

The Role of Liturgy in the Faith Development of Adolescents

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Abstract and Research Procedure

It is the aim of this research to identify how liturgy shapes the faith development of youth at Highway Church of the Nazarene (HCotN). This research will also be used in the future development of liturgy in order to further shape the faith of adolescents. In brief, the paper centers on the work of James Fowler and John Westerhoff III. The research of this paper was conducted through participant observation. The observation took place between February 2, 2014 and February 26, 2014. These observations were then compared to the opinions of both Fowler and Westerhoff. In conclusion of this research, one may clearly recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the liturgy at HCotN. The following liturgical elements were observed: art, songs, responsive readings, prayer, bulletins, rituals, scripture, sacrament, space, and symbols.



Observations

- Minimal artwork is displayed throughout the church.
- HCotN has a blended mix of songs between hymns and contemporary. Musical worship was used in multiple ways. Some examples include opening the service, closing the service, or as a time of response.
- During the month of observation, there were no responsive readings at HCotN.
- Prayer was a regular aspect of HCotN services. Three-fourths of the time members were invited for intentional prayer time at the altar.
- Bulletins were highly informational. Bulletins include an order of worship, announcements, and prayer requests.
- Rituals included passing of the peace and times of testimony.
- Scripture was only read outside of the message one-fourth of the time. HCotN messages evenly used both Old Testament and New Testament passages.
- During the time of observation, neither the sacrament of baptism nor the sacrament of communion was observed.
- The space at HCotN is focused on the front stage areas. In the youth sanctuary, chairs are placed in semi-circles.
- Symbols include the Bible, cross, communion cup, American flag, and Christian flag.



Conclusions

The observations show that Stage 3 Synthetic-Conventional faith is the norm at HCotN. The present liturgy provides a basis for identity and outlook. However, this identity may not yet construct or maintain an independent perspective. The areas of prayer, bulletins, rituals, and space are sufficient to positively shape faith development. The following suggestions are offered in response to other areas:

- People learn through images, so adding more artwork would reinforce the sacred story.
- Songs help the faith community put faith into words. Therefore, songs should be deliberately chosen to reflect more on God than the self.
- The introduction of responsive readings would unite the faith community in the common memory.
- Sacraments should be observed frequently at HCotN. Sacraments teach through experience and allow for faith to be celebrated.
- Scripture should be read in addition to the message. We must tell and retell the sacred story.
- The current symbols are adequate, but contradictory since communion is not regularly practiced. If communion were to be practiced frequently, the symbols and sacrament would reinforce one another.



Literature Review

Great attention is given to Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, which includes a detailed explanation of his theory of the six stages of faith. Westerhoff focuses heavily on liturgy and Christian education. He carefully examines the impact of the faith community in bringing up children and youth in the Christian faith. The following are recurring themes from both Fowler and Westerhoff:

- A person's faith advances when maturation or environment disturbs the current equilibrium.
- The average American church models Stage 3 Synthetic-Conventional Faith (in which identity is shaped in light of the norm of the faith community).
- The community of faith shapes religious education. The faith community shares a common memory (sacred story) and a common vision.
- People learn first through experience, second through images (stories), and third through signs (conceptual language).
- Storytelling should be a central part of church life. We must learn to tell God's story as our story.
- Through liturgy, the faith community tells and retells the sacred story. Specifically, the liturgy of the church year unites our story and God's story.

Purpose

This paper will be beneficial to the staff at HCotN in order to help us better understand the needs of adolescents so that we may encourage and nurture fruitful faith development.