

Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

Journal Collection: Intergenerational Faith Formation



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Best Practices in Intergenerational Faith Formation

John Roberto

Intergenerational faith formation may seem “new” to contemporary Christian churches, but it has deep roots in our Jewish and Christian heritage. The call for one generation to share its faith and story with future generations is deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition. Moses’ instruction to the parents and grandparents of his day makes this clear:

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:1–9)

From the first century onward, Christian faith communities have been intergenerational communities. Allan G. Harkness writes, “Ever since the development of Christian faith communities in the post-Pentecost era of Christianity, there has been a consciousness that such communities need to encourage and embody a genuine intergenerationalism” (Harkness 1998, 431). From its Jewish roots, the early Christian church maintained its intergenerational identity with all ages considered to be integral parts of it. “The church is all generations. From the newly baptized infant to the homebound, aged widow—all are members of the faith community. None are potential members; none are ex-members. Though some congregations may have no younger members (and a few no elderly), most have all five generations. And all are members of the Body” (Koehler, 10).

Intergenerational faith formation was an integral element of the Christian church from the very first days. The Israelites and the first Christian communities may not have used the term “intergenerational faith formation” to describe the transmission of the faith story and way of life to the next generation, but it most certainly was.

Harkness provides a helpful, contemporary understanding of intergenerational faith formation when he writes, “Intentional IG (intergenerational) strategies are those in which an integral part of the process of faith communities encourages interpersonal interaction across generational boundaries, and in which a sense of mutuality and equality is encouraged between the participants” (Harkness 2000, 52-53). Drawing on theology, education, and social sciences he makes a strong case that intergenerational learning “can contribute to the achievement of the normative educational goals of faith communities, which (for Christian communities at least) integrate the gaining of knowledge, holistic growth to maturity of individual believers, and the development of the corporate Christian community for its mission” (52-53). Harkness identifies four major areas in which specifically IG educational strategies may enhance the achievement of these goals:

1. by providing the foundation of consistency between the theology of the community and its educational strategies;
2. by embodying the essence of appropriate and authentic education in faith communities;
3. by enhancing the potential for faith development in the individual members of the communities; and
4. by encouraging the corporate edification that enables the community as a united entity to more effectively live out its God-given vocation. (Harkness 2000, 53)

James W. White offers what has become the guiding definition of intergenerational religious education: “two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive sharing” (White, 18). White explains that an ideal IGRE program will have all four patterns of relationships: in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive sharing. The IGRE methodology can be utilized in many forms: monthly IG learning programs, weekly or bi-weekly IG small groups, IG/family summer camp programs, IG/family vacation Bible school, IG Sunday school or Bible study, IG retreats, IG workshops.

The dominant form of Christian education or faith formation in most Christian churches today is not intergenerational. For over sixty years it has been homogeneous-age education, organizing children, teens, and adults into separate learning groups or classes organized by age or grade level. In

many congregations even worship is age-segregated. Holly Catterton Allen, in her research on IG observes, “It seems that learning how to be God’s people has become less a joining in with community, and more a gathering of age-segregated groups to study about being God’s people” (Allen, 271).

Since the 1970s there have been a number of significant attempts to make intergenerational and/or family-centered learning central to Christian faith formation (see Harkness 1998). Many of the lectionary-based approaches and resources developed since the 1970s have incorporated a family and/or intergenerational learning component. Kathleen Chesto’s *FIRE (Family-centered Intergenerational Religious Education)* program, originally developed in the 1980s and revised and updated in the 1990s, is a comprehensive five-year curriculum: *Celebrating Community, Becoming Community, The Responding Community, The Living Community, The Believing Community*. Faith Inkubators (www.faithink.com) has developed *Generations in Faith Together*, intergenerational learning programs focused on Advent, Lent, and stewardship that are an integral element in their curriculum for congregations. The Center for Ministry Development and Harcourt Religion have developed the *People of Faith* curriculum, six volumes of intergenerational learning sessions on Jesus and the church year, the Creed, sacraments, morality, justice, and prayer, that can be used as the primary form of congregational faith formation for all ages.

Unfortunately there is very little scholarly writing or research on intergenerational faith formation. James White’s 1988 *Intergenerational Religious Education* is one of the only substantial books presenting the theory and practice of Christian intergenerational education.

The Challenge of Intergenerational Faith Formation

There are many forces in our society and within our congregations that make the (re)establishment of intergenerational faith formation countercultural. To these forces we now turn our attention.

The general culture in the United States is becoming increasingly age-segregated. We live in a society defined by age segregation, in which adults and children go their separate ways. Young people experience very few settings that are truly intergenerational. The architecture and design of communities and neighborhoods tend to isolate

families, and virtually every program and institution is organized to meet age-specific needs at the expense of the richness of intergenerational community.

While intergenerational communities and extended families have long been the norm in human societies all over the world, U.S. society is pulling the generations apart. Among the many factors contributing to this are: individualism, mobility, grandparents living at often great distances from their children and grandchildren, and separation of children and youth by age levels from adults in education and activities.

Age-segregation is detrimental to all generations. “This lack of intergenerational contact leads each generation to see itself as a separate subculture rather than as an integral part of an entire community, perspectives that often lead to conflict and competition rather than cooperation” (Martinson and Shallue, 4).

Religious congregations are among the very few settings where three or more generations gather for intentional activities. Yet even in churches, young people are segregated by age from the rest of the community for most of their activities. In a typical church today a child can be involved in Christian education programs from first grade through high school and never have the opportunity to meet and learn with other generations in the faith community—to the detriment of the individual and the other generations. In some congregations they are even separated for worship.

Intergenerational Contact

The 2000 research study, *Grading Grown-Ups: American Adults Report on their Real Relationships with Kids* found “there is clear evidence that young people benefit from multiple, sustained relationships outside their immediate family. For example, Search Institute research has found that the more adults a young person reports that he or she can turn to, the better off that young person is. Yet just 22 percent of the youth surveyed reported having strong relationships with five or more adults other than their parents” (Scales, et al., 5).

To grow up healthy, young people need to be surrounded, supported, and guided within a sustained network of adults, in addition to their parents, who choose to know, name, support, affirm, acknowledge, guide, and include children and adolescents in their lives. Yet, the *Grading Grown-Ups* study found that most young people lacked this sense of “connectedness” to other generations.

The *Grading Grown-Ups* study revealed that youth and adults have shared priorities for intergenerational relationships. However, there was

also general agreement that these relationship-building actions are not happening often enough. There appears to be a gap between what adults believe and what they do. Of the 18 actions studied, only the top three—encouraging school success, teaching respect for cultural differences, and teaching shared values—are reported to be happening with any regularity. Some very important actions that adults could exercise in their relationships are not being practiced: passing down traditions, having meaningful conversations, being engaged in giving and serving to help the needy, modeling giving and serving to make life fair and equal, discussing religious beliefs, and discussing personal values.

What is clear from the study is that “forming meaningful relationships across generations needs to become an expected part of everyday life. All adults need to see being engaged with kids as part of their responsibility, as part of their community and this society. Children and youth need to be able to count on adults for support, guidance, and modeling” (Scales, et al. xi).

In the *Effective Christian Education Study (The Teaching Church, 1993)* the Search Institute found only 20 percent of congregations adequately promoted intergenerational contact. And just 39 percent of youth say their churches do a good or excellent job of helping them get to know adults in the church.

In October 2003, the Search Institute conducted a field test survey in 15 U.S. congregations of their instrument, *Building Assets, Strengthening Faith: An Intergenerational Survey for Congregations*. While only a limited survey, it does provide a glimpse of the state of intergenerational programming in congregations. The adult and youth respondents rated their congregation as doing very or extremely well in the following intergenerational opportunities (note the low score for intergenerational relationship building and learning opportunities):

- 52%: having worship or prayer services that are spiritually uplifting for people of all ages;
- 42%: providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to serve others together;
- 40%: helping people of all ages feel their gifts and talents are valued;
- 29%: having children and youth in leadership roles for the whole congregation;
- 29%: providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to get to know each other;
- 29%: providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn and study together.

Eugene Roehlkepartain, the report’s author, emphasizes the need for intergenerational

relationships and learning. “Nurturing faith and building assets involves more than what the congregation does specifically for children, youth, and families. Faith and assets are strengthened through intergenerational relationships, programs, and activities, including the ones examined in this section of the survey. Together, these items help congregations understand the ways they are, truly, an intergenerational community. The invitation for congregations is to discover a balance between age-specific opportunities and intergenerational opportunities in a time when generations are, too often, isolated from each other” (Roehlkepartain, 11).

Intergenerational – Age-Specific Tension

One of the major congregational issues is the tension between intergenerational and homogenous-age education. The recent history of Christian education has been dominated by age-specific (and age-segregated) learning. There are obviously age-related differences in development and age-related learning needs that make age-specific education important. However, as Allan Harkness observes, “Open to debate is the extent to which these differences provide a valid rationale for restricting education in faith communities to contexts in which homogeneous-age groups can function, as in the traditional age-graded divisions of congregations” (Harkness 2000, 54). He goes on to say that there are legitimate reasons for age-group educational settings, but “What is not justifiable is when these reasons are presented as a rationale for exclusively homogeneous-age group settings” (55).

Harkness concludes that intergenerational and homogenous-age group educational strategies in faith communities should be considered complementary, but with an intergenerational approach taking primacy over the age-segregated approach.

For contemporary faith communities, especially those which seek to model themselves on the New Testament churches, application of these criteria, when based on broad foundations from theology, education, and the social sciences, will demonstrate that the preferred educational strategies will integrate both IG and homogeneous age strategies. In terms of the priority to be given the two strategies, however, accumulated evidence from the same broad foundations strongly endorses the perspective that we “must learn to do only those things in

separate groups which we cannot in all conscience do together.

If faith communities are to increase effectiveness in fulfilling their mandate to equip people for life and relevant mission, no longer can the widely used homogeneous-age group methodology go unquestioned. An IG component must be conceived as normative. (Harkness 2000, 63)

The Process of Intergenerational Faith Formation

James White identified four patterns of relationships that shape the four components of an IGRE learning experience. Briefly summarized, these patterns are:

- **In-Common Experiences.** Intergenerational religious education begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together. In-common experiences of generations are usually less verbal and more observatory than in the other three elements. In this pattern there is something “out there” or “over there” for us to see or do, something that equalizes the ages. Thus, at the same time and place and in a similar manner, different-aged people listen to music or sing, make an art project, watch a video, hear a story, participate in a ritual, pray together, and so on. In-common experiences for the most part remain at what Jean Piaget calls the “concrete operational” level, where all can learn together.

Shared experiences are absolutely critical for building IGRE. They are the stuff by which other patterns of relationships are built. To the point, Fred Rogers, of television’s *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, makes the case for what is prescribed here when he asks rhetorically, “How can older and younger people respond to each other if they have no experiences together?”

- **Parallel Learning.** Parallel learning is the second major IG relational pattern. With it the generations are separated in order to work on the same topic or project, but in different ways at a “best fit” development, interest, or skill level. Some of the developmental levels we are talking about are cognitive, psychological, physical, moral,

valuational, and so on—all the ways that make people different and special.

Though age groups may be separated, each one is focusing on the same learning task or topic. One of the major criticisms of IGRE is “the tendency to view equality or persons across the age spectrum with uniformity of experience,” with that experience only from the vantage point of the child. By engaging in parallel learning, however, this IGRE shortcoming is avoided.

- **Contributive-Occasions.** The third pattern of learning is that of contributive-occasions. These occasions are often the step after parallel learning. What is involved is a coming together of different age groups or classes for the purpose of sharing what has been learned or created previously. The joining or rejoining becomes a contributive-occasion where separated pieces to a whole are added together for everyone’s benefit.

Contributive-occasions are more participatory than the other three patterns. If the contributions come from a previous period of parallel learning, the last part of that parallel learning would have been concerned with how to communicate acquired insights or behaviors to other age groups. By engaging “in mutual contribution” to one another, IG learners discover that the educational whole is great than the sum of its parts.

- **Interactive Sharing.** Interactive sharing is the fourth major pattern in IGRE relationships. It is a distinctive style or way of learning. Here persons are provided with an opportunity for interpersonal exchange, which may involve experiences or thoughts or feelings or actions. At its best, interactive sharing facilitates a “crossing over” to hear and respond to another’s perspective.

In an ideal IGRE program or event, all four of the patterns of relationships will be enacted. People come together and have an in-common experience. Then they break to separately investigate the common subject at a level appropriate for their highest learning abilities. They come back together to present their insights and work in a shared program. Finally, different generations interact with one another, giving and receiving in the exchanges. In the latter case the participants are sharing, reflecting, debating, and

dreaming from the side of the other but for their own edification. (White, 26-30)

With my colleagues at the Center for Ministry Development (Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber), we developed a model of intergenerational learning based on White’s four patterns, which is being used by Catholic parishes in the Generations of Faith Project and in the intergenerational sessions for the *People of Faith* series (Harcourt Religion). In this model IG is designed around a four movement learning process.

Welcome, community building and opening prayer

1. **An All-Ages Learning Experience** for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
2. **In-Depth Learning Experiences** that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format:* learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format:* learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format:* learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
3. **An All-Ages Contributive Learning Experience** in which each generation teaches the other generations.
4. **Reflection** on the learning experience and interactive group sharing.

Closing prayer

Best Practices in Lifelong Faith Formation

As we have noted there is very little research on intergenerational faith formation. The best practice findings rely primarily on the *Generations of Faith Research Study* conducted in the Spring of 2005 by the Center for Ministry Development. The Center staff conducted a qualitative research study, using focus groups and in-depth interviews, of almost 100 parishes in eight dioceses across the U.S. who were participating in the Generations of Faith Project. Each parish in the study was conducting

intergenerational learning programs monthly or seasonally.

The findings from this study were then used to develop a quantitative survey involving over 400 parishes across the U.S. and Canada who were participating in the Generations of Faith Project. (A summary report of the findings is available online at www.lifelongfaith.com.)

Best Practice I. Intergenerational faith formation strengthens and creates new relationships and increases participation in church life.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* (qualitative and quantitative research) found that the practice of intergenerational learning promotes relationship building and participation in church life. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational relationships are created as people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together.
- Intergenerational learning strengthens the faith community through relationship building and participation in church life; people take time to talk and share with each other.
- Participation in intergenerational learning leads to greater involvement in church life, including Sunday liturgy, church events, and church ministries.

The survey of 434 Catholic parishes asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Families benefit from intergenerational learning through opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families are growing in ways that they share faith.	4.06
Intergenerational learning strengthens the parish community through relationship building and participation in parish life; people take time to talk and share with each other.	4.0
Our parish is reaching new audiences, such as adults and whole families, through intergenerational learning.	3.76
Intergenerational relationships are created through intergenerational learning, as people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together.	3.73

Participation in GOF learning programs leads to greater involvement of participants in parish life, including Sunday Mass, sacraments, service projects, and in the ministries of the parish.	3.69
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Holly Catterton Allen's research on an intergenerational small group model reinforces this finding. She writes,

Children who regularly participate in IG small groups have special opportunities for spiritual development. In a sense, they gain an extended family that is otherwise unavailable to most children today; they gain spiritual "aunts" and "uncles," "grandparents," and "cousins." They also see other role models for parenting. More importantly they participate in the spiritual lives of their parents. They learn the spiritual disciplines by watching and doing. They learn to share as they see their parents and others share their lives. They see others minister to one another and they begin to minister. They see their parents and others pray for concerns in their lives and they too begin to pray. (Allen, 270)

James White also reinforces this finding when he reports on the reflections of leaders from a church that had conducted intergenerational learning for ten years. He writes,

With the group of IG educators at All Saints, whom I called together for a ten-year evaluation, there was a strong sense among these people that the *church had indeed become more of a community with wholeness*. Several felt the IG programs over the years had "shot the magic bullet" which made us one across the ages. (White, 239)

The *Effective Christian Education Study* (*The Teaching Church*, 1993) also found that intergenerational contact helps young people grow in their faith. The study suggests several reasons for this:

- First, contact with older adults is more likely to give young people mentors with mature faith. This maturity can have a positive influence on teenagers' growth in faith.
- Second, it builds for young people a sense of community in the congregation. As young people get to know people of all ages, they feel more comfortable in the church and more like part of the family of God.

- Third, intergenerational contact can build mutual respect among the generations. As older adults get to know the youth, they will be less suspicious about innovations in the youth program. And as a result, the congregation as a whole is more likely to support youth education.
- Finally, intergenerational education is another way to build shared experiences for youth and parents, which can open doors for formal and informal faith conversations at home. Discovering ways to make intergenerational interaction beneficial for all generations can have a significant impact on young people's faith maturity, as well as on the life of the church (Roehlkepartain 1993, 145-46).

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* provides further insights on Best Practice 1 through the quotes of church leaders (pastors, religious education coordinators, youth ministry coordinators, et al.) involved in the qualitative study.

Relationship Building

I found in intergenerational learning a chance to find belonging, a sense of community, a sense of value and worth in a way that I can contribute to, and then just getting to know people of all ages in my community. As a newcomer it has been a wonderful experience

The older couples, they just talk to the kids. It's like a grandparent taking them on because their own grandparents aren't close. So it's very good to see that everybody is involved. Everybody feels comfortable being involved.

One of the changes I saw from the program is the relationship that now even the youngest children in this parish have with our senior citizens, which they did not have before because they were all in their isolated groups. I think this shows great respect for who our elders are, and that's why our first program was on the role of the elders.

We are so pleased to see all ages sitting and eating and conversing with one another. Parishioners who have never met are forging friendships and looking forward to seeing each other the following month. Confirmation students are doing most of their service hours during the sessions, and the parishioners notice it. Adults seem to really be interested in the sessions.

It's faith sharing. It's building community. It's bringing people together. It's opening doors. And they don't sit there in silence. They chatter all the time and they're happy to be there.

It's been a great way for our parish family to grow closer together by learning from each other. The adults seem to enjoy the interaction with the young people in our parish. It's hard to get everyone to break away from the meal segment to start the program! They are really enjoying just being together, and that is a gift.

The biggest thing that I see is community, community, community. You can see Church happening within the group, and you can see a mentoring that is unbelievable.

I see more people talking to each other after Mass or spending time together. As staff, we recognize people and they recognize us. It's just building relationships and community within a parish.

Involvement in Church Life

There has been an increase in liturgical attendance, and more families are volunteering to do faith formation together. The marginalized in the parish feel invited, and watching them grow has been wonderful.

More people are coming to intergenerational learning who I haven't seen at Mass before. They're participating more and seeing faith as more than just Sunday morning Mass.

We have seen such an increase in participation at church events. An unbelievable number of people came to participate in the Holy Thursday service, and that carried through to this year. Extremely well-attended.

Best Practice 2. Intergenerational faith formation engages all ages and the whole family in learning together.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* found that intergenerational learning did, in fact, bring together people of all ages, including families, for learning. In particular many churches found that parents and adults began participating in faith formation because of intergenerational learning. Specifically the study found:

- There is involvement of all ages and generations in learning together: parents and children, teens, young adults, adults, older adults, and whole families.
- Intergenerational learning addresses a hunger that adults have to learn more about their faith and fill in the gaps in their formation. More middle-age and older adults are participating in faith formation.
- Families enjoy opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families are growing in the ways that they share faith. Parents are

participating in a learning program with their children, often for the first time, and are finding benefits in learning together as a family.

The survey asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Families benefit from intergenerational learning through opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families are growing in ways that they share faith.	4.06
Intergenerational learning addresses a hunger that adults have to learn more about their faith.	3.97
Families are growing in faith and developing ways to share their faith through intergenerational learning.	3.92
Our parish is reaching new audiences, such as adults and whole families, through intergenerational learning.	3.76
There has been an increase in the number of adults participating in faith formation because of intergenerational learning.	3.57

Quotes from church leaders involved in the *Generations of Faith Research Study* provide further insight into Best Practice 2.

All Ages

I see a great strength as bringing all age groups together to learn about their faith. That's been a real change for our people, and they are responding.

It's really helped me to appreciate the wisdom of our seniors, the energy and faithfulness and spirit of our children, the hunger of our parents, and the questioning of our young adults. We bring all that together in a community setting, and allow them to minister to each other and to help each other grow, and then bring it home with them.

Adult Involvement

I think the biggest change is that we have adults who are excited to come and learn and grow in their faith. And not just a few, but we have many adults who didn't have the opportunity before to participate and grow in their faith. That's very exciting.

We try to challenge adults—to stretch them a bit, even with the simplest things they may be ignorant of. There is a vast need for religious formation and education out there.

I think there's just a hunger for spirituality out there. I think people are looking for something and we're filling in that gap.

Family Involvement

What gives me hope is that I see families being transformed, that we're empowering people to talk about their faith in a whole different way.

For the families who have participated, their lives have changed: their relationship with one another, their relationship with God, and their relationship with the church—total transformation.

