other than having to sell their church building and property.

We need to do something to get us out of this funk... and the reset opportunity staring us right in the face is to engage again in the transformational work of God and disciple young people.

"But we're too old."

Probably.

"But we already do that."

That's possible. How's that going? How are young people included, valued and developed? Do you know all their names and the things they are interested in?

"Young people don't give enough money to keep the church running."

That's very true. I wonder why that is?

"Who will look after me?"

That sounds very self-centred.

"I'm too old to run youth group."

Nobody is asking you too, and programmatic entertainment isn't what discipleship is about.

At the core of this new reality is the heart-shifting recognition we should not be coming to church for ourselves.

We should not be coming to church to meet *our* needs and wants.

We definitely should not be coming to church to join the holy huddle to get a 'spiritual top-up'.

These ideas are shallow and selfish and have never served the church well.

We see these problems reversed in church communities where love is offered to the unlovely and investment is made in the care of other people ahead of ourselves. Not just the others we know and see every week in church—people in our community also who don't attend. People on the fringes of church who pop in and have time-consuming demands. Those that don't know the saving grace of Jesus. To engage in a church community where we care for others ahead of ourselves and see it explode into reality requires us as *people of God on the way* to do things differently, and it costs time, energy, and money.

There's lots we do already that shows we care for others like Thrift Shops, food banks, and neighbourhood centres. These, and other activities and programs, have been a focus of the church for a long time. They've also become a distraction. We worry about whether these things are well attended and not whether or not we are building relationships with the people

within them specifically so we can share about Jesus. It's a case of the program covering our personal missional cost. We shy away from doing the hard work that the cross calls us to.

Engaging in the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ is more direct – we must no longer be afraid of showing and telling others about Jesus personally. We must no longer be scared of personal evangelism, and we must absolutely give our everything to engage young people in the life and witness of God.

We come to church, to engage in Christian community on Sunday as a part of our whole life of witness, because we love and care about the other ahead of ourselves because Jesus first loves us.

When we understand that engaging in the deep work of God and caring for other people is paramount to Christian community, we will find worshipping together as a community irrespective of our generations a whole lot easier. This will encourage us to work together with God to build his kingdom and to bring more people into relationship with Jesus so they can be transformed to become more like him.

How we engage with young people is at the core of rethinking and resetting the church, and applying the six core commitments of the Growing Young program will help every congregation reset and connect intentionally into the mission of God:

- Mentoring young people and releasing them into leadership will challenge them and strengthen us;
- Modelling being a good neighbour encourages young people care for others and think outside themselves;
- Stepping into the shoes of young people and loving them for who they are in the situation they are in, displaying empathy rather than judgment;
- Taking Jesus' message seriously and communicating it clearly changes lives;
- Focusing on warm peer and intergenerational relationships within your church and wider community forms strong bonds; and
- Prioritising ministry with young people in all areas and at all layers of the church will transform our movement to the glory of God.

We face the opportunity for a reset that will allow us to enter into a new age of commitment and spiritual practice that will see God's church flourish with love, grace, and hope that will grow a church committed to seeing all people – particularly young people – be valued, accepted, and encouraged into a lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ.

A reset that brings the core message of Jesus back to the front of our thinking, ministry, and proclamation.

This is the radical reset we need to take part in. Press the button.

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