

MODERATOR'S 2023 PENTECOST MESSAGE

"...listen carefully to the call of God to be bearers of God's hope-inspiring message and life-giving Spirit to a new generation."

This month the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission released the results of a new study that speaks about the causes of the high levels of stress, anxiety and social isolation impacting our young people. One of the four causal factors they identified was intergenerational disconnect!

It used to be that the church was a primary place of intergenerational connection in our society. That was certainly my experience as a child and young person at Hoon Hay Presbyterian Church! It was a common story of big Sunday Schools, youth groups and Boys' and Girls' Brigades often led by our parents – we young people developed special helping connections with the older members of the parish. And this was part of a bigger story in Aotearoa as Presbyterian men and woman, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit, planted this huge network of churches, social service organisations and schools that is the Presbyterian movement in this land.

But times have changed. Part of that change is the increasing level of hostility towards the church in the younger generation. Certainly, as I move around the country, I see a huge network of Presbyterian churches who are struggling to connect with young people. This is so challenging at many levels.

So, what has Pentecost and the Holy Spirit got to do with

that? Well, the early church context was also hostile and challenging! Yet, fresh from the jaw dropping spectacle of Jesus risen from the dead, the early Christians had a compelling story for the telling. And then the book of Acts tells of the added injection of the Holy Spirit. Spirit-filled and Spirit-led action dominated the life of the fledgling church - and they met hostility with resilient love that spurred spectacular growth in spite of the challenges!

We too are people who carry the story of the risen Christ; we are people of the Spirit.

As we reflect on the needs of our young, and the exciting narratives of the early church and our Presbyterian heritage in this land, may our hearts cry out for the Holy Spirit do a new thing with us!

The Scripture that most speaks to me about this right now is Ezekiel 37. As the prophet wandered despairingly among the dry bones of his people, the Lord empowered him to bring flesh and breath to those bones. As we survey the dry bones of despair in our youth, may we too listen carefully to the call of God to be bearers of God's hope-inspiring message and life-giving Spirit to a new generation.

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