I think another big change has been that we've empowered parents to pass on the faith to their children. We've done that in a way in which we are teaching them about their faith and they're learning, so that when they get into the car and drive home they can share the topic with their kids. They know what they are talking about and they feel empowered because they're able to do what they promised at Baptism; that is, to pass their faith on to the children.

With the parents there, the whole family can participate and have something to talk about based on the subject presented at the learning session.

This is what we've been looking for: bringing families together to do this and to be involved together instead of fracturing them into different components.

I know one of the things they love about it is that they get to do this as a family. They say "I liked being together with my family."

Best Practice 3. Intergenerational faith formation creates a conducive environment for all ages to learn, and utilizes a variety of learning activities to address the diversity of learning styles and developmental needs.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* found that intergenerational learning creates a learning environment—one of warmth, trust, acceptance, and care—conducive to all ages, that promotes group participation, activities, and discussion. Intergenerational learning programs incorporate a variety of experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive learning experiences to foster all-ages learning, as well address the developmental needs and abilities of the different age groups. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational learning creates an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.
- Intergenerational learning engages the participants in a variety of learning activities that are experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive. Faith sharing and personal experience are an important element of intergenerational learning.
- Intergenerational learning is exciting; the enthusiasm, joy, and energy are attractive and contagious.

The Generations of Faith survey asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Intergenerational learning engages participants in a variety of learning activities that are experiential, multi-sensory, interactive, and involve faith sharing.	4.26
Intergenerational learning provides an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.	3.98

The survey also asked parish leaders to rate the effectiveness of intergenerational learning using a rating from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

How would <u>adults</u> rate the overall quality and experience of the intergenerational learning programs?	3.95
How would <u>families with children</u> rate the overall quality and experience of the intergenerational learning programs?	3.84
How would <u>middle school and high school youth</u> rate the overall quality and experience of intergenerational learning programs?	3.06

The *Effective Christian Education Study* found that, in order for intergenerational learning to be effective, it must allow for differences in development and abilities. Experiential learning is often most appropriate since it begins with a shared experience in which all can participate. (Roehlkepartain 1993, 146)

Allan G. Harkness' (1998) review of the impact of intergenerational learning reinforces this finding when he writes about the factors that enhance intergenerational involvement. People of different

ages and temperaments learn best in a variety of ways, and identifies factors that encourage greater enjoyment and involvement by people of all ages in IG events:

- **Build in variety:** Plan for a variety of experiences to provide a means for both exploring and responding. Variety may be in the range of teaching/learning experiences used, whether people respond together or individually, the choice of music, how the Bible is used, a balance of silence and sound, cognitive and affective focus, and so on.
- **Encourage participation:** The active involvement of all participants is important, while at the same time ensuring that people are not coerced into situations in which they feel too high a level of discomfort. There will need to be a balance between activities based on cognitive/abstract thought processes on one hand and affective/"concrete" processes on the other. Plan also throughout each program for meaningful, nonthreatening interaction between people across the generational barriers. A key to enjoyable participation is providing a balance of activities, for while movement and action are especially important for some age groups, and stillness and quiet reflection provide significant learning environments for others, there is potential for all to learn by drawing on the strengths of approaches they are less familiar with.
- **Utilize as many of the five senses as possible:** Each of our senses can provide a means of experiencing the world and so encourage "whole of life" learning. Children do this with intuitive ease, but older people can be helped to reverse their conditioning and rediscover that learning consistent with the quality of life we seek to bring to spiritual growth can be enhanced if more than one of the senses is engaged; this process is often easier in a relaxed intergenerational context. Thus sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell can all be used to good effect. (Harkness 1998, 443-444)

Intergenerational learning incorporates a variety of methods and approaches that actively engage people in the learning process and respond to their different learning styles. Specifically, intergenerational learning programs:

- Incorporate real-life application of learning by engaging people in the life of the community and helping people apply their learning to daily living as Christians. During the sessions participants experience new ways to practice their faith that promote the transfer of learning from the session to their daily lives as individuals and families.
- Utilize participants' experience and prior knowledge. Participants bring relevant religious knowledge and experiences to the session. Participants need the opportunity to build on their knowledge, as well as to learn from each other.
- Respect the variety of learning styles among the participants with a diversity of learning experiences, recognizing that some people learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences, some through reflective observation, some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts, and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices. (For further information see: *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, by David Kolb. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984.)
- Recognize the multiple intelligences (linguistic, spatial, musical, logical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist) among the participants, and design learning methods and activities that address the variety of intelligences in the group. (For further information see the work of Howard Gardner and the book *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Many Intelligences*, revised edition, by Thomas Armstrong. New York: Plume Books, 1999.)

Quotes from church leaders involved in the *Generations of Faith Research Study* provide further insight into Best Practice 3.

Environment

I think adults are seeing that it's OK to continue their learning. It's OK not to know everything. This is a safe environment for them to come in and share and listen. I think this environment has made it more welcoming and comfortable for some people to continue exploring their faith.

One by one they came up and they just shared the faith in their lives in an amazing way. They just got it! That there was a sharing, there was a trust; when we broke, people weren't talking about the weather, they were talking about faith.

One of the reasons I love intergenerational learning is because it's a very non-threatening environment in which to get updated, with the result that people begin sharing faith more in their homes.

When the adults met together the sharing was phenomenal. It was people, one-on-one, just opening up and really sharing. They also expressed a desire for more.

Learning

I've seen a change in adults, from simply memorizing their faith to understanding their faith. They have a deep desire to understand more than just what is in the catechism, and they want to know "Why?": "Why are we doing this?" "Why is this so important to us?" I think people are grasping the fact that it's OK to question their faith—that, I believe, is the key to understanding it. And that's one of the things I reiterate constantly: it's all right to question.

It's experiential. People are doing something: they're singing, they're praying, they're watching an event. It's happening in their midst, around them; it's not all up on the stage. It's very interactive.

We had four people get up and give witness to their experience of having celebrated the sacrament. It was powerful and amazing, just four regular people of different generations.

It was more exciting that just being in the regular classroom, and I think the kids are a little more excited with the activities and the skits and some of the fun things we do in the beginning.

For me, it's the excitement and the energy of the people that come to intergenerational learning and the interaction we have with them. I look forward to that energy and enthusiasm.

You really experience enthusiasm that's significantly noticeable, a real positive atmosphere that was contagious, a real excitement; people are charged. I think they feel really excited about it.

Best Practice 4. Intergenerational faith formation requires a diversity of leaders who embrace a collaborative and empowering style of leadership.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* found that the practice of intergenerational learning requires a *collaborative* and *empowering* style of leadership. This style of leadership needs to be exercised not just by the pastor or religious education coordinator but also by the entire leadership team for intergenerational learning. Teamwork and collaboration are essential for effective planning and implementation of intergenerational learning. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational learning requires a coordinator who fully understands the vision and can work with others to implement it.
- Intergenerational learning requires a team approach, leadership teams with a shared vision for implementation and that practice teamwork and collaboration.
- Intergenerational learning requires committed volunteer leaders who are engaged in a variety of roles in lifelong faith formation: planning, teaching, organizing, and supporting.
- Intergenerational learning requires volunteer leaders who are empowered and trusted to take responsibility for key aspects of the implementation of lifelong faith formation.
- Through their participation as leaders in intergenerational learning, leaders feel closer to God, and grow in their knowledge of the faith and their confidence in sharing it with others.

The intergenerational learning team includes people who are directly involved in the organization and facilitation of intergenerational learning, and people who will be involved in administrative and support roles. A typical intergenerational learning program will involve a variety of leaders, including:

1. An intergenerational program facilitator
2. Teachers/facilitators for age-appropriate learning groups: families with children or children only, adolescents, young adults, and adults
3. Table group facilitators for age-appropriate learning groups, where necessary
4. Assistants to help with activities
5. Prayer leaders for opening and closing prayer
6. Music leader and/or music team for prayer and activities
7. Hospitality team

8. Set-up and clean-up team
9. Food preparation team
10. Creative arts people
11. Promotion and registration staff

The survey asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement (rating: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Through their involvement in intergenerational learning, volunteer leaders grow in their knowledge of the faith and their sharing it with others.	4.21
Leadership teams share a common vision for intergenerational learning and its implementation in the parish.	4.17
Through their involvement in intergenerational learning, volunteer leaders feel closer to God.	3.92

The survey also asked parish leaders to rate the effectiveness of intergenerational learning using a rating from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

How would you rate the quality of collaboration and teamwork among the GOF leadership teams?	3.87
How would you rate your parish's efforts in equipping (training, resources) leaders for their roles in GOF and trusting them to take responsibility for GOF?	3.37
How your rate your parish's efforts in developing a variety of leaders necessary for the effective implementation of GOF?	3.10

Quotes from church leaders involved in the *Generations of Faith Research Study* provide further insight into Best Practice 4.

Coordinator

We were fortunate to have a person who spearheaded the whole thing, who coordinated everything, a person who had the vision, understood the process and what was involved, and was able to pull people together, keep them on track, and keep it moving forward. I think that was a great, great plus.

I have to say a big part of the success of the program has been the coordinator's leadership and her understanding of the curriculum. She was always there. It seemed like her whole ten years of experience kind of built her up for this, so it was really, really, helpful.

The coordinator has a lot of competency and experience. She's very personable. She deals with people first. She

has a theological background; it's nice to have someone oversee things who has a good spirit about it.

Teamwork

It's been a wonderful affirmation for me personally and professionally of collaborative ministry, and how alive and powerful that can be.

One of the things that certainly impressed me was the fact that we had a team that came together to plan for the event and the celebration. Some of these people would not have ever seen themselves as being creative or having any good ideas. All of a sudden around a table they began to think together, and we came up with some really nice ideas. There was a real spirited collaboration happening.

Committed Volunteer Leaders

I think there's a real sense of teamwork and confidence in one another.

We're getting more volunteers, people stepping forward to help. We have volunteers from the edges stepping in, people who've never offered to help. It's a different spirit than before.

I don't think we could have thought about doing this process if we weren't aware of the quality of people we have. This parish is blessed in having many talented and eager people who have had some very positive experiences and the gift of being able to share; this was there beforehand. We have some great sources to draw from.

Leaders Growing Spiritually

God is here when these people are here. You can feel his presence. It's beautiful being involved with it, and very rewarding.

I think the Holy Spirit has been a part of our parish and been involved in this program; that is really what has made it happen.

It keeps me fresh, it invigorates me, it gives me life. I love it.

It's probably helped me be stronger in my faith. I've gained a lot more knowledge about Catholicism.

I think it pushes you to develop a deeper understanding of things. When I gave a presentation, I looked at the materials and used them, but I wanted more. I wanted to give more because I wanted them to understand more.

My faith has just blossomed.

Conclusion

Intergenerational learning provides a new model of learning that produces important benefits for individuals, families, and the whole community. There is a need for more research into the best practices in intergenerational learning. This research needs to happen together with new congregational initiatives in intergenerational learning, and new resources to support congregations. There is a foundation to build upon.

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Practice Ideas

Designing Intergenerational Faith Formation

Welcoming Participants

Meal

Depending on the time of day, a meal begins the program. Use the meal time to introduce people into the theme of the learning program, build community among the participants, do table activities (especially for children) or model at-home practices, such as prayer or a table ritual.

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

Welcome people to the program, provide an overview, and lead the opening prayer service.

Part 2. All-Ages Learning Experience

Conduct an All-Ages Learning Experience to introduce the whole assembly to the theme/content of the program. Select or design learning activities that will engage all ages. Examples of all-ages learning activities include:

- ritual or extended prayer service
- dramatic presentation of a Scripture passage or real life story
- storytelling or retelling a Scripture passage with contemporary examples
- witness presentations by church members (of all ages)
- learning games or TV game show formats
- film or media presentation using art/photos and music
- table group activity and discussion in intergenerational, family and/or age-groups.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

Conduct learning activities that explore the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and developed in one of three formats.

1. **Whole Group Format:** learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room in one of two ways:
 - age-specific groupings
 - intergenerational groupings
2. **Learning Activity Center Format:** learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers targeted to specific age groups, or organized by family and/or all age:
 - age-specific learning centers
 - family-centered learning centers
 - intergenerational learning centers
3. **Age Group Format:** learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages:
 - pre-school children or parents with young children (ages 3-5)
 - parents with children (grades 1-5)
 - young adolescents (middle school)
 - older adolescents (high school)
 - young adults
 - adults

Part 4. All-Ages Contributive Learning

(Sharing Reflections and Home Application)

Determine what each participants will bring back from their In-Depth Learning Experience to share/teach the whole assembly or their small group. This can include reports from each age group, presentation of a project or skit, small group sharing, and so on.

After the presentations, engage small groups in sharing reflections on the learning experience.

Explain the home resources that will extend the learning from the session and demonstrate how people can use them in their daily lives.

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Practice Ideas

Examples: Intergenerational Programs on Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, Son of God Intergenerational Program

(From “Jesus, Son of God” in *Professing Our Faith*,
Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion, 2006)

Theme: Divinity of Christ
Format: Intergenerational Activity Centers

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Who Do You Say That I Am?

- Conduct the learning activity to help participants name who Jesus is for them.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience: Experiencing the Son of God through Gospel Stories

1. The focus of the activity centers is to discover the qualities of God by exploring a variety of Gospel stories that present the words and actions of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. Each learning activity center provides an interactive and experiential way for people to explore one aspect of Jesus’ divinity through Gospel stories.
3. Activity centers will engage participants in presentations, discussions, and activities. Several centers include dramatic presentations, while others engage participants in creative arts or prayer or a ritual activity. One center includes a film presentation. There is even one that includes eating. If the children get tired, there is a storytelling center just for them.
4. Each center is staffed by a team who guides participants through the learning activities.
5. Each center is designed for all ages, participants can select the centers that interest them the most. Families with children stay together.

Activity Centers

1. Jesus is Born (Infancy Narratives)
2. Jesus is God’s Beloved Son (Baptism of the Lord and Transfiguration)
3. Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God
4. Jesus Heals People
5. Jesus Forgives Sin
6. Jesus Raises People from the Dead
7. Jesus Feeds People
8. Stories of Jesus (Storytelling Center)

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Jesus Christ, Death and Resurrection Intergenerational Program

(From “Jesus Christ, Death and Resurrection” in
Professing Our Faith, Orlando: Harcourt Religion, 2006)

Theme: Paschal Mystery
Format: Whole Group

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

- People are organized into intergenerational table groups for the whole program

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Triduum Quiz

- Test everyone’s knowledge of the Triduum through an activity that matches symbols, ritual actions, and events from the Lectionary readings with the correct Triduum liturgy.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

A. Guided Tour of Holy Thursday

- Present the Gospel story of the Last Supper from Matthew, Mark, or Luke in word, drama, and/or visuals (artwork or the film, *Jesus of Nazareth*).
- Guide people in reflecting on the story. Provide commentary on the reading.
- Celebrate a table ritual modeled on the Last Supper.
- Present the Gospel story of the Last Supper from John in word, drama, and/or visuals.
- Guide people in reflecting on the story. Provide commentary on the reading.
- Celebrate a table ritual modeled on the washing of feet with people washing each other’s hands.

B. Guided Tour of Good Friday

- Present Gospel excerpts of the Passion of Christ in word, drama, and/or visuals.
- Guide people in reflecting on the Passion; provide commentary.
- Explain intercessory prayer and pray together intercessions modeled on the Good Friday liturgy.

- Explain the tradition of the veneration of the cross and process with the cross in the meeting room while people pray and sing.
- Guide people in making their own cross for their home.

C. Guided Tour of the Easter Vigil

- Provide a brief overview of the major elements of the Easter Vigil liturgy.
- Celebrate a Service of Light modeled on the Easter Vigil. Use the prayers from the Easter Vigil liturgy. Lead the group through the ritual and explanation of the symbols on the Easter Candle. Light individual candles and sing an appropriate song.
- Present selected Lectionary readings with accompanying prayers from the Easter Vigil liturgy, for example: Genesis 1:1—2:2, Exodus 14:15—15:1 (consider showing the crossing of the Red Sea scene from *The Prince of Egypt*), Romans 6:3-11, and the Gospel reading from the current liturgical year in word, drama, dramatic reading with visuals, or film (*Jesus of Nazareth*).
- Introduce the sacrament of Baptism as central to the Easter Vigil liturgy and to how your church initiates new members every Easter. Guide people through the initiation rite: pray a short version of the Litany of the Saints, bless the bottles of water at each table, explain the celebration of Baptism and Confirmation, renew the baptismal profession of faith, sprinkle the people with holy water, and sing an appropriate song.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Jesus Christ, Resurrection & New Life Intergenerational Program

(“New Life in Christ” in *Following Jesus*, Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion, 2005)

Theme: New Life in Christ
Format: Age Group

Part I. Gathering

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Scenes from the Easter Season—Prayer Experience

- Lead a prayer service focusing on the impact of the resurrection on the disciples and their conversion and commitment to Jesus. The prayer service incorporates scenes from the

Easter Season Lectionary using a freeze-frame approach to dramatizing the scenes. Create the props for each scene and ask the actors to dress for their parts in the stories. For each Gospel reading: present the freeze-action, read the Gospel, and respond in prayer.

- Scene 1. Empty Tomb: Matthew 28:1-10
- Scene 2. Closed Doors: John 20:19-31
- Scene 3. Eating: John 21:9-17, 19
- Scene 4. Commissioning: Matthew 28:16-20

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

• Families with Children

Part 1. Read and discuss each of the four Easter Gospel stories.

Part 2. Create an Easter Banner with key Scripture verses from the Easter readings, Easter symbols, and ideas for living the Easter season.

Part 3. Decorate a Family Easter Candle for the table at home with symbols of the Easter season and short prayers for the family meal.

• Adolescents

Part 1. Adolescents explore the Gospel readings of the Easter Season and discuss theological reflections on the readings.

Part 2. Adolescents are engaged in one or more creative activities to bring the meaning of resurrection alive for them through a magazine story, a television report, a presentation, an advertisement, top ten list of reasons we know Jesus rose from the dead, and/or a debate on the importance of the resurrection.

Part 3. Learning activity on the Emmaus Story

• Adults

Part 1. Adults reflect on their own understanding of the resurrection, and explore and discuss Christian tradition and theological reflections on the significance of the resurrection for their faith.

Part 2. Adults explore the meaning of the Emmaus Story and use the story to reflect on their own relationship with Jesus.

Part 3. Adults develop ways they can live the Easter season in their lives.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

Part 5. Closing Prayer



The Importance of Intergenerational Community for Faith Formation

John Roberto

Something old is new again. Congregations across the United States are rediscovering the power of the intergenerational faith community. Most congregations are multi-generational by membership. Some are *intentionally* intergenerational. They make their intergenerational character a defining feature of their community life, ministries, and programming. These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, and storytelling; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages, and to engage all generations in learning together. For these churches, being intergenerational is a way of life. It is an integral element of their culture. It is who they are!

Bringing generations together within the church provides benefits and blessings on a variety of levels. Insights from research and pastoral experience tell us that being intentionally intergenerational:

- reclaims God's intent for faith to be shared in community and across generations
- affirms each person's value in the total community (regardless of age)
- fosters a foundation of support of each other's concerns, interests, and activities
- provides "up close and personal" formation in faith as children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults engage in sharing faith, teaching, learning, and praying for one another
- teaches us to care for one another
- provides role models for children and youth
- teaches us to value older adults
- allows us to pass on the traditions of family and faith

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- enhances people's identification with their congregation and integration within the community
- encourages greater faith in all generations
- creates special relationships between adults and youth
- fosters leadership regardless of age or stature
- utilizes the strengths (the wisdom, experience, and knowledge) of one generation to meet the needs of another generation
- promotes understanding of shared values and respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life
- utilizes the creative talents of younger and older generations to provide service to the church and community

The "Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry," as reported in the book *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*, identified the significance of an intentionally intergenerational congregation on the faith maturity of young people. Congregation whose basic ministries were thoroughly intergenerational have a significant impact on the faith growth and commitment of young people. In these congregations young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making.

At Sunday worship in these congregations adults and youth greet each other and groups of adults gather for informal conversation with young people before and after the services. Young people bring their friends to worship because they are valued and the worship services engage them. Young people feel at home in these safe and nurturing communities where their participation, energy, concerns, questions, and faith life are valued. They turn to adults in the congregation for guidance and care. Young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. They

get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. The study presents a picture of welcoming congregations who respect and value young people and their youth ministries. These youth are surrounded by multiple, reinforcing spheres of relational Christian influence, and immersed in a larger, multi-generational community of quality relationships informed by faith in Jesus Christ.

What becomes clear in the "Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry" is that in addition to learning about God through excellent Bible teaching, young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. The young people in these congregations get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. The study concludes that the power of faithful, multi-generational Christian relationships is at the heart of effective youth ministry.

Challenges for Intergenerational Relationships

There are many forces in our society and within our congregations that make the (re)establishment of intergenerational faith formation and relationship-building countercultural. We live in a society defined by age segregation, in which adults and children have minimal contact and activities. On a daily basis children and young people experience very few settings that are truly intergenerational; and this is also true for older adults in our society. The architecture and design of communities and neighborhoods tend to isolate individuals and families, and virtually every program and institution is organized to meet age-specific

needs at the expense of the richness of intergenerational community.

