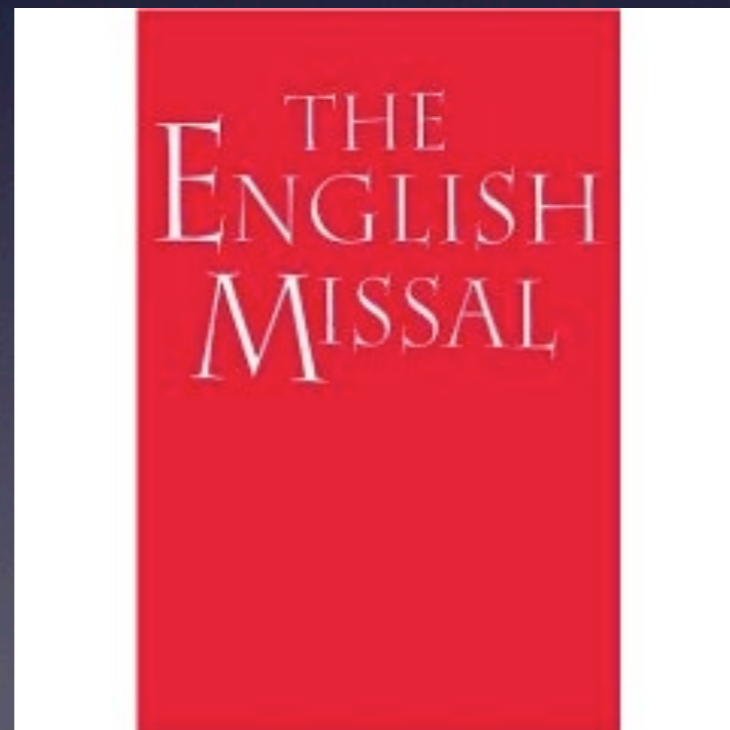


Navigating nostalgia in the congregation



What are you nostalgic for?



Definitions of nostalgia

- Homesickness (Hofer 1668)
- A yearning for an unrecoverable past
- Intellectual deficiency (Kant, Hegel, Marx)
- Abdication of memory (Jameson 1992)

About nostalgia

- Universally present across the age-range
- A 'complex' emotion
- Differs from straightforward remembering due to bittersweet affect
- Helps to maintain self-identity and feeling of self-continuance
- Combats loneliness

About nostalgia

- ‘Nostalgics are past oriented, such that their longing for the past matches their dislike of the present and their dread of the future.’
Pietro Castelnovo-Tedesco (1980)

RESTORATIVE NOSTALGIA

EMOTIONAL TONE

Bittersweet yearning
to restore the past
Pain, Sadness, Loss, Regret

COGNITIVE CONTENT

Non-critical
Positive about past
The present is contaminated
Would like to unthinkingly
restore the past
Accepting of change to restore the past

NOSTALGIA

DISPLACED NOSTALGIA

*Nostalgia for a time never known to
the individual firsthand, eg
English Civil War Society
Trekkies, Tolkienites*

*Used as a 'Trojan Horse' by
advertisers to encourage
purchasing behaviour*

EXERCISE

Consider your Church Council.
How often do members become
nostalgic and over what issues?
Does this nostalgia ever inform
resistance to change?
How do you tend to cope with this
kind of resistance in church life?

REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA

EMOTIONAL TONE

Bittersweet yearning for a past that can
never return
Essentially happy, positive.
Redemptive
Warmth, Comfort, Joy, Hopeful
'A gentle contentment'

COGNITIVE CONTENT

Critically aware
Positive about past
Critical of the present in relation to past
Resistant to change
Sometimes willing to accept
need for change

Some more definitions of nostalgia

- A means of destabilizing the collective memories of minority communities (Fentress 1992)
- A way of designating whose memories are worthwhile (Smith 2000)
- An alternative way of seeing (Fritzsche 2001)
- Preservation of self-identity/continuity (Sedikides 2006)

What triggers nostalgia?

- Disjunction/discontinuity events
- Innovation/change
- Major life events
- Ageing process
- Loneliness
- Beauty

Triggers for nostalgia in the congregation

- Innovation: new approaches to worship and mission, new curates, vicars, alterations to buildings, new attitudes and approaches amongst younger members
- Loss: death, friends moving away, pastoral reorganization, church closure
- Music, stories, festivals All Souls remembrance

What, in your
experience, triggers
nostalgia?

What can nostalgia, in turn, trigger?

- Unwillingness to adapt to new surroundings
- Insistence on continuously reliving the past
- Resistance to change

The progressive cleric...



...meets the nostalgic congregation

Clerical time and congregational time

- Clergy tend to speak in terms of progress and transformational planning
- Clergy increasingly see themselves as managers and innovators
- Clergy use 'change talk'
- Clergy invoke past and future to define and frame situations for the congregation

Clerical time and congregational time

- Congregations tend to speak in terms of personal meaning and remembrance
- Congregations see church as a sanctuary away from change over which they have no control
- Congregations use 'nostalgia talk'
- Congregations invoke past and present to define and frame situations for the clergy

Church congregations as 'sanctuaries of meaning'

- Churches can act as refuges from difficult or hostile social conditions (along with WMC, allotments, pubs, clubs)
- Through shared memories meaning is regained as an antidote to threats to individual and shared identity
- Places of strong emotional reactions and resistance to change

Nostalgia's positive side

- promotes personal significance and worth
- connectedness with others
- regenerates and sustains a sense of meaning
- promotes psychological/physical well-being
- has a bearing on goals and actions

Caring for the nostalgic congregation

- Pastoral response
- Get to know more about the content of your congregation's nostalgia
- Take the content of nostalgia seriously - treat it as a critique of planned change
- Is there a way feeding nostalgia's values into change?