

RE-IMAGINING WORSHIP AS ACTS OF DEFIANCE AND ALTERNATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF EMPIRE by Rev. Rohan Forrester

As I reflect on the **focus of worship** for the first quarter of 2019, I am inclined to reimagine worship as defined at a recently held **Council for World Mission (CWM) Workshop on liturgy**. The workshop was held in Kingston, Jamaica from November 30 to December 6, 2018. I had the privilege along with **Rev. Dr. Ralph Hoyte and RDGS Mrs. Maureen Henry** to represent the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI). The Workshop was led by **Cláudio Carvalhaes** and has really served as a precursor for what we are now exploring in worship in the UCJCI.

The theme of the workshop, **"Reimagining Worship as Acts of Defiance and Alternatives in the Context of Empire"** enabled the important aspect of redefining liturgy that meets needs. The word **liturgy** from the original Greek word *leitourgia*, means **"service," "ministry," or "work of the people"** and was used for any public work of the people, not only religious services.

So, while liturgy is simply used in the public worship of the Church and includes the celebration of the sacraments, it is not limited only to the sanctuary or the seminary. The truth is that so often when we think of liturgy, we think of things that happen within the church walls or seminary.

Liturgy is extremely important to **faith development and the nurturing of the Christian identity**, and it encompasses what happens in churches, seminaries and what the clergy does in the preparation and in the actual worship service.

Another truth is, **what families do at home** and **what people do at the work place** can also augment one's faith development. **Living in community** and dwelling together as neighbours also **serve to enhance faith development**.

This for me was the highpoint of the workshop; bringing us back to where it all started, hence, my journey into **an inner-city community** as part of this understanding.

I chose to be a part of the group with the kind assistance of **Dr. Henley Morgan** to visit and work in the renown Trench Town community. In this community, the group and I envisaged a different world. A world inspired by **values of love, justice, peace, and freedom**. All of which are defined differently by the people with whom we conversed with. To gain a fuller understanding of the connection of my immersion in Trench Town community and how it informs liturgy, is to listen to the people as well as revisit the history of the community.

Trench Town is one of sixteen (16) communities within the Downtown Development Area Cluster. It has four districts namely; Arnett Gardens, Rose Town, Lyndhurst/Greenwich and Wilton/Federal Gardens. Some data provided by Dr. Morgan point to an objective measure of the socio-economic status of Trench Town and its constituent districts:

The majority (63.5%) of **households** in Trench Town had water piped into their yard while 13.8% of households had public water piped into their dwelling. Approximately 98.3% of households surveyed had electricity. Food is prepared by 93.2% of households using Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG). Household garbage was predominantly disposed of by garbage pick-up truck (85.1%).

Forty-eight (47.7%) of the employed labour force were males compared to fifty-three (53.3%) females. Approximately 50.6% of them were employed full time, of those employed 33.5% were self-employed. The majority of working persons were service, shop and market sales workers.

The most popular reason stated why household heads were unemployed was because they were in the process of trying to gain employment (17.3%) **OR STIGMATISED BECAUSE OF WHERE THEY LIVE**. An estimated ten percent (9.7%) indicated that they could not find employment, 9.2% were retired, 4.7% reported that they were ill, 3.3% indicated that they were trying to start a business and 2.2% had qualification but could not find suitable work. 6% were retired and 5.1% were trying to start a business. All other reasons stated why



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE!

February 13, 2019

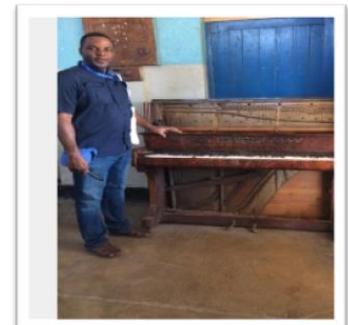
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RE-IMAGINING WORSHIP cont.

We cannot help but to think of the demographic highlighted in these findings. This is truly a community struggling to develop and maintain its status in the Jamaican society. However, the community itself was born out of **a struggle for housing, struggle for social and spiritual identity and a struggle for economic stability and empowerment**. So, how does liturgy fit into all of this journey into the community of Trench Town?