While intergenerational communities and extended families have long been the norm in human societies all over the world, U.S. society is pulling the generations apart. Among the many factors contributing to this are individualism, mobility, grandparents living at a distance from their children and grandchildren, age-segregated housing and activities for older adults, and the separation of children and youth by age levels and grades in education and activities.

Religious congregations are among the very few settings in our society where three or more generations gather for intentional activities, such as Sunday worship. Yet even in churches, children, youth, and adults are segregated by age from the rest of the community for many, if not most, of their activities. Educational programs are organized into learning groups or classes organized by age group or grade level. In a typical congregation today a child can be involved in Christian education programs from first grade through high school and never have the opportunity to meet and learn with other generations in the faith community—to the detriment of the individual and the other generations in the congregation. In some congregations children and youth are even separated for worship. In these congregations there are few, if any, settings for intergenerational learning and relationship-building. Is it any wonder that teenagers leave the church in their high school years? They have never had the opportunity to develop intergenerational relationships and develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the faith community. Teenagers don't leave the church; the church and teens were never introduced!

Age-specific and intergenerational faith formation are not either-or choices; they are complementary. Lifelong faith formation balances age-specific and intergenerational programs, activities, and strategies. Throughout the lifecycle there is a need for age groups (and interest-centered groups) to

gather because of age-related differences in development and age-related learning needs. Each congregation needs to determine the balance that is appropriate.

Approaches for Enhancing Intergenerational Relationships

There are dozens of ways that churches today are moving toward an intergenerational future, while still incorporating age-specific and interest-centered ministries and programming. In her article, "Breaking Down the Age Barriers," Amy Hanson (2008) reflects on the research she conducted on innovative churches across the U.S. She found that innovative churches are intentionally building multi-generational ministries into the fabric of their church culture. Some of the methods that she found to be effective included:

- Creating natural ways for the generations to serve together.
- Honoring older adults by asking them to tell their stories.
- Educating the church body on the value of intergenerational ministry.
- Finding ways to make the worship service multi-generational.
- Encouraging affinity groups, rather than age groups, as a way for people to connect.
- Hosting strategic intergenerational events.
- Matching young people with older adults in mentoring relationships. (Hanson, 3)

There many ways for churches to enhance intergenerational relationships that will promote lifelong faith formation. These practices are already being implemented in one form or another in Christian churches today and provide a starting part of a

congregation to develop its own customized plan.

Building Intergenerational Relationships throughout Church Life

Congregations can build intergenerational relationships by adjusting existing ministries and programs, and by creating new opportunities for intergenerational connections. Here are a few examples.

- Integrating intergenerational programming into age-group programming, such as quarterly intergenerational gatherings as part of the children's faith formation.
- Structuring age-group programs with an intergenerational connection, such as an educational program that includes interviews, panels, and storytelling with people of different generations.
- Incorporating intergenerational dialogues into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions. And then *reversing* the process and providing opportunities for the older adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Developing mentoring relationships between children/youth and adults, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvements, and confirmation mentors.
- Linking people of different generations (older-to-younger or younger-to-older) in the church who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to

the other, such as mid life and older adults helping young adults and new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.

- Involving the community in praying for each generation, e.g., when young people leave on a mission trip or retreat weekend or when people celebrate a milestone, such as the birth of a child, a marriage, a graduation, and a retirement.
- Developing specific roles for the younger generations in church leadership, such as adolescents serving as teachers in children's faith formation or as worship leaders.
- Organizing a leadership or ministry apprenticeship for younger generations to serve in church ministries and leadership positions.
- Sponsoring music and art projects such as a community concert where musicians of all ages perform together, or an intergenerational art exchange or exhibit, or an Advent or Lent music festival.
- Organizing social and recreational activities that build intergenerational relationships, such as an intergenerational Olympics, a Friday night simple meal during Lent, or a summer film festival (maybe outdoors on a large screen).

Developing Intergenerational Learning

Congregations are becoming intentionally intergenerational by incorporating intergenerational learning into their lifelong faith formation plan. Intergenerational learning provides a way to educate the whole community, bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other. Intergenerational learning integrates learning, building community, sharing faith, praying,

celebrating, and practicing faith. The key point is that everyone is learning together— young and old, single and married, families with children and empty-nest families. And it involves the whole family in a shared learning experience.

Churches tend to implement intergenerational learning in one of two approaches: 1) as their core faith formation program for all ages, supplemented by age-specific and affinity group faith formation models, or 2) as one element in their lifelong approach with age-specific and affinity group learning.

In the first approach churches make the intergenerational learning program their core faith formation program for all ages usually conducting monthly intergenerational programs as their core experience, and then offering a variety of age-group or affinity-group programs throughout the month. They have replaced or modified their age group programming, such as Sunday School, to place an emphasis on all ages learning together. They develop a multi-year curriculum for the whole community that can include themes from the Bible, the cycle of Sunday lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, Christian practices, service and social justice, prayer and spiritual disciplines, core Christian beliefs, and moral teachings.

In the second approach intergenerational learning can take a variety of forms, such as an all-ages workshop, a whole-congregation Bible study, all ages conversations after Sunday worship focused on the scripture readings and sermon. Churches have also added an intergenerational learning component to a vacation Bible school or summer program. They take the theme from the summer program and offer an intergenerational program on that same theme for the whole community, engaging the parents and grandparents in learning around the same content as the children have experienced. Churches also use intergenerational learning to prepare the community for a new liturgical year and the

lectionary readings, for particular church year feasts and seasons (Advent-Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost), and for church-wide events, such as Stewardship Sunday.

One model of intergenerational learning being used by hundreds of churches across the United States begins with an All Ages Learning Experience (intergenerational); moves to an In-Depth Learning Experience (age-specific or intergenerational) taught in one of three formats: age group, whole group or learning activity centers; and concludes by Sharing Learning Reflections and Preparing for Practice (intergenerational).

1. Gathering and Opening Prayer
2. All-Ages Learning Experience. Intergenerational learning begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together.
3. In-Depth Learning Experience. Through structured learning activities each generation—families with children, adolescents, and adults—explores the biblical and theological understanding of the topic, using one of three possible formats:
 - The *Age Group Format* provides parallel, age-appropriate learning for groups at the same time. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic—utilizing specific learning activities that are designed for their life cycle stage: families with children or children alone, adolescents, young adults, and adults.
 - The *Whole Group Format* provides a series of facilitated learning activities for everyone at the same time using intergenerational or age-specific small groups or table groups.
 - The *Learning Activity Center Format* provides structured

intergenerational and age-specific learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area.

4. Sharing Learning Reflections and Application. In intergenerational groups participants share what they learned and prepare for applying their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or online.
5. Closing Prayer Service

For more on intergenerational learning see *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners* by John Roberto (Twenty-Third Publications, 2006), and *Intergenerational Faith Formation* by Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber (Twenty-Third Publications, 2008). For articles on intergenerational learning go to www.LifelongFaith.com, “Intergenerational Faith Formation.”

Utilizing Milestones throughout Life

Milestones are significant moments in life’s journey that provide the opportunity for people of all ages to experience God’s love, and grow in faith through sacred and ordinary events both in the life of the congregation and in daily life. Faith formation around milestones, sacramental celebrations, and life transitions provides another way that congregations can be intentionally intergenerational—engaging the whole community in the celebration of the milestone, promoting the spiritual and faith growth of all ages, enhancing family faith practice at home, and strengthening people’s engagement in the church community.

Congregational milestones include: baptism, welcoming young children to worship, first communion, presentation of Bibles, confirmation, marriage, a funeral, sending people on mission trips, and much more. *Lifecycle milestones* include: entering a new stage of schooling, graduations (middle

school, high school, college, or graduate school), getting a driver’s license, leaving home for college or the military, first home or apartment, new career or job, moving, retirement, death of a family member, and much more. *Annual milestones* include birthdays, anniversaries, start of the school year (e.g. blessing backpacks), seasons of the church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week), and much more.

Each milestone incorporates intergenerational components at home and church: 1) a ritual celebration or a blessing marking the milestone with the whole church community; 2) a home ritual celebration or blessing marking the milestone; 3) a learning program, for the individual and the family, that prepares them for the milestone and its significance for their life and faith; 4) a tangible, visible reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, given by the church community; and 5) people and resources to support continuing faith growth and practice after the milestone.

For resources on milestones faith formation see *Milestones Ministry Manual for Home and Congregation* (Vibrant Faith Ministries, 2007), *Faith Stepping Stones* (Faith Inkubators, www.faithink.org), *Milestones of Faith* by Laura Keeley and Robert J. Keeley (Faith Alive 2009), and *Shift* by Brian Haynes (Group, 2009).

Creating Intergenerational Service

Intergenerational service provides many benefits to individuals, families, and the whole church community. Intergenerational service helps narrow the generation gap between older and younger church members; recognizes that all people in the church, regardless of age, have talents to contribute that are valuable and important; assists children and youth in feeling a part of the church today, not just the church of tomorrow; connects the generations and builds relationships as they serve God by serving their neighbor; communicates that it

is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of age, to serve people and work for justice as a follower Jesus Christ.

Churches can incorporate inter-generational service into existing service projects and activities *and* create intergenerational versions of an existing program. Almost any service project can become intergenerational. For example:

- Offering mission trips for adults and young people.
- Connecting youth with adults in the church who already preparing and serving meals at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Engaging children, parents, and older adults in collecting and delivering food baskets, school kits for children, “personal essentials” for those at a homeless shelter, toys at Christmas, gift packages for prisoners, and so on.
- Involving families in caring for the elderly by visiting them at a convalescent home or senior citizen facility or doing chores and shopping.
- Supporting efforts to provide vaccines and medical care to the world’s poor, such as mosquito nets for malaria prevention and immunizations against childhood disease.
- Conducting a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to a) support the efforts of local and national groups who work directly with the poor, b) adopt a community in another country by supporting them financially and learning about their culture and community life, or c) support organizations that are building schools and libraries for children in the poorest countries of the world by providing books and/or our money to purchase books for children.
- Developing intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life,

promote human dignity, preserve God’s creation, and build peace by 1) becoming familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people’s basic needs, 2) writing advocacy letters or emails, 3) working with advocacy groups, and/or 4) working with organizations that are changing the structures that promote injustice.

- Holding a fair trade festival to provide a way for people to buy fair trade products, such as coffee, chocolate, and crafts, that benefit local producers in the developing world.
- Sponsoring a community-wide “care for the environment day” by planting trees and cleaning-up the community

Churches can mobilize the whole faith community through an annual church-wide justice and service project. An example of this type of church-wide involvement is *Faith in Action Day* sponsored by World Vision and Outreach, Inc. It is a four-week, church-wide campaign that culminates in a Sunday where the entire congregation engages in service projects in and with the community (see www.putyourfaithinaction.org). Churches can select a local and/or global project already developed by a justice or service organization. Then develop an annual theme, such as poverty, care for creation, peacemaking. Prepare the whole community for the service engagement, utilizing the resources developed by the partner organizations: 1) worship and prayer experiences focused on the particular theme or project; 2) educational sessions including social analysis of the issues and reflection on the teachings of Scripture and the Christian tradition; 3) household activities on the theme or project: prayers, learning resources, action suggestions; 4) a website with the resources, activities, action projects, and features to allow people to share what they are doing; and 5) special presentations by experts on the issues and by people engaged in action on the issue.

Being Intergenerational Makes a Difference

In my work and research on intergenerational faith formation I have discovered the power that it has to renew and enliven a faith community. For six years I developed and coordinated the Generations of Faith Project, a service of the Center for Ministry Development and a Lilly Endowment funded project. At the conclusion of the project we conducted a qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (survey) research study to determine what effects intergenerational faith formation was having on the participants, the church leaders, and the whole community. Over 400 Catholic parishes responded, out of the close to 1,000 parishes who participated in the Generations of Faith Project. We found many hopeful signs in the churches that were making intentional intergenerational learning a centerpiece of their lifelong faith formation efforts. (The results of the study are available on my website, www.LifelongFaith.com under “Intergenerational Faith Formation.”)

We discovered that the practice of intergenerational learning strengthens and creates new relationships and increases participation in church life. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational relationships were created as people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together.
- Intergenerational learning strengthened the faith community through relationship building and participation in church life; people took time to talk and share with each other.
- Participation in intergenerational learning led to greater involvement in church life, including Sunday liturgy, church events, and church ministries.

We discovered that intergenerational learning did, in fact, bring together people of

all ages, including families, for learning. In particular many churches found that parents and adults began participating in faith formation because of intergenerational learning. Specifically the study found:

- There was involvement of all ages and generations in learning together: parents and children, teens, young adults, adults, older adults, and whole families.
- Intergenerational learning addressed a hunger that adults have to learn more about their faith and fill in the gaps in their formation. More middle-age and older adults were participating in faith formation.
- Families enjoyed opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families were growing in the ways that they share faith. Parents were participating in a learning program with their children, often for the first time, and finding benefits in learning together as a family.

We discovered that intergenerational learning created a learning environment—one of warmth, trust, acceptance, and care—conducive to all ages, and promoted group participation, activities, and discussion. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational learning created an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.
- Intergenerational learning engaged the participants in a variety of learning activities that were experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive. It fostered all-ages learning, as well addressing the developmental needs and abilities of the different age groups. Faith sharing and personal experience were an important element of intergenerational learning.

- Intergenerational learning was exciting; the enthusiasm, joy, and energy were attractive and contagious.

We discovered that the practice of intergenerational learning required a diversity of leadership who practiced a *collaborative* and *empowering* style of leadership. This style of leadership needed to be exercised not just by the pastor or faith formation coordinator, but by the entire leadership team. Intergeneration learning required committed volunteer leaders who were engaged in a variety of roles in lifelong faith formation: planning, teaching, organizing, and supporting. Teamwork and collaboration were essential for the effective planning and implementation of intergenerational learning.

It is clear to me that living as an *intentionally* intergenerational Christian community brings great blessings and benefits to everyone. Being intergenerational makes a difference!

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Bringing the Generations Together: Support from Learning Theory

Holly Catterton Allen

During the last 100 years, steady changes have occurred in society that have separated families and segregated age groups, not only in educational settings, but also in life in general. These changes include the universality of age-graded public education, the geographical mobility of families, the movement from extended to nuclear family, the rise of divorce and single-parent families, and the prevalence of retirement and nursing homes for older persons and preschools for the young.

Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents — all generations — come together on a regular interacting basis. Yet, the societal trend toward age segregation has moved into churches also. Though church leaders endorse intergenerational approaches in theory, in practice American mainline and evangelical churches generally conduct many of their services and activities (worship, Sunday school, fellowship, outreach, etc.) in age-segregated settings. Consequently, children are rarely with teens or adults in religious settings, and certainly not on a regular basis. Separating children by age may seem efficacious, practical, and desirable, especially when excellent children's programs are offered to complement the adult activities and services. However, as this age-segregating trend developed over the last few decades, religious educationists such as Nelson, Westerhoff, White, and Fowler began to question the validity of the practice.

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Consequently, children are rarely with teens or adults in religious settings, and certainly not on a regular basis. Separating children by age may seem efficacious, practical, and desirable, especially when excellent children's programs are offered to complement the adult activities and services. However, as this age-segregating trend developed over the last few decades, religious educationists such as Nelson, Westerhoff, White, and Fowler began to question the validity of the practice.

Some scholars (e.g., Harkness, Prest, Stonehouse) are now offering biblical, theological, educational, and even developmental support for the idea that all ages should be together often.¹ These scholars believe that faith and spiritual development are especially nurtured as children participate with adults in teaching/learning/worshiping settings. They do not argue that age-segregated grouping is harmful; rather they contend that regular intergenerational religious experiences should complement other age-grouped religious activities for optimal spiritual growth and development. Though the conceptual arguments for such cross-generational practices seem educationally and biblically strong, two problems emerge: little empirical research exists to support the claims, and no all-encompassing learning macrotheory has been proposed that explicates the value of intergenerational learning. In other words, is there any evidence to suggest that intergenerational religious experiences are especially beneficial for faith and spiritual development in children? And, if so, *why* might intergenerational religious experiences contribute significantly to children's faith journeys?

The primary purpose of this article is to address the second problem/question—the theory issue. However, before learning theory is discussed, the following background information will be offered: (a) a short definitional section concerning intergenerational concepts, (b) an overview of existing research that examines the effects of intergenerational Christian experiences, and (c) a brief treatment of the scriptural support for intergenerational community.

Intergenerational Concepts

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, several prominent religious educationists were asserting the importance of the whole believing community to the growth of faith in children. Though the term *intergenerational* was not widely used, Nelson's "community of believers," Westerhoff's "faith enculturation," Moran's "interplay across the generations," and Fowler's "church as an ecology of faith nurture" were ways of saying that cross-generational experiences

within the community of faith, the church, are crucial to faith and spiritual development in children—and adults.

Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents—all generations—come together on a regular interacting basis.

By the 1980s the term *intergenerational religious education*, or IGRE, was the general term for bringing the generations together. James White, in his 1988 book entitled *Intergenerational Religious Education*, defines IGRE as "two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common-experiences, parallel-learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive-sharing" (18). Though the E in IGRE stands for *education*, White really uses the word far more broadly than it is typically understood. The word *experiences* would connote White's meaning more accurately—that is, intergenerational religious *experiences*, not *education* in the more narrow classroom sense.

More recently, and in explicitly Christian research, the term *intergenerational Christian education* [or *experiences*], or IGCE, is being utilized. The general idea (of IGCE or IGRE) is that children, teenagers, and adults (young, middle, and older adults, both single and married) gather in settings where all members give and receive from each other. All ages can participate actively in prayer and worship, and, in some settings, share spiritual insights, read Scripture, and minister to one other. Another current phrase that describes this concept in general is James Gambone's "intentional intergenerational ministry" or IIM.

IGCE stands in contrast to the typical way "church is done" in the contemporary American context. For example, in formal worship experiences, children, teens, young adults, and women are rarely heard from. Activities of the church are often age-group oriented; consequently, children seldom hear older children or "lay" adults express spiritual thoughts, and adults rarely hear the spiritual insights of children. Even Sunday school classes, whether they follow the typical educational model (teacher-centered, content-oriented) or have adopted more contemporary educational approaches such as discovery learning, active participation, and cooperative learning, tend to be age-segregated.

IGCE calls for more common learning experiences involving mixed age groups.

Recent Research Concerning IGCE

Intergenerational Christian experiences have been studied in a variety of settings, though most of the research offers primarily soft data. Anecdotal and observational data is quite supportive and encouraging: people seem to enjoy IG religious education; after they experience it, they seem to like being in age-inclusive settings; they like interrelating with each other; and intergenerational friendships develop (Chesto, Marr, White). IGRE events seem “to draw the people of a church closer together” (Marr, 201).

A few studies also offer empirical support. Chesto describes a program involving 72 families in her Catholic diocese who used Chesto’s intergenerational curriculum. Most of the families (67 out of 72) returned the evaluative surveys, offering generally positive comments, including phrases such as “it helps families to pray together, to share with other people, to be more open, to grow,” and “the children become more comfortable expressing their feelings about God and they see their parents doing so” (75). White collected pre- and post-data on the IGRE programs that he conducted for nine summers in a large mainline Christian denomination, reporting increased attendance and improvement in biblical knowledge.

For my dissertation, I interviewed children in Christian families in two settings: children who participate regularly in intergenerational settings (they worship with their parents and attend an intergenerational small group at least twice a month) and children who have no regular opportunity to be in intergenerational Christian settings (they regularly attend Sunday school and children’s church during adult worship, but do not participate in an intergenerational small group).² In general, though both groups of children gave eloquent testimony to their relationships with God, the children in the intergenerational sample were more aware of their relationship with God, that is, they spoke more often and more reciprocally of that relationship than did the children in the non-intergenerational sample. Other researchers around the country and the world are continuing the efforts to explore the impact of IGCE on both children and adults.

Biblical Support for Intergenerational Community

In Scripture, coming to know God is typically presented as a family- and community-based process. God’s directives for his people in the Old Testament clearly identify the Israelites as a relational community where the children were to grow up participating in the culture they were becoming. In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, and absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging. The directives for feasts and celebrations illustrate this point best. These commanded festivals were celebrated annually and included elaborate meals, dancing, music, singing, and sacrifices. All of Israel participated, from the youngest to the oldest.

These festivals included Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Booths, and the Feast of Trumpets.³ The purpose of these festivals was to remind the Israelites of who they were, who God was, and what God had done for these, his people, in ages past. As children and teens danced, sang, ate, listened to the stories, and asked questions, they came to know who they were and who they were to be.

