

YEP, YEAH. TOTALLY. I GET THAT.

A few weeks ago, John Taylor joined our online discussion group that myself and a few church friends attend every Tuesday night.

During the discussion John asked us a series of questions he had been asking other congregations. Of those questions were "What are the major problems in the world today and what are the underlying causes?"

After answering a long list of world problems, John followed with the question "What are some of the things we can do towards reversing these causes within the community?" The first response was "to raise good kids." We all nodded in agreement.

I was impressed at how simple it all sounds but then quickly realised just how difficult the concept is when actually putting it into action.

Being a mother of two young girls I've experienced the difficulties that come while trying to process unresolved trauma, healing my own inner child at the same times as raising kids. I struggle at times with guilt and shame that I may not be equipping my girls with the emotional and spiritual resilience they'll need to get by in this world, let alone adding extra pressure that hopefully play some type of role in reversing the problems of the world.

After our discussion that Tuesday night I couldn't help but feel the heavy burden we just placed on those raising children and youth, especially when one of the biggest problems for adults today is Mental Health.

Research has shown that children and young people that have a parent or carer with a mental illness are at greater risk of experiencing mental illness and/or social isolation, less likely to complete education and/or training, and likely to take on responsibilities beyond what's expected for their age. Like sponges, we know children absorb and learn by observing how the adults around them communicate and react to certain situations.

I don't want to highlight this to shame or guilt parents or careers that are suffering from these illnesses, but rather raise the importance of the primary careers wellbeing when considering the current needs of our children and youth.

Focusing all our attention on the needs of others in the community shouldn't come without the inner soul work that helps ourselves manage our own suffering. Ignoring this work is not only dangerous to ourselves, but also to those in our care.

Raising children in today's landscape comes with its challenges. Thanks to the hard work of those breaking the stigma that used to exist around mental health, it's now a little easier to reach out and talk openly to friends and access medical support than in previous generations. Prioritising our own healing and self-care can have the potential to stop cycles of generational trauma that unintentionally pass onto our children and youth.

Mental health, with all its complexities, feels like a gigantic problem to tackle as a church with limited resources and volunteers. But when functioning at our best and using the tools we've inherited from our tradition we can offer first aid support opportunities to those who feel alone and overwhelmed when it comes to navigating the professional help that may be needed.

We provide small intimate groups that provide companionship and emotional support while people share whatever difficulties they may be facing when raising children. We have ministers who can provide friendships that walk alongside those who are trying to navigate the difficulties that sometimes comes when trying to find the right professional support.

Being an intergenerational community we have the ability to create relationships for children and youth who may not have the privilege of having large family circles or grandparents around them to lean on.

Lifelong friendships and role models are formed through our youth and children camping experiences while parents can receive much needed respite.

We pass down ancient stories and parables that, when interpreted responsibly, teach us values like eternal love, forgiveness, inclusion, peace, justice, death and renewal, as well as the importance of helping others and recognising when it's our turn to be on the receiving end of ministry.

We offer spiritual practices and sacraments that non-members can receive including the Laying on of Hands that can provide healing to our inner wounds. Evangelist blessings to those seeking spiritual guidance and direction when feeling lost. Renewing communion experiences that make space for self-evaluation and reconciliation. We can perform children's blessings that recognises and celebrates the blessing their child is to the community around them.

Through our vulnerabilities we create opportunities to model and display how valuable a healthy spiritual and emotional life can provide people.

Raising a kingdom building generation was never meant to land on the shoulders of just one or two carers. Nor should the responsibility of children or youth ministry fall only on one designated minister. This task takes a whole village.

When we come together and actively participate and model the very foundations of our faith, we become the sanctuary and helpline for careers, youth and children, as it has been for myself.

by Emma Ghazarian