

Creating Rites of Passage

Quotes from Ronald Grimes, "Deeply into the Bone"

"Without rites that engage our imaginations, communities, and bodies, we lose touch with the rhythms of the human life course..."

"The primary work of a rite of passage is to ensure that we attend to such events fully, which is to say, spiritually, psychologically, and socially..."

"Unattended passages become spiritual sinkholes around which hungry ghosts, those greedy personifications of unfinished business, hover."

"A rite of passage is a set of symbol-laden actions by means of which one passes through a dangerous zone, negotiating it safely and memorably."

Questions for our consideration as leaders/creators of ritual

- What other "rites of passage" do we need in our lives?
- is there something about the "traditional" that feels inadequate? wrong? missing?
- Is there a "deep structure" that can help us create something new out of something old?
- what is happening in this ritual?
- what needs to be experienced?
- what can symbolize the old state?
- what can symbolize the transition?
- what can symbolize the new state?
- what image has been meaningful to this person/these people?

- are there family or cultural traditions which can be honored?
- what should the ritual “feel” like?
- what colors/textures/lighting will help create this feel?
- what sound will “set the stage” (mood) for the ritual?
- how will persons be invited into the experience?

Grimes' "premises" of ritual practice

1. *the premise of “processual primacy”*: the process which takes place in the ritual will be more formative than the content (pay attention to the “from this... to that” aspect)
2. *the premises of enactment and embodiment*: action is the primary form of engagement; talk is secondary (pay attention to posture, gesture, placement, objects and actions)
3. *the premise of ordinariness*: ritual takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary with extraordinary attentiveness (pay attention to the power of the everyday used as ritual symbol)
4. *the premise of attunement*: be responsive to the environment and acknowledge the interdependence with others (pay attention to the NOW)
5. *the premise of receptivity*: receptivity is open, empty waiting which requires exertion and attentiveness, not passivity (create invitations to receptivity)
6. *the premises of silence and stillness*: there should be some of this in even the noisiest of celebrations (this is one of the best ways to “soak up” the moment)

7. *the premise of mystery*: mystery is wonder coupled with reverence. It is an outcome of being attentive to whatever presents itself (create an atmosphere of the mystical- name the holy)

8. *the premise of play*: play is detachment from “ends” and productivity and a willingness to explore (create ways for joy and laughter to play a part, revel in the moment)

9. *the premise of imagination*: ritualizing is a form of imaginative activity (create opportunities to dream, to imaginatively name the future)

10. *the premise of improvisation*: we have no choice but to improvise. And we have no choice but to structure what we improvise (allow rituals to contain the unexpected).

11. *the premise of criticism*: good ritualizing comes with experience; learn from what works and what doesn't; but don't criticize prematurely (or over-criticize)

Resources

Ronald Grimes, "Deeply into the Bone: Reinventing Rites of Passage"

Ronald Grimes, "Marrying & Burying: Rites of Passage in a Man's Life"

Louise Carus Mahdi, et.al., eds., "Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage"

Hugh Sanborn, ed., "Celebrating Passages in the Church: Reflections and Resources"

Elaine Ramshaw, "Ritual and Pastoral Care"