Emerging from its Jewish heritage, the early church was a multigenerational entity. All generations met together, worshiping, breaking bread, praying together, and ministering to one another in the context of the home (Acts 2:46–47; 4:32–35; 16:31–34). Besides meeting with parents and others in house churches, children were clearly present in other spiritual settings. In Acts 16:15, Lydia was baptized “with all her household,” and in Acts 16:33, the jailer was baptized “with his whole family.” Also in Acts is the story of the youth, Eutychus, who, while listening to Paul preach until midnight, fell out of a window (Acts 20:7–12). Luke also reports that children accompanied those bidding farewell to Paul as he boarded a ship at Tyre (Acts 21: 5–6).

These explicit intergenerational concepts in Scripture clarify that religious community as described in the Bible included the idea that children were actually present. Intergenerational community was apparently the norm for Jewish children and for Christian children of the first century. This intergenerational emphasis elicits the question: Have educational psychologists or pedagogical theorists explored the learning principles that might explain the importance of such an emphasis? The primary focus of this article is to examine the biblical idea of IGCE from the field of educational psychology and

specifically to explore the situative/sociocultural perspective as a cohesive, illuminating learning macrotheory for the concept of church as a relational intergenerational community where Christians grow and learn.

A Learning Macrotheory for Intergenerational Christian Experiences

Intergenerational religious education (IGRE), or intergenerational Christian experience (IGCE), has been a practice in search of a theory. At this point, those who extol the benefits of IGCE (e.g., Harkness, Stonehouse, White) ground their (extra-biblical) theory in the work of social scientists such as G. H. Mead, Margaret Mead, and Erik Erikson, developmentalists such as Jean Piaget and James Fowler, and religious educationists such as John Westerhoff, III, Donald Miller, Ellis Nelson, and James Michael Lee. Yet, no broad undergirding learning macrotheory for IGCE has been proposed, even in White's book, *Intergenerational Religious Education*. White says he offers only a "first draft for the missing systematic theoretical base" (91).

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory

In my dissertation, I proposed the situative/sociocultural perspective as introduced by Lev Vygotsky and developed and elaborated by contemporary educational psychologists and social scientists to explain the basic learning principles at work in an intergenerational Christian community. The situative/sociocultural perspective brings the work of the earlier-mentioned social scientists, developmentalists, and religious educationists under the umbrella of this broader learning macrotheory.

The situative/sociocultural perspective on knowing and learning focuses on the way knowledge is distributed among individuals in a social group, the tools and methods that they use, and the practices in which they participate (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick). Lev Vygotsky is the best-known theorist in this category (though Jerome Bruner shifted from the cognitive to the social cognitive—sociocultural—over his career). This theory places a stronger emphasis on the social interaction of the learning environment than do cognitivist and behaviorist theories,⁴ and promotes the idea that the social setting itself is crucial to the learning process.

Intergenerational community was apparently the norm for Jewish children and for Christian children of the first century.

Lev Vygotsky was born in Byelorussia in November 1896 to middle-class Jewish parents. He graduated with a law degree from Moscow University in 1917 and studied history and philosophy at Shanyansky's Popular University just before the Bolshevik revolution. He began teaching at Moscow University's Psychological Institute in 1924 and wrote and taught in the area of psychology, human development, and learning over the next 10 years. He died of tuberculosis in 1934 at the age of 37. During those 10 years (1924–1934), Vygotsky authored approximately 200 papers, most of which have only recently been published in English.

After Vygotsky's death, his work was suppressed during Stalin's reign. His works began to be published in the 1950s in Russia, but only in 1978 with the publication of his works in English has Vygotsky's thought begun to widely impact educational thought and practice in the West.

During Vygotsky's era, psychologists were divided on the issue of human development and learning into two basic camps—either behaviorist or cognitivist. Vygotsky initially identified more closely with the behaviorist view but was also in contact with Piaget and those from the cognitivist camp. He eventually rejected both theories. Rieber and Carton explain it best: "Vygotsky argued that [psychological processes] have their source not in biological structures or the learning of the isolated individual but in historically developed *socio-cultural experience* [italics added]" (19). Vygotsky came to believe that for persons to learn concepts, they must experience them and socially negotiate their meaning in authentic, complex learning environments.

A key concept crucial to understanding Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Actually, Vygotsky describes three zones of developmental activity:

- **Zone of Actual Development:** Where the student *actually* is developmentally
- **Zone of Potential Development:** Where the student *potentially* should be developmentally
- **Zone of Proximal Development:** The amount of assistance required for a student to move from the Zone of Actual Development to the Zone of Potential Development. (Estep, 15)

When a young person collaborates with a more competent peer or adult, the distance between the student's actual development level and the level of potential for development determines the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky says that most learning happens in this zone.

Wertsch and Rogoff have conceptualized the ZPD as:

that phase in development in which the child has only partially mastered a task but can participate in its execution with the assistance and supervision of an adult or more capable peer. Thus, the zone of proximal development is a dynamic region of sensitivity in learning the skills of culture, in which children develop through participation . . . with more experienced members of the culture. (1)

Vygotsky developed the ZPD partially in protest to the growing concept of IQ testing. Vygotsky (1978) recognizes that "when we determine a child's mental age by using tests, we are almost always dealing with the actual developmental level" (85). He points out the obvious—that teaching a child at this level would be unnecessary since the child had already mastered this level of functioning. He proposes that "what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (85).

Vygotsky illustrated these concepts with an example from current educational practice of his day. Since it had been found that mentally retarded children were not very capable of abstract thinking, the special schools had decided to teach these children utilizing only concrete, "look-and-do" methods. But after a time it was found that this approach not only did not help these children advance, it actually reinforced their handicaps. Vygotsky (1978) comments:

Precisely because retarded children, when left to themselves, will never achieve well-elaborated forms of abstract thought the school should make every effort to . . . develop in them what is intrinsically lacking in their own development. (89)

Vygotsky continues:

Similarly in normal children learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of a child's overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process

but rather lags behind this process. Thus, the notion of a zone of proximal development enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only "good learning" is that which is in advance of development. (89)

And, for Vygotsky, this type of "good learning" requires a more capable peer or adult to happen.

In other words, the concept of ZPD is the idea that when a person is ready to learn the next thing, the best way to learn it is to be with those who are just ahead on the learning journey. This concept is not a new one, though perhaps it has not been well articulated in educational terms. Mothers of several children know ZPD as the "potty-training phenomenon:" the first-born child is the most difficult to potty train—the next child learns from the first and so on.

ZPD is a key idea in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky would say that persons learn to be members of their community as they actively participate in that particular identified social community, learning alongside those who are further ahead in the journey. Intergenerational Christian settings are authentic, complex learning environments, made up of individuals at various stages in their Christian journey, teaching some, learning from others, as they participate in their community of believers.

Situated Learning

An article on situated cognition by Brown, Collins, and Davidson is one of the seminal articles quoted in sociocultural learning literature. Brown et al. contend that those who study the learning process often ignore the influence of the social context on what is learned. This article on situated cognition addresses directly the school context rather than the church context; however, the transfer can easily be made. Brown et al. assert that knowledge is always situated; it is in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used. They call this concept "cognitive apprenticeship" (32).

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's work builds and expands on the work of Brown et al. Lave and Wenger, both educational psychologists, looked at what they called "situated activity" (29). In situated activity, learners must be given access to the practices that they are expected to learn and be able to have genuine participation in the activities and concerns of the group. At first, learners are relatively peripheral in the activities of a community, but as they become more experienced and adept, their participation becomes more central. Their participation must be legitimate; that is, they must actually practice the

activities themselves, not just observe or receive instruction about them.

In studying situated activity, Lave and Wenger focused on apprenticeships. They examined five ethnographic studies of specific apprenticeship situations: midwives, tailors, quartermasters, meat cutters, and non-drinking alcoholics. They drew principles from these apprenticeships that apply to other situative learning settings: (a) apprentices are guided and supervised by masters; (b) masters teach by showing the apprentice how to do a task (modeling), and then helping them as they try to do it on their own (coaching and fading); (c) the apprentice derives identity from becoming a part of the community of workers; and (d) productive apprenticeship depends on opportunities for the apprentice to participate legitimately in the activities to be learned.

These situated learning activities do at least two things: (a) they forge a person who now identifies with the community of practice; and (b) they create an environment where “knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artifacts of that practice, and the social organization . . . of the community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 122).

Situative learning approaches fit what those in intergenerational Christian education have been saying for years—to be a Christian one must participate fully in Christian community. If novice midwives and tailors learn best by participating fully with practicing midwives and tailors, then perhaps Christians learn best from participating fully with practicing Christians further along on the journey. IGCE provides continual opportunities for this type of learning to take place.

Situative/Sociocultural Theory and IGCE

This article has examined three aspects of the situative/sociocultural theory that offer a rationale for IGCE as an effective approach: (a) Vygotsky’s premise that persons learn best in *authentic*, complex environments; (b) Vygotsky’s assertion that the best learning happens when children participate with more experienced members of the culture (the Zone of Proximal Development); and (c) Lave and Wenger’s thesis that persons identify with their community of practice as they are allowed to participate legitimately in the activities to be learned.

These situative/sociocultural principles are clearly interrelated, and, more importantly for this article,

can be seen to transfer readily to the concept of Christians learning in intergenerational community. IGCE concepts fit what the situative/socioculturalists are describing:

1. The gathered church is the authentic, complex community being addressed here.
2. In intergenerational settings, children participate with “more experienced members of the culture”—older children, teens, young adults, and older adults.
3. As a child (or a new believer) participates in relational community doing “Christian” things with those further down the road, the child comes to identify with the Christian community.

Intergenerational Christian settings are authentic, complex learning environments, made up of individuals at various stages in their Christian journey, teaching some, learning from others, as they participate in their community of believers.

As loving church leaders diligently seek to build communities of faith that help children come to know God, many are re-evaluating the current common practice of separating the generations for worship, Bible study, and ministry. They are reconsidering the biblical example and looking for guidance in fostering a more intergenerational mindset in their churches.

Implications for Ministry & Education Practice

Most churches already offer occasional intergenerational (IG) activities such as dinners and “fellowships,” church-wide service projects, or annual musicals or cantatas in which children and adults participate together. While these are excellent means of providing IG experiences, the ultimate goal is for churches to become intergenerational in their outlook and practice. This will not happen simply by adding an IG activity occasionally. A paradigm shift will be required, and paradigm shifts must be guided by leaders who understand the issues and communicate well. Suggestions for church leaders who desire to cultivate a more intergenerational outlook could be:

1. Revisit the basic goals or purposes of Christian education/spiritual formation. This discussion generates phrases such as “growth into Christ,” “commitment to Christ,” or “Christian maturity.” The usual questions that follow such a discussion are: “How well are we meeting our goal?” and “What else can we do?” In this case, the question is: “How can an intergenerational approach foster our goal?”
2. Contrast/compare the spiritual needs of adults and children, recognizing ultimately the surprising similarities.
3. Discuss the factors that have led churches to develop age-segregated approaches to church and religious education (e.g., developmental concerns, societal norms).
4. Study the biblical examples of Jewish community life and early house churches, perhaps exploring how children learned in those settings.
5. Share the theoretical support (from this article) for learning socioculturally and intergenerationally (See theories of Vygotsky, Westerhoff, Fowler, Harkness).
6. When it is deemed feasible, begin to re-incorporate children into church life.

This last step would need to be a multi-stage undertaking, beginning at a simple, less disruptive level and moving to more complex levels later as the church begins to recognize the blessing and benefits for the children as well as others in the body.

Intergenerational activities in Christian settings can take a variety of forms. Five promising possibilities are described below.

Including Children in Worship

If children are normally separated during the primary worship service, search for ways to include the children for 15–20 minutes (or more) of praise in the Sunday morning worship on a regular basis (once a month, every fifth Sunday, every other week, or *all the time*). Major religious educationists (e.g., Fowler, Westerhoff recommend this approach as well as IG advocates (e.g., Prest, White). Simply stated, children need to be participating with the significant adults in their life, worshipping God, praying, and listening to the Word.

Special Programs

Another common IG activity is allowing children to be present at such special programs as baptisms, “baby dedication Sunday,” and church-wide

congratulatory celebrations for graduating seniors of the church, retiring ministers, etc.

Intergenerational Events

Some churches may wish to plan one or more events a year that are envisioned, planned, created, and performed by an intergenerational group of people. This could be a Thanksgiving program, a short drama for Easter, a Christmas musical, or some other event that requires time, effort, creativity, brainstorming, and work for a group of people of all ages.

Intergenerational Bible Study

This approach might take a variety of forms, for example, an IG Sunday school class, a whole congregational study, or IG small groups.

A few churches have experimented with intergenerational Sunday school classes, typically focusing on such topics as the fruit of the Spirit or the Beatitudes. Recommendations for a successful IG Sunday school would be to (a) offer it as an option, (b) suggest an age limit (e.g., children seven years and up), (c) limit the study to six to ten weeks, and (d) recruit the most creative and experienced adult and children’s teachers to collaborate in constructing the teaching/learning materials.

At the full congregational level, the church as a whole could focus on a particular biblical concept for worship and teaching. For example, the whole church could study several names of God. Worship could focus here. Testimonies of adults and children who have experienced God as Yahweh Jireh (the Lord our provider) or El Roi (the God who sees) could be shared with everyone together. Banners that depict each name could be created and made by intergenerational groups. Sermons (and the children’s sermon or children’s church) could focus on these names. At the end of the series, cross-generational groups could share the banners or a drama illustrating the names.

Intergenerational Small Groups

A more comprehensive (even radical) approach to IG Christian experience would be forming weekly (or bi-weekly) intergenerational small groups for the purposes of ministry, fellowship, prayer, worship, and/or Bible study. This approach is a church-wide undertaking requiring support of not only the leaders but also the whole church. Because it is so radical, churches may be fearful of such an approach until they begin to see some of the potential benefits of IG

experiences. Though there is an abundance of practical material available on small group approaches in general, few offer suggestions for ways to incorporate children fully. TOUCH Outreach Ministries of Houston, Texas (www.touchusa.org) offers detailed information and support materials for intergenerational small groups.

Once churches begin to think intergenerationally, creative ways to bring the generations together will begin to emerge. One church in the Northwest constructs a large banner each year that depicts symbolically important milestones and spiritual markers of its members, for example, births, baptisms, and marriages. It also records deaths, graduations, and special honors members receive. The banners for the last 12 years hang in the foyer of the church where children (and others) can point to special markers in their lives and the lives of those in their community of believers.

Moving to a more age-inclusive approach is a large undertaking. It will entail more than “simply being in one place and doing the same thing together;” it is “a mindset . . . in which all belong and interact in faith and worship—a communion of believers” (Prest, 22).

Conclusion

Cognitive developmental theory has convinced Christian educators that children learn best with other children their age doing developmentally appropriate activities. And it is true that children may learn *some* things better in this way. The fundamental difficulty is that *spiritual* development is not essentially *cognitive* development. In other words, the way children (and adults) grow in their understanding of math or history is not fundamentally the way they (and we) grow spiritually. Other factors are at work in spiritual development, not all primarily age-specific. Therefore applying cognitive developmental principles to a primarily spiritual enterprise may not, in itself, produce mature members of the Christian community of practice, the church. This principle-to-product dichotomy may explain the fact that the learning environments for children described in Scripture are primarily intergenerational. Perhaps God knew that some things are learned best in authentic, complex communities where children and others participate regularly with more experienced members of the culture.

In addition to the biblical record and growing empirical evidence, this article has proposed a cohesive learning theory to support IGCE. The situative/sociocultural perspective on knowing and

Perhaps God knew that some things are learned best in authentic, complex communities where children and others participate regularly with more experienced members of the culture.

learning explains in a new way the strengths of such an approach.

No better place exists for the most number of people to learn Christian ways from “more experienced members of the culture” than in intergenerational Christian communities. People of all ages and maturity levels are present actively carrying on the very essentials of Christianity. In IG communities, children learn from each other, younger children, older children, teens, and adults. And adults learn from teens and children. All benefit from each other with a sense of mutuality; in essence, they grow each other up into Christ. As Lave and Wenger say, “The *person* has been correspondingly transformed into a practitioner, a newcomer becoming an old-timer, whose changing knowledge, skills, and discourse are part of a developing identity—in short, a member of a community of practice” (122).

End Notes

¹ Harkness, Prest, and Stone-house have made strong cases for the theological, educational, developmental, and spiritual promise of intergenerational religious experience. Harkness marshals evidence from theology, education, and the social sciences that he believes demonstrates that intergenerational strategies can contribute to “the achievement of normative educational goals of faith communities, which . . . integrate the gaining of knowledge, holistic growth to maturity of individual believers, and the development of the corporate Christian community for its mission” (53). More specifically Harkness believes that the evidence he has gathered attests “to the significance of IG [intergenerational] interaction for spiritual formation of both individuals and faith communities” (52). Prest offers a similar opinion: “The optimal spiritual impact upon children will take place in a warm, belonging, caring and concerned interaction with the gathered people of God” (20).

² I interviewed 40 nine-, ten-, and eleven-year old children from six churches in Tennessee and California in 2001–2002. All of the children attended church regularly with their parents. I interviewed children from a cross-section of evangelical churches—two Vineyard churches (one large, one small), one large Baptist church, a large Bible church, a medium-size renewal Presbyterian church, and a large progressive Church of Christ. The purpose of the

dissertation was to explore the connection between intergenerational Christian experiences and spiritual development in children.

³ Passover (Ex. 12; 23:15; 34:18, 25; Lev. 23:5–8; Num. 9:1–14; 28:16–25; Deut. 16:1–8; Ezek. 45:21–24), the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:15–21; Num. 28:26–31; Deut. 16:9–10), the Feast of Booths (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:33–36; Num. 28: 12–39; Deut. 16:13–18), and the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23–25; Num. 29: 1–6).

⁴ Two learning theories dominated the 20th century:
Behaviorist/Empiricist: In the behaviorist/ empiricist view, knowing is an organized collection of associations and skills. Behavioral learning theories have tended to view persons as neutral human animals whose behavior can be controlled through training and manipulation in the form of reinforcement (and lack thereof). Learning can be defined as a change in behavior or performance resulting from experience and practice. (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996)
Cognitive/Rationalist: Around mid-century, some behavioral learning theorists began to shift the definition away from behavior toward a cognitive approach that focuses on what happens inside the mind rather than merely focusing on the outward changes in behavior. Learning came to be defined more as a restructuring of knowledge and a change in understanding. In general, the cognitive/ rationalist perspective is concerned with how persons organize knowledge about their world. It focuses on understanding the individual mind—its abilities or achievements in perceptions, reasoning, and problem solving. (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick)

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Faith Formation across the Generations

Mariette Martineau

Growing up in rural Saskatchewan, I was surrounded by many caring and supportive family and community members of all ages. Though the school we attended had the typical grade-level classrooms, the school's population was small enough that many activities were undertaken together. Being a farming community, most of the families in town lived close to their extended families, so aunts, uncles, grandparents and so on were a weekly if not daily presence in our lives.

On a social level, we often gathered as extended families to share meals and socialize. Church life was a regular part of our intergenerational existence, as well. Our grandparents and parents often had visible leadership roles in the community, lecturing, cantoring, and so on. Church socials were an important place where the generations gathered: young and old all worked together to host the church fall suppers, to prepare funeral lunches for the family of the deceased, and to participate in the seasonal clean-ups and church maintenance. Adults and young people shared easy conversations in the local store, and cheered each other on at the hockey and curling rinks.

Life was not perfect, but relationships between the generations were naturally nurtured and respected. Values were shared, stories were told, and experiences were created together. Though we would never have defined it like this, we were a eucharistic community, diverse yet of one body.

As the parent of three young children, living in our current world, I have to create or seek out opportunities for them to intentionally relate with other generations. Their lives are mostly spent in an age-segregated context, whether in their classrooms at school, in their sports programs, or even in religious education at the church. Like many families of my generation who relocate to find work, my children's grandparents and extended family are far away. And so there are few contexts for them to interact with older or younger generations. They have few teens or adults in their lives who share faith with them, and they often wonder why we as a household are believers.

Before we initiated intergenerational learning in our community, church for them was often perceived as something they were brought to once a week, and where they had little interaction with the people around them. In relation to church, my children often talked about one thing: the intergenerational learning events that they had experienced at our previous church. They often talked of the people they had met there and of the learning they had participated in, and they often expressed a longing to have those experiences again.

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It took a few years of watching and waiting before we were ready to suggest intergenerational learning to our new church. But eventually we did, and it has meant a new awakening for the Christian community as a whole.

Now, once a month, something different happens in our church. Imagine that it is Thursday night at Notre Dame Parish, and people are starting to gather in the hall for the monthly intergenerational learning session. The population resembles a family reunion with a diversity of households gathered. There are whole extended families gathered together—grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, and children. There are single older adults; there are moms and/or dads with one or two children; and there are even a few teenagers and young adults in the group. Everyone sincerely greets one another and seats themselves for a meal. Beyond the Sunday worship experience, it is one of the few times that our congregation intentionally gathers as an intergenerational community. Time is taken to nurture relationships, to pray and worship, and for an in-depth learning experience that engages all the learners.