I noted the work of **Boys' Town** and the range of development that took place before and after the late **Reggae Superstar Robert 'Bob' Marley**. There are five streets – from First Street to Fifth Street all within reach of the Boys' Town that is owned and operated by the **Methodist Church**. It is within that specified range of streets that the mission communicated through the liturgy of Boys' Town that many world renown singers and actors were born, lived and musical talents developed. **It was at Boys' Town that Bob Marley learned to play the piano.**



The piano at Boys' Town

UPCOMING EVENTS

- February 16 Leadership Development Training – Council Office – 9:00 am
- February 16 Church School Teachers' MAT -PYC-10:00 am
- February 17 East End /Gun Bay Charge – Combined Community Worship Service
- February 18 Extraordinary Meeting of Council Executive
- February 20 Meeting with Congregation Board Deputy Chairs and Secretaries – Council Office

RE-IMAGINING WORSHIP cont.

According to Cláudio Carvalhaes
“Liturgy is the learning of this doing, faith being an action. . . Worship is the acting out of what we believe, and the believing out what we act. Worship is that which set our mission in the world. In worship, we attest the world we have and announce the world we desire and hope for. It is through our gathering, singing, praising, preaching, celebrating the sacraments and sending forth that we organize our lives and our communities.”

If we can get this right in our churches, then we’ll understand from a different perspective the prayers both as said and acted, words we read and the songs we sing not only express biblical truth, but also the truth about our journey and relationship with God. We must not shy away from acknowledging the fact that sometimes the journey is hard and difficult, yet not impossible. Our liturgical learning/doing of the Christian faith should allow us to be honest, vulnerable, and transparent with each other and with God and to allow God to meet us right where we are in ways that could not be humanly orchestrated. Therefore, the question we must ask is **“How can our liturgy consistently liberate, inspire, convince, convert and celebrate individual and community life?”**

The answer to this question can be found in a quote from Cláudio Carvalhaes,

“ . . . at worship we learn about God and our world and this knowledge empowers us to live out the mission of God we rehearsed in our gathering honoring God. . . Between the world and the altar is how we live and confess our faith, both in the world and in the church. . . Both mission and spirituality live together in the world and in the church.”



**February Theme-
Disciples in Worship**

February 16 - Mr. Ethridge Netz

KNOW YOUR UCJCI CONSTITUTION

REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

SECTION 4

Building Location

7. When it is proposed to erect any new Church, Hall, Manse, or other building, and whether the building is on a new site or on a site presently occupied by church buildings, the proposed site must be approved by The Regional Mission Council before any building plans are transmitted to the Property Committee of Synod for approval.

8. Preliminary plans for any new Church, Hall, Manse, or other building must be submitted to The Regional Mission Council for approval before further steps are taken by the Congregation. If the preliminary plans are approved by The Regional Mission Council, they shall then be forwarded to the Property Committee of the Synod who shall have the responsibility of approval of the detailed plans. Financing of Buildings

RE-IMAGINING WORSHIP cont.

Therefore, where there’s a **disconnect in the liturgy, communal identity is lost and communities experience frustration and anguish.** However, it is only when we have connected outside and inside our communities that communal identity is experienced, and liturgies become meaningful. In liturgy we receive both the exterior form of the liturgy and the interior content, which is **God coming to meet us and give Himself to us through the pain and struggles of the community.** This understanding of liturgy holds that the liturgy is already, by its nature, the most interesting and engaging thing that takes place in the world, because God does it. Although in every liturgy the action of worship is directed to God, we praise God who first called us to be his people, to remember what God has done for us, and to share in the blessings of salvation. Therefore, our liturgy must take the shape of the gathered community expressing itself in response to God’s goodness. This, however, must be contextual using the language and art forms of the people and their experience.

Conclusion

Many these days are hungry for worship that moves them deeply, touches them completely, and ultimately transforms us. So, let us begin with our liturgy - a journey of discovery from within the community and **allow Christ to penetrate the liturgy of the gathered community through our words and actions.**

Published by the Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council
 292 Prospect Point Road
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 CAYMAN ISLANDS



CWM Trench Town group at Culture Yard: Rohan Forrester – Cayman, Maria Ling – Canada, Cecilia Nanjari – Chile, Fitzroy Blackman – Guyana, Daylin Pardo – Cuba and Julio Adam – Brazil.



*The group sharing a moment with gospel singer **Carlene Davis** and husband **Tommy Cowan** and **Dr. Henley Morgan** at the Trench Town recording studio.*