No one is there as a bystander; all participate actively in the evening's activities. There is even a visitor from a neighboring church attending this evening, because the they are wondering what is going on at Notre Dame. The visitor is skeptical about whether children, youth, and adults can really learn together. It has been so engrained in us that learning can only happen in an age specific context that we have forgotten how natural it was for many of us to live and learn in intergenerational communities.

Over the past ten years, the Center for Ministry Development, where I work, has been working

with Catholic parishes to enable them to see how intergenerational learning is a critical part of lifelong faith formation. We believe that learning in this context is essential to the spiritual health of families, and that it makes a significant contribution to the overall health of the Christian community. Intergenerational learning nurtures important relationships between people of all ages, and it supports and guides members to better practice their faith at home, at work, and at school.

Here are comments from parishes who have practiced intergenerational learning for several years:

and fill in the gaps in their formation. More adults are participating in faith formation.

- ◆ Families are enjoying the opportunities to pray, learn, and be together through intergenerational learning. Families are growing in the ways that they share faith. Intergenerational learning creates an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level. Participants are engaged in a variety of learning activities that are experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive. Sharing faith and

We believe that learning in this context is essential to the spiritual health of families, and that it makes a significant contribution to the overall health of the Christian community. Intergenerational learning nurtures important relationships between parish members of all ages, and it supports and guides members to better practice their faith at home, at work, and at school.

- ◆ Participants are building relationships across all ages as people learn from each other and grow in faith together. Intergenerational learning is strengthening the church community through relationship building and participation in parish life. People take time to talk and share with each other. The entire community is benefiting.
- ◆ Intergenerational learning is addressing the hunger of adults to learn more about their faith

personal experience are an important element of learning.

- ◆ People of all ages are finding ways to use the activities in the home kit [a send-home tool for intergeneration learning] as part of their daily life and home life. Families are beginning to incorporate faith-sharing activities in family life.

(Generations of Faith Project: Summary Report)

Being a Truly Christian Community

I have often wondered how we are able to fully understand the meaning of Christian community when we live in such a divided world. We divide believers and non-believers, we segregate young and old, we distinguish between cultures and languages and needs. In fact, we manage to creatively divide ourselves up at every opportunity. Yet our Christian faith challenges us again and again to witness the hope and possibility of being community in the world. Through the celebration of Eucharist we seek to proclaim that all are welcome, all belong, all are united together through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can serve together, we can heal together, we can pray together, and we can build community together, all because we are of one faith, called to be disciples in every moment of our lives.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “In Christian usage, the word “church” designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. “The Church” is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ’s Body.” (no. 752)

If we believe we are the People of God, we need to embrace the call to relationships that being a people demands. Not just relationships of the same, but relationships of the diverse. It is important for a young

person to try and understand the perspective and stories of an older person. In the simple witnessing of their faith, many a child has softened the heart of the older generation, thus enabling the Spirit to enter. The faithful testimony of a young adult can move young people to re-evaluate their priorities and directions. One isn’t a “people” alone!

evident through all members of the community gathered together to learn and share faith together. Whether it be the joy of a household welcoming a new baby or the witness of faith in an older person whose spouse has just been moved to a nursing home, intergenerational faith formation can be the nurturing place for Christian identity and values, where the long-held faith

Intergenerational learning creates centers of dialogue for exploring faith.

We are not formed or fashioned into a people in isolation. It is only in community, through the grace and power of the Trinity inherent in the whole community that we can be the People of God. The *General Directory for Catechesis* makes it clear: “In giving attention to the individual, it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it” (no. 168).

The nature of intergenerational faith formation stands as a countercultural witness to the consumer-driven society that plants the seeds of need, using “things” to fill the need of relationships, purpose, and meaning. Intergenerational faith formation calls us to remove the blinders of assumption from our eyes and to call forward the best from one another as we explore our call to be disciples of Jesus Christ in today’s world. It provides a setting in which to learn compassion, to learn how to listen, to celebrate the gift of faith in the hope found in others.

Through intergenerational learning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is

traditions of the Christian community are shared.

Our faith formation programs need to provide opportunities for intergenerational learning that includes all ages and generations in the community. This type of learning provides an opportunity to gather the whole community together to learn, pray, celebrate, and share. It has tremendous benefits for the community and for individuals.

Intergenerational faith formation:

- ◆ builds community and meaningful relationships across all the generations in a church
- ◆ provides a setting for each generation to share and learn from the other generations (their faith, stories, wisdom, experience, and knowledge). The parent and grandparent generations pass on the traditions of family and faith to the younger generations, while the younger generations share their faith, energy, and new insights with the parent and grandparent generations.

- ◆ provides an environment where new ways of living one's faith can be practiced
- ◆ provides adult role models for children and youth.
- ◆ promotes understanding of shared values and a common faith, as well as respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life.
- ◆ helps to overcome the age-segregated nature of programs in both our parishes and society.

Intergenerational Learning: Features

Intergenerational learning is much more than different ages learning the same thing at the same time or in the same place. Sometimes called cross-generational learning, it includes intentional opportunities for learners to “cross” their generational boundaries and learn, pray, serve, and be in community with a variety of ages.

Through intentional community building, learners of all ages feel comfortable with one another studying and celebrating the rich traditions of the Christian faith. Intergenerational learning provides opportunities for young and old to teach one another. For example:

- ◆ Scripture takes on a new meaning for the elderly as they listen to a young person's research on the Isaiah passages in preparation for Advent.

- ◆ Children grow in their understanding of discipleship as they listen to their parents or other adults talk about the challenges of being a person of justice.
- ◆ Parents and grandparents pass on traditions of family and faith to the younger generations, while the younger generations inspire others with their energy, enthusiasm, and fresh insights.

Intergenerational learning creates centers of dialogue for exploring faith. Through these conversations we are all nurtured and challenged to live out our baptismal commitments. Cross-generational faith sharing helps us celebrate the presence of God throughout our diverse life experiences. We help one another with our questions, and occasionally offer inspired answers.

Intergenerational learning provides role models and mentors who inspire our hearts so that we can live out our faith to the fullest. How awe-inspiring it is to hear

- ◆ an eight-year-old talk about her plan to help the homeless in her city
- ◆ a thirty-year-old mom share how she seeks to find the face of God in every person she meets as she takes her children to the playground each day
- ◆ a middle-age man share his struggle to find God's presence as he journeyed with his dying wife

- ◆ a seventy-year-old couple talks of their committed love through the sacrament of marriage that they have shared for fifty years.

Intergenerational learning provides opportunities to practice one's faith as each person better learns how to pray, how to read Scripture, and how to relate to people of different ages and cultures. Imagine Christians of all ages practicing together to be church.

Intergenerational Learning: Characteristics

Intergenerational learning incorporates the best of what is important about learning. People of all ages and generations learn best when the learning program engages them experientially, through their heads, hearts, and lifestyles. Students of all ages learn best when their own experiences are honored and respected. Multi-sensory methods to engage the whole person—art, drama, music, dance, storytelling, media, prayer, rituals—are key building blocks for effective intergenerational learning experiences. One need only imagine Jesus, and how he taught through story and images, to realize that learning is broader than lectures and presentations.

Intergenerational learning is enriched through the use of collaborative and group-centered formats for study, inquiry, activities, and sharing. Today's generations of learners are accustomed to interactive learning that actively engages them in the learning process.

Good learning always has real-world application, making the connection between learning and life, and faith and life. When

Cross-generational faith sharing helps us celebrate the presence of God throughout our diverse life experiences. We help one another with our questions, and occasionally offer inspired answers.

learners leave the intergenerational learning sessions they need to be ready to live out their faith in new and renewed ways. Good learning involves more than just receiving content; it also involves integrating that content into daily practice.

Intergenerational Learning: Process

The following learning process, and its many variations, is being used by thousands of churches across North America to design and facilitate intergenerational learning programs.

Part One: Gathering

Registration and Hospitality

Registration may be needed before the learning event takes place in order to determine the number of people who plan on attending. Registration may also be needed as the learners gather for the session to distribute nametags, handouts, home kits, and perhaps collect outstanding fees.

Hospitality is critical toward creating a vibrant learning community. If learners are welcomed warmly, they will more readily participate in the learning program. People learn best in an environment characterized by trust, acceptance, and inquiry. Beyond the gathering, hospitality is critical throughout the entire intergenerational learning experience.

Program Overview

People of all ages like to know how they are going to be spending their time together. As you begin your session, give the learners an overview of the program. Post the agenda on flip chart sheets, use a PowerPoint presentation, or

distribute small pieces of paper for individual learners to carry with them. You may choose to bundle the handouts and take-home materials into a small booklet, placing the program agenda on the front cover.

Group Formation and Community Building

Depending on the learning model or activities chosen, learners are divided into groups: family clusters, intergenerational groups, or age-specific groups. The grouping choices depend on the topic for the session, the physical space, the leadership available, and the number of participants. Community building helps participants feel safe, comfortable, and welcome. Many churches start their learning experiences with a snack or meal.

Opening Prayer Service

The opening prayer service launches the learning experience, as it introduces the theme and roots participants in the community of the Trinity. In some sessions, the opening prayer experience is expanded to serve as the “All-Ages Learning Experience.”

Part Two: All-Ages Learning Experience

The All-Ages Learning Experience provides participants with a multigenerational experience to engage them in the topic of the session. All-ages learning experiences equalize the ages, so that listening to music or singing, watching a dramatic presentation, making an art project, watching a video, hearing a story, participating in a ritual, or praying together are things that different-aged people do at the same time and place, and in a similar manner. Shared experiences are absolutely critical for intergenerational learning.

Part Three. In-Depth Learning Experience

In this, the longest portion of the intergenerational experience (usually about 90 minutes), learning formats are selected according to audience, facilitation, physical space, and topic. A church may use one format one month and a different format the next, depending on the topic being explored. A community may even blend the whole group and age group formats at the same learning session. For example, families with children separate so that the parents have a brief catechetical session on the topic while the children participate in music or crafts related to the topic. The families are then reunited after 15 to 20 minutes to continue to participate in the learning experience together. Here follows an overview of the three learning formats.

Whole Group Format

The Whole Group Format gathers all participants into one large space and guides them through each learning experience at the same time. Imagine a large church hall or adaptable worship space in which tables (preferably round) and chairs have been set up and people of all ages are gathered. Some of the table groups appear to have two or three families working together on a project, some have teenagers or adults working together, and other table groups have people of all ages at them.

At the front or middle of the room is a large-group facilitator (emcee) giving instructions to the groups, and guiding them through the learning experience. Circulating throughout the room are leaders in brightly colored T-shirts assisting the table groups as needed, or who

have been assigned to help facilitate the learning at one of the table groups.

Some of the younger children are participating in the learning experience with their families, while others have chosen to attend the preschool learning option being offered in the vestibule of the church.

The Whole Group Format is a good choice for intergenerational learning when a church has:

- a large physical space with good acoustics and sound system, and appropriate furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large-group facilitator (emcee), capable of providing clear instructions, and able to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of facilitators who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to assign one facilitator to work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time but in different ways in the same space.

Timing is crucial. The various table groups must be able to accomplish the learning tasks in a similar timeframe to prevent some table groups having to wait long periods for other groups to finish.

Age Group Format

The Age Group format provides for three or more separate parallel learning groups to focus on the same topic through the use of learning activities best suited for their learning abilities.

Imagine the learning assembly has just completed their All-Ages Opening Experience and participants are moving into various spaces in the church facility.

Families with preschool children have moved to the carpeted space of the school library for their learning time. Families with school-aged children have moved into one of the church halls for their learning, and the teen and adult groups have also found a comfortable learning space. For the next hour or so all of the learning will take place in these parallel learning groups.

The Age Group Format is a good choice for intergenerational learning when a church has:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning. Some topics are best explored using different activities for different groups.

The number of age groups may vary depending on your total number of participants. The following age groups are recommended. You may decide to have fewer groups—such as putting all teens together, or putting young adults and adults together—if your overall numbers dictate such a choice.

- Three years old and younger: child care
- Four and five year olds, with or without parents: preschool program with one or more teachers
- Parents with children in grades 1-5. We know that parents and children need time to learn together, to learn how to share faith and

talk about faith with one another. Times for parents of teens to learn with their teens should also be offered at varying learning sessions.

- Middle school: grades 6-8
- High school: grades 9-12
- Young adults (single, married couples): 18-39 years old
- Adults: 40 years and older.

Learning Activity Center Format

The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Imagine groups of learning teams, whether they are age-specific or intergenerational, busy at a variety of learning activity centers in the church complex. After a twenty-five minute learning period, the church complex erupts into temporary chaos as the learning groups move from one learning center to the next.

The learning activity center format is a good choice for intergenerational learning when a church has:

- a large physical space where multiple learning centers can be set up without each center being too noisy or distracting for other centers, or a church complex that has multiple meeting or classrooms in which the centers can be hosted
- an adequate number of facilitators to guide the learning at each center, or activities that are simple enough for learners to guide themselves
- a learning focus that lends itself to exploration through a variety of shorter topics that are facilitated through a variety of methods, such as a scripture drama and

discussion, making a project together like an Advent wreath, a video with a response activity, and so on.

Part Four. Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application

This portion of the learning event helps participants share what they've learned with each other, and to discover ways to apply the learning to their lives.

Whole Group Sharing

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each learning group to share some highlights of their in-depth learning experience with the rest of the community. Groups may describe the project or activity they created, give a verbal summary, share a symbol of their learning, offer a dramatic presentation, and so on.

Whole group sharing can be conducted in small groups (e.g., families with children, youth, young adults, adults) sharing their learning activities, or conducted with presentations to the entire learning assembly.

Reflection

Through reflection, participants can integrate what they have learned into their lives. Only then will they experience change and growth.

In the "present," you will ask participants to reflect on their learning experience by responding to simple open-ended sentence, such as "I learned..., I discovered..., I was surprised by..., I was moved by..." After a period of reflection, they share with a partner or table group.

For the "future," you might give participants a postcard in their home kit with same open-ended sentences. After participating in the church event that the learning

session was preparing them for, they fill out the card and drop it in the collection basket. Their learning may be shared anonymously with the whole community through the church bulletin and other means.

Home Application

Participants are given an opportunity to craft a concrete action plan for how they will live out what they have learned. This may be done in a simple format such as a to-do list or a pledge card. The learners are also given, with explanation and guidance as needed, any tools and resources they will need to continue the learning, praying, and serving at home.

Part Five. Closing Prayer Service

The closing prayer service reminds participants what the learning is all about: celebrating and building the kingdom of God. Symbols and responses like pledge cards, prayers of intercession, action plans, and so on can be incorporated into a closing prayer service.

Opportunities for Intergenerational Faith Formation

Use intergenerational learning to prepare for significant happenings in church life. For example, offer an intergenerational learning session on solidarity to prepare the community for Lent, or a session on faithfulness to prepare everyone for the annual blessing of married couples. Offer an intergenerational church-wide retreat, such as a daylong or weekend retreat focused on an event or topic important to your faith community, or an intergenerational vacation Bible school program.

Intergenerational faith formation is integral to our churches as we seek to nurture lifelong faith formation in our communities. The possibilities are endless. What opportunities can you provide for your community to strengthen their call to be the People of God by learning together?

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Ways to Utilize Intergenerational Learning

1. Develop a faith formation curriculum for the whole community using intergenerational faith formation as the primary learning model.

Many churches across the country have adopted intergenerational faith formation as their primary learning model. The intergenerational curriculum becomes the core faith formation curriculum for the whole Christian community, supplemented by age-specific topics for children, teens, and adults. For example, many churches offer monthly intergenerational learning sessions for the whole faith community. They may offer the same intergenerational program several times each month to accommodate the number of people in the church, using different days and times to make it easy for people to participate.

Here is an example of topics for an entire year of intergenerational learning focused on Jesus and discipleship. This example makes clear the intimate connection between faith formation, Sunday worship (with a special focus on the lectionary), and the liturgical seasons.

November-December	Birth of Jesus
January-February	Called to Discipleship
March-April	Death of Jesus
April-May	Resurrection of Jesus
June-Summer	Living as Disciples
September-October	Identity of Jesus

2. Extend a topic or theme being featured in the faith formation program for children or adolescents, to the whole community through intergenerational learning.

A topic that the children are studying can be extended to the whole community through intergenerational learning. For example, if the children are studying about Jesus, consider offering an intergenerational program on the identity of Christ. Schedule it within the same timeframe that the children are studying the unit on Jesus.

If the young people are preparing for a service project or mission trip, use the opportunity to conduct an intergenerational session on Christian service, and get everyone engaged in supporting the teenagers. Intergenerational learning provides a common

learning experience for the whole community that can support age group learning programs. Examine your age group curriculum and look for the opportunities and topics for extending age group learning to the whole community.

3. Replace a topic in the children or adolescent faith formation program with intergenerational learning on the same theme.

Intergenerational learning can provide a different learning model for teaching the same content that would have been taught to the children. For example, replace the children's sessions on prayer with one or more intergenerational sessions on prayer for all members of the community. Children will benefit greatly by learning together with their parents and the other generations of the Christian community.

4. Add intergenerational learning to sacramental preparation and sacramental celebrations.

Sacrament preparation offers a marvelous opportunity to offer intergenerational learning for the whole community and/or the extended family of the one preparing for the sacrament. The celebration of a sacrament, such as baptism or Eucharist, is an opportunity to enrich the faith of the whole community. For example, your church can offer intergenerational learning each year around the celebration of First Communion, focusing on different aspects of the Sunday liturgy within the context of the sacrament. During the Christian initiation formation process (RCIA), intergenerational sessions can be offered on initiation themes, such as the baptism and conversion. In addition, many Catholic parishes conduct intergenerational learning programs to prepare the community for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation in Advent or Lent.

5. Conduct intergenerational faith formation before major church year feasts and seasons, as well as church events.

The church calendar is rich with possibilities for intergenerational learning for the whole community. Conduct intergenerational programs to prepare all generations for major liturgical feasts and seasons, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and

Pentecost, as well as significant events in the life of your church, such as the anniversary of the founding of the church, stewardship Sunday, or a ministries fair. There are dozens of opportunities for preparing the whole community to participate more intentionally and meaningfully in church events.

6. Add intergenerational learning to a vacation Bible school or summer program.

Many churches sponsor summer programs for children. This is another opportunity to add an intergenerational learning program for the whole community. Take a theme from the summer program and offer an intergenerational program on that same theme for families of the children and the whole community. For example, if the focus of the program is being a friend of Jesus, the church can sponsor an intergenerational program on becoming a disciple or living as a disciple.

7. Conduct intergenerational learning around local, national, and international justice issues, events, and action projects.

Justice issues, events, and action projects provide opportunities to engage the whole community in the work of justice and service, as well as learn about the biblical teachings on justice. For example, prepare the community for a justice and service project, such as

helping to feed and clothe the poor in your community, with an intergenerational program on poverty and the needs of the poor. Celebrate the national holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr., by conducting an intergenerational program on racial equality or peace and nonviolence, and then engaging in an action project. Enlist the whole community in supporting the work of national and international organizations by adopting an organizations' project, such as building homes through Habitat for Humanity, and then conducting an intergenerational program on housing and poverty.

8. Sponsor an intergenerational retreat for the whole community.

Many churches conduct a community-wide retreat or mission over several days each year, usually with weekend and evening sessions. This is a great opportunity to enrich the faith of the whole community. Organize your retreat by conducting intergenerational sessions, rather than sessions for individual groups. Develop a focus for the mission, such as following Jesus, or growing in prayer, or what we believe as Christians. Select individual topics for each session of the mission and provide participants with materials to continue the retreat at home.

People of Faith Intergenerational Faith Formation Resources

Six Volumes: Jesus, Creed, Sacraments, Morality, Justice, and Prayer

Developed by the Center for Ministry Development

Authors: John Roberto, Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald

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From Generation to Generation: A Case Study on Factors in the Family and Faith Community Impacting Faith Development

Kathie Amidei

Learning faith, developing faith, living faith, and sharing faith is multidimensional, multifaceted, and sometimes a mysterious process. How faith is handed down from one generation to the next is an inexact and sometimes elusive and unclear process. How does faith develop? How is the gift of faith passed on from one generation to another generation within the context of the family and of the faith community? What roles should the family and the faith community play in socializing children in the ways of faith?

This article describes a single site case study of a Catholic parish in the mid-western United States having a Catholic grade school as well as a family faith formation program for families with children who do not attend the parish school. The study empirically examined factors occurring in the family and faith community which are perceived to impact faith development. The focus was on parents' perceptions of factors affecting family faith formation. Also included in the study were the perceptions and observations of the parish staff and of young adults who had grown up in the parish.

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Part 1. Introduction

The Role of the Parish Community in Faith Formation

In past generations the parish community was the social, moral and spiritual center, the heart of faith life for Catholics in this country. The process of enculturation of faith (catechesis) was championed by the parish and began early through religious instruction occurring most often in the context of Catholic schools. Parishioners were also extensively involved in the local parish church community life which provided a strong dimension of religious formation for the family.

The Role of Parents in Catholic Faith Formation

A sentiment which is echoed in virtually every catechetical document of the Catholic Church holds that “Parents are the primary educators in the faith” (General Directory for Catechesis #255). Today’s parents often are challenged to be effective at this, sometimes due to lack of their own depth of religious education and faith formation or lack of time or possibly a lack of a sense of commitment to the Catholic Church. The American family in the 21st century is often highly scheduled and stretched by time commitments related to work and other activities. The time it takes to cultivate a religious tradition is often in competition with the many activities and pursuits children, teens, and families are engaged in. In past generations, the culture of faith was passed on through time spent in the milieu of the extended family. Today this opportunity for involving extended family as faith educators may be weakened because of physical distance, lack of time or lack of established shared traditions.

The Growing Issues and Challenges of Catechetical Formation

The Catholic Church began to experience a significant challenge to faith formation as the number of students educated in Catholic schools declined. There was an increased need for catechetical ministry for children in Catholic parishes not attending Catholic schools. The Roman Catholic Confraternity for Christian Doctrine (CCD), a movement that dates back to the 1920’s, was established to meet this need. These CCD programs, as well as other traditional religious education programs targeted at educating children apart from the family in the present system of faith formation, depend heavily on volunteers, who most often are well meaning but uneducated in religious content and do not have background or training in education or effective teaching strategies (Strommen & Hardel, 2008). The significance of the issues resulting from the shifts in Catholic education and after-school models of religious education have had a profound effect on the issues of passing on the Catholic faith tradition

As the Church culture has changed, and some might say has weakened, the challenges of those responsible for faith formation in Catholic schools and parish catechetical ministry have increased (D’Antonio et al., 2007). Catechetical approaches, intended to provide supplemental religious formation, rely heavily on strong family involvement. With the changes in American culture in general, and the culture of Catholic parishes specifically, as well as the changes in the contemporary American family the present system of faith formation does not meet current catechetical needs.

These historical and faith cultural developments in the community challenge the catechetical process of passing on faith through religious education and faith formation. And if the other prevailing pathway affecting the transmission of faith generationally is the family, then the shifts of family structures have further challenged the

traditional conduit of the transmission of faith. Instead of supporting the larger religious culture of the Church and being the heart of the stabilizing religious force of formation, the context of family structure does not always reflect or reinforce formation in the Catholic faith.

Need for Further Study of Faith Formation Development

The present generation of catechetical leaders in the Catholic Christian tradition is pondering these circumstances today in light of the present culture and its specific challenges. They are aware the family's involvement in the faith community has declined and the centrality of community life lived out in the local Catholic parish has weakened. This has affected the context for faith formation in both subtle and significant ways.

A problem exists in the lack of actual study or evaluation of the effects of more current approaches that call for a partnership of family and parish community in context of a lifelong faith learning paradigm. While many initiatives are proposed, launched, and even implemented, little study is done in Catholic catechetical ministry to determine if these approaches are cultivating the critical factors that are necessary to exist in the home and in the faith community to foster faith development.

Part 2. The Research Study

Purpose of the Study

This study identified parent and parish staff members' perceptions of factors affecting faith development. The overall research question posited by the study was: *What factors, occurring in the family and in the faith community, are perceived to impact faith development?* This is a unique study because it examined factors affecting faith formation of

school aged children largely from parents' perspectives. The goal of the study was to provide empirical data to parents, religious educators, and parish staffs regarding information generated on the factors that nurture the process of faith formation. It is hoped that this information will assist parents in understanding the importance of their role in their children's faith formation, inform religious educators designing effective education programs, and encourage parish leadership to provide the necessary resources to support faith formation programs.

The Study Site

The site of this study was chosen because of its dedication to lifelong faith formation and commitment to the intentional dedication of family in faith formation through the school and parish family-based catechesis. This faith community was intentional in philosophy, staffing, and budget, fostering faith development in families and a perspective of lifelong faith development. As evidence the parish mission statement cited the commitment of the parish "to lifelong faith formation" and stated in its vision statement this church is a "learning community." The combination of a strong traditional school setting as a context for faith development and the family faith formation model's longevity of over fifteen years (a relatively long period for implementation of this model) offered a unique opportunity for research.

A key element of the parish faith formation program is its school-based program with approximately 200 students in grades K-8. The parish also supports a family-based faith formation program referred to as the "Family Program" primarily for children of parish members who do not attend the school though it is open to all families in the parish. Parents who elect to participate in the family program are considered as primary catechists and partners in the catechetical process and make a greater commitment of their time than is traditionally expected of parents in most

Catholic parishes. The parish provides these families with programs targeted to the developmental age of the children as well as intergenerational catechesis. Children and parents who participate in the family program gather as families and also disperse in age-specific settings to classrooms and halls filling every nook and cranny of the church building for their faith formation sessions following the Sunday 9:00 am Mass or Monday evening sessions.

Description of Faith Formation Programs

The parish had a parish grade school. The school staff consisted of a principal, ten fulltime classroom teachers, and six support staff. The teachers taught religion in the classroom as an academic subject. The school had one class each of 5-year old Kindergarten through Grade 8. There were 130 families in the school having 220 students in the school at the time of the study. This is referred to as the “school program.”

The parish also provided a family faith formation program to approximately 330 families who had over 450 children and adolescents who participated in the “Family Program” at the time of the study. Children participated in the program from age 2, in childcare and, age 3 through grades 11, in age-specific religious education classes as well as intergenerational family faith formation sessions. Parents participated in adult faith formation sessions and in intergenerational activities with their own children. The faith formation department had six fulltime staff and five part-time staff members in 2010 through 2011, the year the research was conducted.

Research Approach

The study approach was a mixed methods case study. The study incorporated a two-phase design in which quantitative data was collected through a survey and analyzed for

dominant themes. These analyses were followed by confirmatory focus groups and individual interviews conducted concurrently. The data from these two methods were analyzed separately. Finally, the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data were compared to achieve greater insight regarding the research question than could be obtained by either type of data alone.

The Faith Development Survey

Quantitative data was collected using a survey which was developed based on existing research of factors identified which impact faith development. The process of developing the survey involved four revisions. Changes were made to improve the format of the survey, clarify the directions and improve the Likert scale used in the survey. The revisions were made and the fourth survey was piloted in a nearby parish in the same geographic area implementing a similar family faith formation program.

The final version of the survey consisted of three parts. In Section One, “Perceptions Regarding Personal Faith Development,” parents were asked to rate, using a 6 point Likert scale, 32 factors that they believe impacted their personal faith development. In Section Two, “Perceptions Regarding Family’s Faith Development,” parents rated 31 factors they believed were impacting the faith development of their family. Of the 31 factors, one factor was rated only by school parents and two factors were only rated by family program parents as was applicable to their circumstance. In Section Three, parents responded to 15 questions regarding demographic information such as the parent’s age and the ages of their children and information regarding their children’s attendance in Catholic school and faith formation programs.

Participants in the Survey

The population that participated in the survey consisted of two groups of parents from the parish. The “school program” group consisted of parents having children attending the parish grade school. The “family program” group included parents participating in the family faith formation program. For analysis purposes, a third group, the “combined population” was created which included the aggregated responses from both groups. Statistical analyses established the reliability and validity of the survey instrument with the school program, family program and combined population groups.

The survey was given online to the parents of children who attended the school program. The school program parents completed 158 surveys for an 85% response rate. Parents who participated in the family program completed the survey in paper and pencil form. Every parent in attendance at one of the faith formation programs on the dates the survey was given participated in the survey for a total of 405 surveys completed. The combined population of school program and family program group members who participated in the survey totaled 563.

Survey Data and Qualitative Data Collection

The data from the surveys was organized into three data sets to facilitate comparison of differences between responses from parents of the school program, those in the family program population and a combined set of both populations. The survey results from these three groups were analyzed by descriptive statistics to learn more about the perceptions of this population.

The qualitative portion of the mixed methods research design incorporated the use of focus groups and interviews. The focus groups and individual interviews were confirmatory in nature and provided an opportunity to follow up on analysis of the

survey data and sought insight into the meaning of the survey results. There were 6 focus groups (5 of parents and 1 of young adults) and 11 individual interviews with parish staff members conducted.

Parent Focus Groups

In this study focus groups were used to elicit confirmatory research regarding data previously collected in the parent surveys. The source material for the confirmatory focus groups was inquiry regarding the factors identified initially in development of the survey and further developed from the statistical data analysis from the survey research.

The focus group members were willing participants chosen from a random stratified selection of parents from the same populations who participated in the faith development survey. Groups consisted of 6 to 8 parents. Guided by a moderator, group members were asked follow up questions based on the information regarding perceptions of faith development derived from the survey phase of the study. The focus groups provided anecdotal data about parents’ perceptions regarding faith development of themselves and their families.

The data derived from the focus groups was recorded, transcribed, coded, and reviewed through a constant comparative method. It was additionally reviewed and by an independent researcher with 95-96% inter-rater agreement.

Staff Interviews

Interviews were a second technique used to gather qualitative data in this study. One-on-one, face to face interviews of about 30 to 40 minutes in length were conducted with 11 parish staff members who minister to the these families. The staff was asked to reflect on their perception of what the parents report as to the significance of the factors from the Faith Development Survey. The information

acquired from staff responses was used to see if the information they expressed was consistent with the results of the parent survey and focus groups. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The comments made by staff members were then coded for common themes based on the original constructs.

Part 3. The Research Findings

The study examined factors perceived to impact both parents’ personal faith development and that of their family. However, this article focuses on reporting and discussing only those responses to survey factors related to parents’ perceptions of factors affecting the family’s faith development which were originally identified in Section Two of the Faith Development Survey.

Statistical analyses of the findings of the factors studied identified no significant differences between the school program and family program parent groups. School parents and family program parents were far more similar than different in their ratings of what factors had the greatest impact on the faith of their families. Therefore, responses from the school and family program parents were combined to form the “Combined Parent Sample.”

Survey Findings on Faith Development

Finding #1. Factors Perceived to Affect Family Faith Development

Table 1 presents the top ranked factors from the combined parent group as having impact on family faith formation. These factors, ranked by both groups as impacting faith development, were further investigated in the confirmatory focus groups and interviews.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Combined School and Family Program Parent’s Perceptions of Factors Impacting their Family’s Faith Development

	Factors Perceived to Impact Family’s Faith Development	Rating (6=highest)
1	Warm loving environment of our home	5.43
2	Adhering to our moral beliefs	5.41
3	The faith of the mother in family	5.18
4	Reliance on faith in crisis or traumatic events	5.15
5	Warm welcoming environment of our church	4.86
6	The faith of the father in family	4.84
7	Attending Mass regularly.	4.83
8	Praying together as a family	4.82
9	Participation in the Sacraments	4.81
10	Sacramental preparation sessions	4.77
11	Sense of belonging to a faith community	4.73
12	Church’s teachings about beliefs and morals	4.71
13	Family discussions about faith	4.70
14	Service opportunities	4.48
15	The faith of a grandparent or extended family member	4.40
16	Social relationships and friendships at church	4.38
17	Personal prayer or meditation of family members	4.34
18	Local spiritual leaders	4.30
19	Participation of a teen in youth ministry	4.15
20	Social opportunities at church like festivals	4.01
21	The physical building of the church	3.95
22	Faith development opportunities like retreats	3.82
23	Sacramentals and symbols in home and church	3.72
24	Music and art at church	3.70
25	Reading Scripture or spiritual or religious material	3.50

26	Spiritual examples such as saints	3.43
27	Private practice of religious devotions	3.11
28	Being a member of a church choir or music ministry	3.03

The ranking of these factors impacting faith development, especially the highest rated factors, were further investigated in the confirmatory focus groups and interviews. The low ranked factor of Scripture was also further explored in the qualitative phase of the data due to the importance that Catholicism places on Scripture and the low ranking it consistently received across all of the parent groups in the quantitative data.

Finding #2. Gender Differences on Perceptions of Impact of Factors Affecting Faith Formation

To explore the question of whether men and women differed in their perceptions of the factors that impacted their personal and family's faith development, descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were conducted on the school parent, family program parent and the combined parent samples. It was revealed that women and men ranked factors similarly. When they differed, women rated factors higher than men. There was one exception, men rated their own impact that is, faith of the father, on family faith development higher than women.

Finding #3. Functions of Age of Children on Family Faith

Analysis was conducted to explore whether parents' perceptions of factors impacting their family's faith development was affected by the age(s) of their children. Results revealed that age(s) of children did, in fact, affect parents' perceptions of certain factors that impacted their faith development. Parents emphasized certain factors statistically, more or less, than

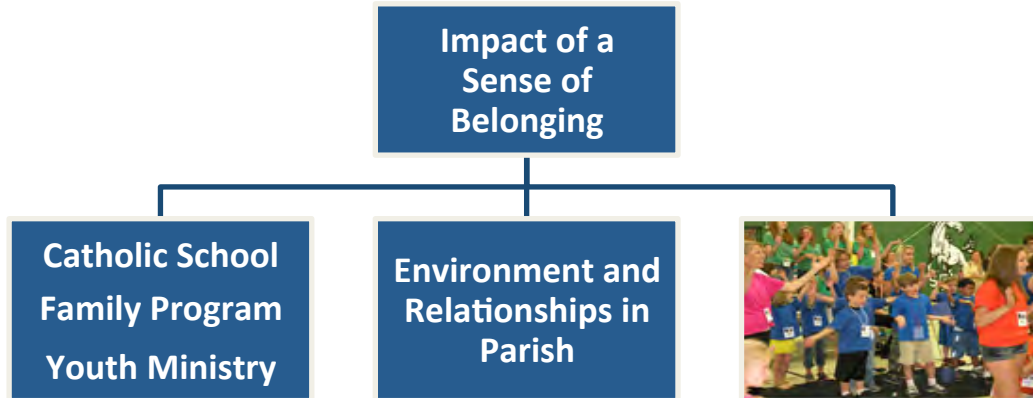
others depending on the ages of their children. Parents of younger children regarded the building of the church, personal prayer, praying together as a family, music and art at church, and intergenerational sessions of family program as more significant. Parents of older children rated the role of service and faith development opportunities such as retreats, as more significant.

Parents of mixed-aged children (having younger and older children), as might be expected, fell between those of with exclusively older or younger children. However, family program parents with older and younger children rated local spiritual leaders in church higher than parents with older children.

Focus Group Findings on Faith Development

Certain findings from the survey data were brought to the confirmatory focus groups to gain more understanding and insight into the meaning of the results from the quantitative data. These discussions revealed more about the perspective of the parents as well as added insights from the young adult group. Responding to the research question, information from the focus group data was organized and five themes evolved, with several sub-themes in each area. The themes identified were related to the research question and offered more information into the inquiry about factors impacting faith development. The themes are identified in Figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The ages are indicated in quotations made by participants from the young adult focus group. Parent ages are not given.

Figure 1: The Impact of a Sense of Belonging



Impact of Sense of Belonging

A dominant theme identified in the focus group data was a sense of belonging that came from the participants' being associated with a micro-community within the larger parish community. The micro-communities discussed were the sense of belonging that came from the school, the family program or the youth ministry community.

We left the church that we were at because of that lack of connection. . . . feeling like you, that sense of belonging, going back to this place that I want to be at. . . . I think that's a huge part. (Joseph)

Don't you think Family Program has really attributed to that. . . ? I mean, I feel like for me and my kids, that really has been the huge factor, that in the summer they miss it, they talk about it. And I don't know if they would talk about missing CCD, or, you know, getting dropped off on a Tuesday night for that hour, I, I don't know. (Amy)

The Family Program. . . . where kids have to work with their parents, learn about certain things. . . . is really useful. It allows the kids to grow with their parents. . . . And I think that's really significant. The other part is of my picture. . . . is the Sunday School where the kids go to school but the parent doesn't get anything. To me, the Family Program, the parents also learn something I think is

very useful. . . . with all of the presentations, [the adult sessions of family program] I still learn something every time. To me, that is, it's good for both, for the kids and for the parents. (Kunta)

When we started Family Program, I fully admit. . . . when I found out that Family Program, meant that the whole family came, I was a little taken aback at first. I had gone to CCD, I had put my time in. . . . I had a little bit of a reservation. However, it's, been a wonderful experience and I wouldn't change it at all. And as a matter of fact, when August rolls around, we're like, "When's Family Program starting? We miss it." (Dan)

Comparing my public school upbringing, to my, children's Catholic school upbringing just brings me to tears. . . . It's just beautiful. They're so, so blessed to have that. . . . I need to pray, I need to thank God, I need to just sit back and think how great everything is. . . . And I don't think, that, if it was just me raising my kids at my public elementary school, that wouldn't be happening. (Mary Pat)

And I think it's kinda, like, at Breakfast Club [the name referred to the youth group of social and service opportunities] and all that it was kinda like, in a sneaky way, we didn't realize we were still practicing faith doing all those things, we thought we were

hanging out with friends. But looking back now, it really, I mean, we did all this stuff, and we were practicing our faith, and maybe didn't even realize it until now. (Emily, 26)

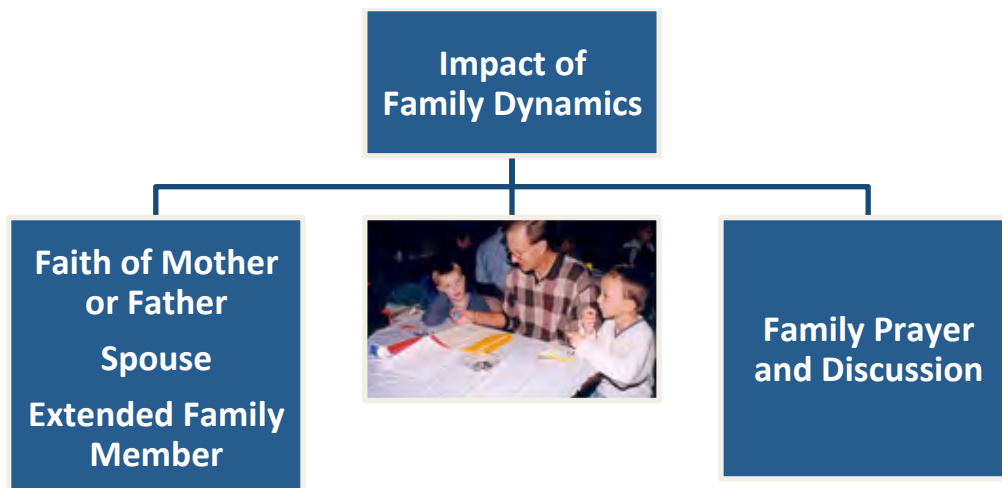
A sense of belonging also resulted from a combination of two related factors, the warm welcoming environment and the relationships that resulted from interaction with the larger parish community.

My daughter said, "I love our church, Mom. It's so homey." I don't even know what it is,

but there's a sense of community, that she feels at home when she walks into this building. (Dawn)

I think, like, relationships at church. . . . you know, a strong church family or a strong parish it's, like, a good foundation to help you. . . . You kinda see how the leaders react in certain situations. And so I think that that helps you kind of look at how you should be reacting. (Betsy, 25)

Figure 2: The Impact of Family Dynamics



The Impact of Family Dynamics

The impact of family dynamics was a second dominant theme rising from the focus group discussions. Parents discussed their influence as parents, the extended family and the home environment on development of faith. Participants identified the family as a nurturing community of love and an originating source of the experience of faith. The family was also described in partnership with the impact the faith community had on their family's faith.

There was some discussion around the faith of the mother and the father and the impact of the faith of one spouse on another in the development of faith, the focus group discussions were more framed by the impact

parents, as an entity, had on faith development. The discussion explored not only the dynamic of relationships within the family on faith but also the dynamics of family activities impacting faith development such as family prayer and discussions of faith in the family. Parents expressed awareness that their example was a powerful factor in their children's faith formation. They also expressed in some cases that, a grandparent's or extended family member's faith had an impact on them personally or on their family.

I think it is because our children learn about the warm and loving God through a warm and loving home. . . . My faith was deepened with each child but it was also that relationship of, wow, how much I love

this child is how much God loves me. And so I think, you know it is kind of related.
(Angie)

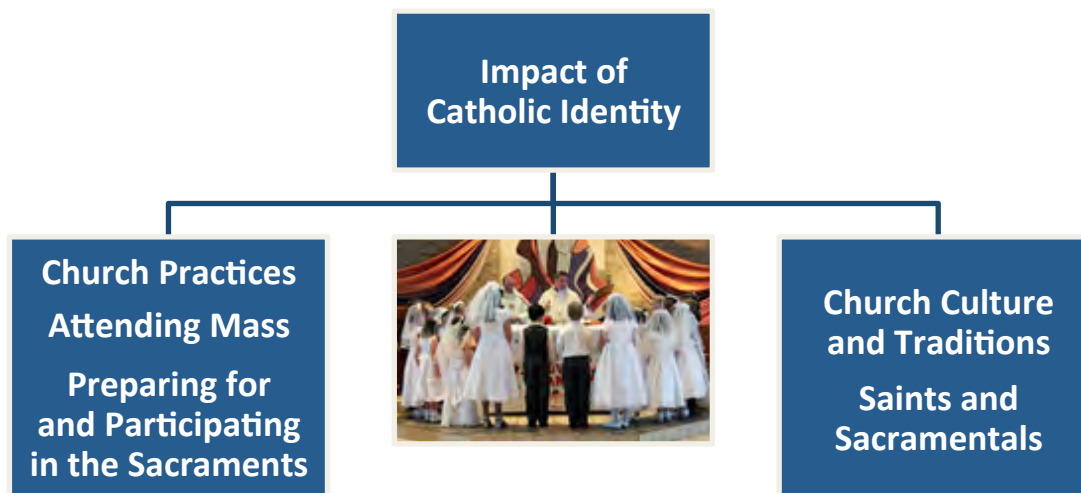
My parents were my role models. . . . My mother is probably going to be a saint. She'll get up to the gates of heaven and Jesus will say, 'Millie!' My mother's a saint. (Peggy)

I think that the faith of a father or a mother, you've gotta walk the talk. And, I mean, if, if

you're faithful, I, I think they'll see that and they'll also follow. They may not know why to follow at first, but as they get older, they, they will realize, and say "Oh, I understand."
(Don)

If you're not introduced to reading and writing, you're not going to know how to read and write. If you're not introduced to faith, you're not going to know what faith is.
(Joe)

Figure 3: The Impact of Catholic Identity



Impact of Catholic Identity

Catholic identity was discussed as a dominant theme by the group participants. They focused mainly on areas of Catholic tradition that they held as significant in impacting their personal and their families' faith development. One dominant sub-theme identified as high in frequency and intensity, in the theme of Catholic identity, was how significantly regular "Mass attendance" was regarded in impacting faith. Apart from the themes of "belonging" and "family" the impact of no other single factor was given the same weight in significance as regular Mass attendance.

Related to this theme was general participation in all of the sacraments. This is consistent with Catholic teaching as the seven sacraments are the most sacred rituals in the Catholic Church. In the sacramental tradition,

the belief is held that through the Sacraments celebrated in the Church, a Catholic experiences God's presence in a significant, holy and real way. This understanding was reflected in some of the focus group discussions.

I think we all agree, in the beginning attending Mass is the key, but it is so much more than that. . . . doing those things is what helps create you- your own relationship with Christ. . . . those things, like opportunities such as retreats and going to church, you see so much more about what the Catholic faith has to offer, that you can be involved in to enhance your relationship with God. (Julie)

If I had to reach out and grab one thing, it would be going to Sunday Mass because that has been such a big, strong part of my

youth and, and the faith that I've passed on to my kids. (Mike)

I think being involved in those things, Mass, prayer, participation in the Sacraments, fosters a sense of belonging. So the weekly Mass, attending Mass, to feel like your church home is another safe place. (a mom)

In the Catholic faith, tradition and ritual is so important. And so for me, number one, just attending Mass every single week, and not like an obligation. . . . to make it that this is what our family does together, you know? That is what helps our children build so when they get to be 20, and they get to decide for themselves whether they're going to go to church while they're at, in college, if they look back and say, well, is this what's familiar and comfortable. . . . that ritual, that tradition of going together as a family is really important as well, and for them to see that it's important to us. We don't go because we have to go, we go because we want to go. We want to all be together here and instill those traditions and values in our family. (Laura)

I don't know how to explain it. . . . it's just, when she [her daughter] said that she was excited to come, doesn't want to miss class,

the Wednesday night Confirmation preparation classes, she just absolutely loves it. (Lisa)

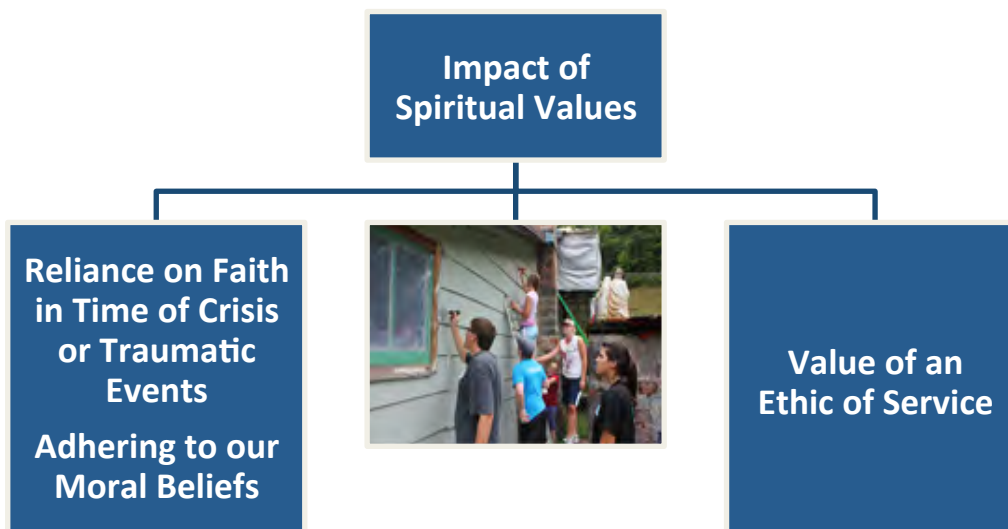
There were various other factors discussed relating to Catholic identity, yet, they were more marginal than central to the discussions. Two topics that seemed to be of interest to parents but they expressed being somewhat vague in their understanding of, were the teachings about saints and sacramentals. They hoped their children were experiencing them as part of the Catholic formation yet they were not totally clear about their place or meaning in the tradition.

I'm wondering how. . . . our children learn kind of where some of our traditions come from. We've got the incense, and the oils, and those are all really cool Catholic things.

And I, I don't know how they got started, and, and, you know, how the tradition all came to be. (Amy)

I don't know much about saints, either. . . . but I would like to learn more about them, because they've – their life experience is amazing. And so I feel like I could learn so much from their hardships and how they encountered them. (Mary Pat)

Figure 4: The Impact of Spiritual Values



Impact of Spiritual Values

The quantitative data revealed the two highest rated factors impacting faith development as “reliance on faith in a traumatic crisis or event” and “adhering to our moral beliefs in important or difficult situations.” Inquiry about the meaning of this finding was followed up on in the focus groups and interviews.

The responses from the focus groups affirmed the value embraced in having faith to rely on, to sustain, and to strengthen them through life, especially in difficult times. The insight into the meaning this held for them was largely shared through storytelling about themselves or others and how faith had been important in certain life situations and circumstances. They did not have far-reaching explanations as to how or why this ability to rely on faith developed and they did not describe extensively how they cultivated this asset in their family values, but in the evaluation of the qualitative data this theme was clearly dominant in frequency of topic and high in their estimate of impact on faith.

Even people who don't think they have a faith, when they suffer a loss, want a faith.

So I think that's one of the things, I mean, that, that's gotta be huge.” (Brenda)

You better have good faith developed before [laughs] or else you're kind of in trouble. . . . You better have worked on it [prayer and a relationship with God] all your life, or at least for a period of time, so when those things happen, you are prepared to deal with it. (a dad)

If you didn't have your faith, I don't think you'd go to God in a traumatic situation. You might go to other, not-so-good vehicles. (Peggy)

You need to practice it. (Sue)

I think not just the relationship with God, but the relationship that you've developed

with the other people in the community that share that relationship with God in their own way. And then in those times, you have those people to lift you up and support you, even if you, you know, because– there are gonna be times when you question and wonder, and if you've got someone backing you, that just helps keep you on the path for your own faith. (a dad)

The second topic, of adhering to moral beliefs, was a second sub-theme of spiritual values. As parents raising children they perceived a clear and direct relationship between this factor of adhering to moral beliefs and cultivating faith in their families to establish a guide for their children in life. They viewed this as important and valuable in aiding them in raising their children.

It's a classic, starting. . . . Well, what would Jesus do in that situation. . . .your kindness is part of your moral beliefs, right? (Brenda)

I would say that we have some people who took this [survey], then, have very strong Catholic moral beliefs and stand by them in a time of need, or decision-making. Which I think is fabulous. Looking at the big picture of our society. . . . when you consider our society, and how so many of our beliefs are not the norm of society. (Jen)

I think without that faith and that morality that you get here, it's hard to make the right choice, especially for kids. . . . the more they see it, the more they feel it in the faith community, the more they can live it, and when they're out in the real world. (Wendy)

We are their first teachers as their parents, and so we need to instill in our own family morals or values and priorities are what they're going to take with them as they grow into their own caring Christians and fully Catholic adults. (Laura)

I mentioned before adhering to the moral beliefs I think is a roadmap for our, our kids. I mean, if you, walk the talk [sic], and you show them how to act moral, you are not only a good example for them, but they understand how they need to behave, and really how they, they really should think and treat other people and how they should treat themselves. So I think it's a huge impact, I think, in our family. (Joel)

Finally, the topic of service to others was initiated by the participants and evaluated as having a powerful impact on faith development for parents and their families. Service opportunities was not ranked high on the questionnaire but seemed to be a more significant factor in many interviews and focus groups. It was identified in the focus groups as a value lived in a Catholic Christian ethic. Repeatedly, parents and young adults praised the community for guiding and facilitating their participation in opportunities to serve as a way to live their faith.

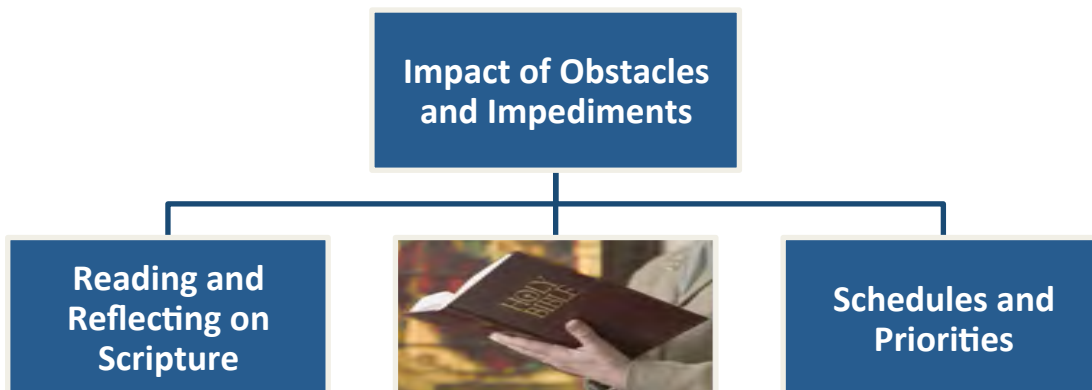
Service opportunities... Because I think it was through the mission trips here at St. Anthony's that as a youth, that really

opened my eyes to other cultures and other ways of life, that then in turn made me make my faith my own. It made me really internalize, what do I believe, and why do I believe that? Why, why are some people given the life that they're given, and why am I given this life? What, where does God fit into that? And I think that's what made me really question who I am and what I believe. (Sam, 23)

Service opportunities was always big in my family, and I notice that I do that a lot with my kids, and then family discussions about faith. . . . was something that we do to this day. (Kim)

I went to Catholic school my whole life, and the retreats that I went on in high school were more meaningful than almost anything. So I think, yeah, I think most of us have younger kids, so as our kids get older, I think, I, I know our family is really looking forward to them going on the mission trips. And we already do as much service as we are able at this point, but. . . . that's all tied in with family values, you know? (Laura)

Figure 5: The Impact of Obstacles and Impediments



The Impact of Obstacles and Impediments

The research question sought to learn more about what factors in the family and in the faith community impact faith development. While not stated explicitly, the study sought to learn more about factors that *positively* impacted faith development. However, in the first phase of the research a factor was identified and confirmed in the qualitative phase, to have unexpected results, that is the impact of Scripture on faith development. This was a significant finding because of the importance of Scripture within the Catholic tradition. Survey results revealed parents rated Scripture low in impact in regard to their personal as well as family's faith development. The low impact parents and young adults perceived Scripture had on their faith was confirmed in the focus groups. Thus, it was revealed as a barrier or impediment to faith development.

My faith was learned by reciting. Tim's [husband] and my knowledge of the Bible is quite shallow because we never grew up reading the Bible. It just wasn't part of how we learned our faith. It was never stressed growing up. (Laura)

Reading your Bible and then talking about it. We don't certainly do that at home. . . . we get the little devotionals for the kids, and maybe a few nights we'll try that, but now it's been sitting on the shelf since First Communion. . . . so not that Scripture's not important, because that's obviously where everything is based off of. I don't know if that, as Catholics, you make it a daily practice. (Brenda)

I just wish we did have a Bible in our hand more as Catholics. I feel like we don't have, we have pieces of a Bible, kind of, in pamphlets or things, but to actually have a Bible and refer to it and have it readily

available, I find that's what I would like more. (Amy)

I think the Bible, to a lot of Catholics, is, intimidating. (Peggy)

For me it's just been a struggle for a long – long time. . . . never felt confident. . . . hard for me to comprehend. . . . Just my knowledge of the Bible, the stories, the teachings, are too. . . . hard for, for me to comprehend oftentimes. So when I looked at it, I felt, well, it would be hypocritical of me to rate this high, because I, you know, it's, it's something that I don't do regularly, and when I do, I struggle with it. I mean, I can read a passage over and over and over and over and it just, you know, so yeah, [I wish] Father Tony was there to help me. . . [laughs] (Dan)

I could read it but. . . . I would never understand it unless somebody would explain it to me. Adam, 25)

Additionally, an impediment or barrier to faith development, of a different nature but also revealed to have a powerful impact that conflicted with faith development, was the issue families faced in balancing schedules and determining priorities and the impact of limited availability of time due to extremely busy schedules. Parents described the stress and struggle they felt in regard to their time schedules and how the very crisis of time impacted the centrality of faith in their families. A high school parent summarized the dilemma many other parents expressed:

There's just way too many competing factors... to try to participate and get the most out of all of the activities. . . . even with, with church, is just very, very difficult to be able to constantly prioritize. (a high school parent)

They [the factors] all stand out to me. . . . it's, it's hard to say one over the other. I don't want to discount any one of them. But

it's just I think the simple fact that we're so busy and caught up in so many other things, we don't have the time to really engage in these things. (Kevin)

And. . . all of these great things. . . in our lives, you get so busy, and it's balancing your. all your things with all these great opportunities. Because I'm sure the church says, well, we have this mission trip, and we provide all these service opportunities, and we have these classes and Bible studies. But where are you? So the church can only do so much. But then it, as a parent, it's balancing all their activities and all the other pulls that they have. I don't know, it's just a hard balance. . . . (Mary Pat)

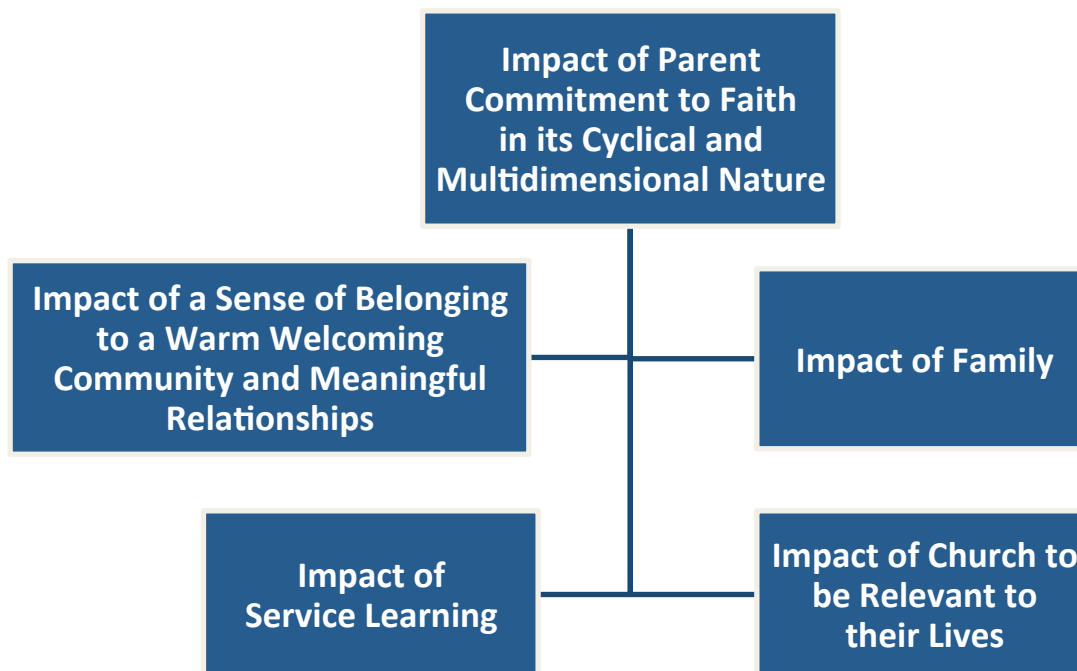
One time he [Fr. Tony] did say something about how God is supposed to be first, God, then your, you know, he's like, it's a really hard thing to put God before everything else. (a mom)

These two factors, in fact, did not cultivate faith but were depicted as barriers or impediments to faith development. They emerged from the discussions to be both high in the frequency and explicitly named as factors that impacted faith negatively.

Summary of Findings on Faith Development from the Staff Interviews

The individual staff interviews echoed the themes of the parents and young adults in the focus groups discussions. Each of the staff members interviewed had a specific responsibility for ministry in the parish and each staff member reflected his or her particular lens and viewpoint. The individual interview discussions identified 5 findings as impactful from the staff viewpoint. They are identified in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Staff Interview Theme



Staff Interview Themes

The staff interviews were conducted with the purpose of triangulating the information gathered in the survey data and the focus groups. The staff members had a unique perspective in their roles ministering to the families in the parish. They were given a list of the factors the parents rated in Section Two of the survey and asked to identify the factors they perceived as impacting the families' faith development.

The dominant theme identified by staff members was the impact of a sense of belonging to a warm welcoming community and meaningful relationships they experienced in that community. As with the focus group findings, they perceived several related factors coalescing into this theme including: the affiliation with the micro community, the warm welcome they felt being initiated into the community, and the continual support they felt from relationships within the community. A staff member described her perception of how the sense of belonging and the relationships in community impacted the families she worked with:

They get that huge sense of community, that this is another family, another of their families that they can relate to. We see that because of how the teens and young adults try to stay connected (Lea)

The second dominant theme identified by the staff was the impact of family on faith development. A perspective was held by a majority of the staff that family environment and the family relationships were a dominant theme impacting faith development. The staff identified the home as the initial place where faith was cultivated and where experiences of faith in practices, discussions, and atmosphere of love occurred.

From the staff perspective, "on the balcony" and in their role as religious educators, they noted the hunger people felt for faith to have a meaningful role in their lives. The impact of

the ability of church to be relevant in their lives was a third dominant theme identified by staff members. The staff recognized the people they ministered to were not motivated to develop faith out of fear or obligation but that they had a real need to find support, help, inspiration and meaning in the midst of the hectic busy lives they and their families were leading.

The staff also validated the focus group findings of the impact of service learning. They perceived families felt the opportunities the church offered them to learn to serve others, a way to "live faith" was valuable to their faith development, and that the staff felt this had been highly impactful in the lives of the families. The staff noted the parish had been deliberate in offering numerous opportunities for service and cultivated a religious education paradigm where service learning was prominent and intentional in faith development.

Finally, the staff reinforced the impact of parent commitment to faith in its cyclical and multidimensional nature. Father Tony emphasized the overlap of the faith formation factors. He said, "They are impactful when they build on one another in a meaningful way."

Culture, Climate and Practices

The purpose of this study was to answer the question: What factors, occurring in the family and in the faith community, are perceived to impact faith development? In an effort to bring clarity to this study and to provide increased relevancy for religious educators, catechetical leaders, and parents, the factors investigated were grouped within three major constructs. The constructs of *practices*, *culture*, and *climate* allows analysis of the categories of factors that may be more pertinent for those responsible for catechetical leadership and for parents.

Culture

The term culture in reference to the Catholic Church is more often associated with the diversity of cultures around the world that make up the worldwide Catholic Church. In this discussion the term is being used more as a tool of analysis. The researcher considered the meaning of culture used in educational or organizational disciplines. In this sense the definition of culture refers to: "This invisible, taken for granted flow of beliefs and assumptions that gives meaning to what people say and do... Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time." (Deal and Peterson, 7)

In a parish, within a faith formation program or a Catholic school, the term culture reflects the pervading context of shared values and beliefs held and demonstrated by the leaders and members. It is being used in this case to indicate the larger connecting values, beliefs, morals that have endured historically and theologically and are mitigated, negotiated and define a local faith community and the larger Church to which it is connected. For purposes of this discussion the term culture tends to refer to the deep and more stable factors of the way a group or a person within the group does things and the values he or she holds and believes. A defining characteristic that distinguishes between culture and climate in this discussion is that culture connects to the larger faith tradition in a significant and deep way and is not easily changed. It is the ineffable beliefs and values that knit the fiber of a group, a family or faith community together. It is, as Geertz says, "the web of significance in which we are all suspended."
(3)

Climate

Climate is being used here to signify formal and informal feelings from both leaders and members of a church community. Climate

refers to the attitudes and feelings that characterize the environment or context of a group. It may denote a positive environment that is friendly, inviting and supportive or it may refer to a negative environment that is unwelcoming, exclusive or unsafe.

Like the term culture, the term climate is being used as a tool to organize the factors being studied that impact faith. Because climate is about more transient perceptions it can be easier to assess and also to change. The term generally refers to the tenor of relationships, the feeling of safety, and the external environment. Climate is a more general term referring to the feel, tone or milieu of a community. It characterizes the collective personality and perceptions or overall atmosphere.

The term faith development or faith formation has been deliberately used in this study to connote the multidimensional process faith encompasses. It is holistic in nature and indicates faith can develop and grow or mature in a person and occurs over the entire lifespan and has many facets. One way that faith continues to develop, to be "lifelong" is by a person engaging in practices of faith. Practices in this discussion refer to actions such as religious ritual, prayer, and serving in the example Jesus. This study identified some practices of faith parents and young adults perceived highly impacting faith.

Practices

The construct of practices was used to indicate actions, patterns of behavior and rituals in the Catholic Christian faith. Terrence Tilley, in his article "Communication in Handing on the Faith" said, "Faith can be understood as a set of practices even a complex virtue. Faith is not something we first believe and then practice. Rather we practice the faith and in doing so come to understand it. God's gracious initiation makes this possible." (156)

To explore ways the results of this study can inform families and parishes, the individual factors identified as affecting faith

development were grouped into these three constructs: culture, climate and practices. Table 2 shows the results of the quantitative data weighted by the findings in the qualitative data on the question of the impact of factors in ranking order and organized into the constructs of practices, climate and culture.

Considering faith development in light of these three constructs; culture, climate and practices allows leaders to analyze the culture and climate of their community and the practices they encourage. They can evaluate the environment of the parish, school or faith formation programs and create a positive climate and encourage impactful practices. The significance in the findings of the impact of a sense of belonging resulting from affiliation of a primary or micro-community,

the warm welcoming environment, and cultivation of relationships and friendships all relate to the climate that initially and continually connects people to a community of faith.

The practices of faith, especially the significance revealed of regular participation in the ritual worship of the Eucharistic Celebration of the Mass and to some extent all of the Sacraments, reflect the value of encouraging the repetitive practice of worship and prayer as conduits of strengthening faith and allowing faith to mature. As service learning opportunities develop and are offered as an integrated dimension of faith development, the climate becomes more positive and meaningful and the ethos of service is internalized.

Table 2. Factors Impacting Families’ Faith Development Related to the Constructs of Climate, Practices and Culture

(*Factors in **bold** indicate highest impact on perceptions of faith)

Connecting Climate	Practices of Faith	Religious Identity and Culture
The sense of belonging and being part of a faith community such as this parish	Attending Mass on a regular basis	Reliance on faith in a traumatic crisis or event (such as loss)
The warm welcoming environment in our church	Participating in the Sacraments	Adhering to our moral beliefs
The warm loving environment of your home	Service opportunities (such as meal programs, mission trips, church volunteering)	The faith of the mother in our family
Social experiences /opportunities at church (Such as parish picnics, festivals, donut Sunday)	Family discussions about faith	The Church’s teaching about beliefs and morals
Our social relationships and friendships at church	Praying together as a family (such as meal prayer, bedtime prayer)	The faith of the father in our family
Local spiritual leaders of your church	Faith development opportunities (such as Bible camp, retreats, faith sharing groups)	The faith of grandparents or extended family member
The physical building of the church (physically being in the church building)	Sacramental preparation sessions (such as for Baptism, First Communion, Reconciliation)	Spiritual examples (such as the saints, Mary, the Pope)
The music or art at church (sacred music or sacred art)	Personal prayer or meditation of family members; family discussions about faith	

Sacramentals and symbols in the home or church (such as holy water, crucifix, ashes or palms)	Private practice of religious devotions (such as rosary, stations of the cross, vespers, adoration)	
	Reading and reflection on Scripture or spiritual or religious material	
	Participation of a teen in church youth group or church youth activities	
	Being a member of a church choir or participating in some kind of music ministry	
Child or teen's attendance in Catholic schools		
Adult sessions of Family Program		
Intergenerational family activity of Family Program		

At some point climate and practices mature into a culture of something deeper, more profound, more personal, and more internal. This study revealed the profound impact of internalizing a sense of belonging and acceptance that could mature into a peace and strength found in the faith community. Lea, a staff member, expressed so beautifully this dynamic, "I think our community is welcoming enough that all those people feel like they can come into it, and we're going to hold onto them."

Other staff members especially expressed the awareness of the appreciation of those who felt the community had become a kind of home and also experienced a sense of loss when they had to leave it.

That the experience in the faith community leads a person to become a person of faith and the hope is that that faith eventually is internalized. Ultimately, "my Catholic faith" needs to be more than just that warm welcoming parish; that if they went elsewhere, that strong faith is always with them and they would not or could not dismiss it because the environment doesn't suit them. (Cindi)

This may be why a certain person in a family, often a mother, carries this culture from generation to generation. Without that

link within the family the parish community must work harder to connect. When there is a nurturing presence within the home and within the faith community the experience of faith is reinforced and strengthened. This exemplifies the cyclical nature of faith development. This maturing of the faith process may also relate to the interesting data that when parents differed as a function of the age of their children, it always pertained to items that are either practices or climate. Is it that practices and factors related to climate change as children get older? And as a person moves through these developmentally, is it ultimately the cultural factors (reliance on faith in crisis, faith of father, faith of mother, and adhering to moral beliefs) that parents identify as especially salient?

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study was the high ranking of reliance on faith in difficult times, crisis or traumatic events, such as loss and the equally high ranking of adhering to moral beliefs. With the insight provided from the focus groups and staff interviews this seems to point to a key understanding of what motivated families to engage in a faith community and in practices of faith. It also appeared that parents lacked conscious awareness of these deep desires, hungers, longings and fears. Ronald Rohlheiser discussed this in his book, *The Holy Longing*. He describes, ". . . a desire that

lies at the center of our lives, the marrow of our bones, and in the deep recesses of the soul” (3). We seek peace, the opposite of this restlessness, longing and loneliness that lies at the heart of the human experience and the true force that drives us. St. Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Rohlheiser says the essence of spirituality is what we do with this unrest which is at the core of our being (5).

What picture emerges out of this information and these insights revealed by this community? The model being offered names the cyclical, developmental and multidimensional nature of forming faith. It is cyclical and developmental in the sense that forming faith for most human beings is not a dramatic onetime event in life. The experience of faith can have moments of dramatic revelation, beauty and insight. These often occur in high and low life events such as birthing and losing a loved one. Faith usually matures, however, over time and through multiple lived experiences and in the practice of relying on faith and in the faith that blesses a person when our human resources fail us.

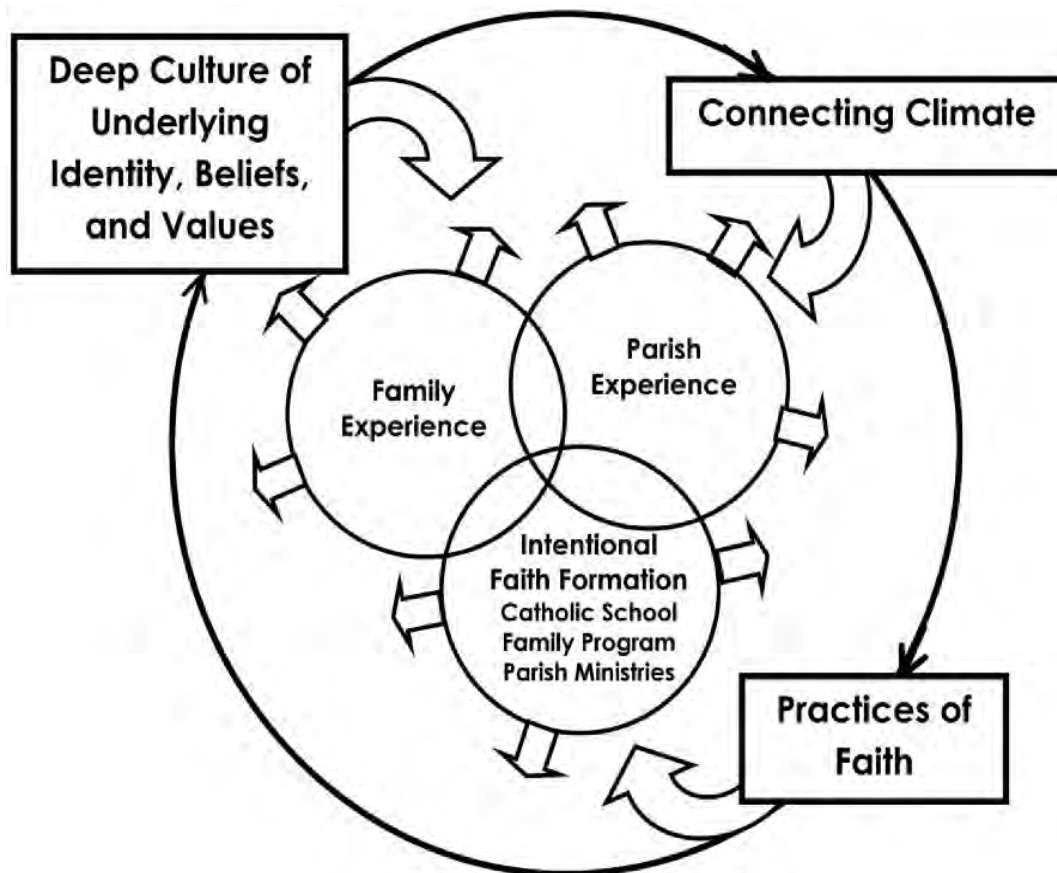
It is multidimensional in that we come to spiritual faith through our social, emotional, intellectual and physical beings. Faith development exclusively associated with an

intellectual pursuit can be sterile. Too often this over-emphasis on learning faith through textbooks has stunted growth in faith. This is not to demean theological inquiry or scholarship which is a solid aspect in the Catholic tradition. To honor the multiple dimensions of the nature of faith formation in parish communities, schools, and faith formation programs engage in multiple models such as prayer, worship, and service learning; multiple methodologies such as music, art, drama, discussion, reading, writing, listening, and sharing. These may to a greater extent, in frequency and intensity, more often lead to the soul experience of “metanoia,” “a profound transformation of mind and heart” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 48).

It is ironic to note that the Bible which could be hoped to root, nourish, and nurture faith is not perceived as helpful to the majority of participants in this study. This is a serious issue that catechetical leaders may wish to ponder. To express it simply, the research revealed a “lack of big picture” when parents even thought about Scripture. They described having no frame of reference, no context for an understanding of the meaning of Scripture. They did not understand what constituted a way to even begin to make sense of what the Bible was saying to them on their own.

Figure 7: Faith Development Cycle

The following model emerging from the study and attempts to represent the cyclical, developmental, and multidimensional nature of faith development.



Part 4. Implications of the Research

Leadership

There are implications from this study for leaders interested in engaging families in faith formation. While the more multidimensional models of faith formation requires more creativity, energy, open-mindedness and perhaps financial commitment in staff and resources, this study evidences their potential effectiveness.

The study revealed that when a faith community invests in all families of the parish, the Catholic school families and the faith formation families in a similar way the outlay

is rewarded in involved, more committed families and catechesis that is more effective for all. Parents become lifelong learners when the door is opened by the love they have for their children and the faith community leaders insist on a partnership with them. This is a paradigm shift for generations of religious education leaders who have only explored the schoolhouse model where parents are not present. It is an adjustment for parents who have been lulled into a model of parental non-participation. Parents need the faith community to give their children the most meaningful opportunity to develop faith and faith communities need parents to be involved to be effective in catechetical ministry. Both the home and the faith community have to work diligently and consistently to be

successful in passing on the faith in a post-modern culture.

Learning Research

The advances in education, especially the developments in new understandings of brain compatible learning and the multiple dimensions of intelligences, as well as the research into multiple intelligences, need to be incorporated into faith formation programs and religious education in Catholic schools. Active learning that engages the whole person needs to be integrated into formal faith formation programs. This requires catechetical leaders to be given opportunities to learn from educational research and encouraged to lead others into a broader understanding of ministry that is charged with passing on the faith to the next generation.

It has been said “Christianity is always one generation away from extinction.” That may be true. Faith must be learned and accepted anew by each generation. That most often occurs through a reinforcing cyclical process of practices of faith. Faith that is immature is vulnerable. Faith maturity is expressed by mature Christians who love and support each other and by their service to the lost, lonely and vulnerable to heal the world.

Service

If there was one shining star in this study it was service learning. Service learning was valued and perceived as effective, and it enhanced all other aspects of faith development. This was especially evidenced in feedback from parents of adolescents and young adults. While parents and leaders may struggle with adolescent immature, rebellious or irresponsible behaviors, service is a language young people speak fluently and understand with their heart. Serving together is bonding within a family or community. It is acting and living the message and mission of Jesus in the world. Parishes, schools, and faith formation programs that can integrate service and

cultivate an ethic of service within the community and encourage it and offer opportunities to families increase their effectiveness, integrity and relevancy to those to whom they minister.

Engaging families in service opportunities may be the most powerful strategy and methodology for families to have a real dialogue about care for others and the need we all have for God’s protection. There is something about standing or helping someone more vulnerable than you that evokes a deeper understanding of our responsibility to others and the potential for God’s presence to be real in our lives. Congregations who understand the busy schedules that challenge families and create short achievable opportunities as well as extended more intensive experiences such as mission trips appear to be more effective in this mission.

This study indicated an enormous value in integrating service learning into the faith formation program. It was considered not an isolated project but a methodology. It was considered valuable and enhanced all other aspects of faith development. Serving together as a family resulted in increased bonding as a family as well as deepening ties to the community. Cultivating an ethic of service as an intentional dimension of faith formation increases the effectiveness, integrity and relevancy of faith to a person. It is a door into understanding what is intrinsic to living as a Christian.

Welcoming Environment

While most leaders are aware of the importance of hospitality and welcome, its significance may not be fully appreciated. Over and over participants reported that it is the door by which they do or don’t enter. If drawn in by a welcoming, non-judgmental, and warm presence, a person enters the possibility of relationship. This initial welcome, followed by relevant conversation and dialogue, activates the relationship. There is little relating to a faith that is impersonal and whose initial

greeting is doctrinal. Many people are open and, in fact, often eager to learn creedal beliefs, traditions, tenants of a faith tradition, but this is a later step in the process. Without the welcoming environment and personal experience not much gets initiated for many people on a faith journey.

This suggestion is not to dismiss the importance of “knowing” the faith but of what creates the hospitable heart to open one’s mind to the “knowing”. It advises the faith formation leader and community about the importance of connecting emotionally and keeping the message grounded and understandable. It suggests the importance about what are leading strategies of parishes, congregations and schools.

The significance is not just an initial issue but an ongoing one. In the present age of rich personal communication and social networks individuals highly value the “being known” factor. In the fast pace of family life and perhaps lack of available extended family relationships many respond to the genuine effort to care about them and their children. They are open to the message if this important factor of climate is attended to. This cannot be dismissed as soft, a waste of time or superfluous. It is achieved through personal presence, electronic communication and easy access to relevant and meaningful resources.

Families

Parents who engage in adult formation in intergenerational settings are more likely to become lifelong learners. The door is opened by the love they have for their children. Catechetical leaders must insist on a partnership with families. Both the home and the faith community have to work diligently and consistently to be successful in passing on the Catholic faith in a post-modern culture. Catholic school educators and parish staffs who work collaboratively act in exemplifying Christian love and simply have a greater likelihood of being effective. Invest in all families, and the results are more involvement,

more committed families, more effective catechesis

In the Catholic Bishops’ document on family, *Follow the Way of Love*, it states, “Wherever a family exist and love still moves through its members, grace is present. Nothing, not even divorce or death, can place limits on God’s gracious love.” There is a power in grace that flows through families that is at work most especially in the process of faith development. It does not depend on whether this is a highly functioning family or a wounded family, or as most are, somewhere in between. Faith formation leaders serve a valuable function in the message we have for parents to amplify this voice of God that flows through families. The leaders who has regard for this grace knows that the leadership of the congregation is in partnership with the family, and asks herself what are the ways I can encourage and enrich this movement of the Spirit? How can I help give it language and structure to intensify the meaning of what God already is at work doing within the family? Practical applications of this will focus on speaking to the capacity of family members to reveal God in their actions, language, worship and service.

Intergenerational Learning

Active learning engages the whole person and should be integrated into formal catechetical programs. Strategies that incorporate brain compatible learning and multiple dimensions of intelligence need to be incorporated into faith formation programs. We learn or retain 10% of what we read, 50% of what we discuss, 75% of what we practice. Jesus used multiple methodologies. So should we!

Harness a parent’s love as a force in accomplishing catechetical learning and faith development. Intergenerational opportunities and programs, such as described in this study, that are relevant to family life are effective. Programs that are adequately staffed and funded potentially change families and faith communities.

Faith and Life Today

We need to speak to the relevant concerns and challenges people face and why faith matters. The concepts of fear and obligation are not the language that is motivating to either parents or catechetical leaders. For parents as well as for religious educators these are perceived as shallow and missing the point of the awesome possibilities of a relationship with God. At the same time in a world where every national disaster, political uprising, and tragic human story is available with the click of a remote control or app on a phone, individuals are well aware that bad things happen to good people and that safety is not a guarantee. Life is complex and their deepest desire is to protect and care for their family members. They long for their children, as well as themselves, to have a north star to guide their moral decisions. It is a complex world that can be puzzling, frightening and challenging to negotiate.

Explicitly or implicitly parents long to situate their family in the care and protection of a God they know and trust. They do not always know how to form that bond or how to communicate this in language to their children. Framing this desire for parents is to be a conduit of faith for them. Speaking about this longing may resonate with parents. Practical applications include engaging parents in topics that might raise conscious awareness of these real concerns. Encourage faith that is cultivated through regular practices of prayer, worship and family discussion.

Conclusions

This study originated out of interest in the mystery of faith and sought to learn more about the process of how faith develops. It focused on two communities: the home community and the faith community. This study sought to learn more about factors that nurture the faith process, much the way an educator would seek to learn more about

factors that nurture intelligence. Seeking to understand what impacts faith and how to nurture it is perhaps even a more challenging mission because of the complexity of what faith is.

Nurturing faith is a multifaceted complex process. It encompasses learning a tradition, participating in prayer and worship, developing a moral life, and allowing Scripture to guide, inspire and change our hearts. To nurture faith is to be dedicated to learn to trust God, to serve others, to help the poor and vulnerable, to forgive and accept forgiveness, to love others without judgment, to cherish peace, to have concern for justice and to value life. It involves opening ourselves as human beings to receive and give love. "And we are put on earth a little space, that we may learn to bear the beams of love" (Blake, 1789).

The study was able to isolate some factors that may impact faith to guide those who have interest in this topic. It revealed some insight into what might warrant awareness in planning, in making choices, in advocating and in determining a focus of priorities for parents and catechetical leaders. This study would suggest the value of paying attention to factors of *climate*. Do people feel a warm welcome? Do they feel there is a small group with whom they connect? Do people feel a sense of belonging? Do they know and feel the connection between the local community of faith and the larger community of faith? Do people experience friendships and meaningful relationships where they can be their authentic selves?

This study would suggest the value and power of encouraging *practices of faith* to root faith, to strengthen faith and to enter more deeply into the mystery of faith. For Catholics, participation in the Sacraments especially, the celebration of Eucharistic liturgy holds deep meaning and value and nurtures faith. This study reveals that learning to share our experiences of God through discussion, expressed through our own human stories, profoundly impacts faith.

This study suggests that the practice of serving others in need is a cultivated practice

that furthers God's Kingdom of peace, justice and love. Serving others makes faith come alive, connects us to each other, authenticates our Christian values, and is a language very meaningful, especially to young persons. Encouraging an ethic of service strengthens the faith of individuals, families and communities.

Finally, this study would suggest an invitation to know the deep longing in the heart is really a holy longing. A longing, a desire, a hunger is wired into our humanity. It is the Eros, the force, that calls us to live in a more creative, life-giving way and what holds us in the dark nights of our lives. This Eros, this force, when nurtured, drives us to love and serve, directs our moral decisions and sustains us in the dark times of trauma, difficulty and loss.

Reliance on faith and faith as a moral north star are the result of a **culture of faith** that is nurtured. It is most powerful when it is nurtured in a family and in a community of faithful others. This study revealed the struggle of abundance. Parents often expressed the abundance in their lives but often found choosing difficult. Jesus said he longed for us to have *life* in abundance (John 10:10). To develop a culture of faith, within a community, a family and an individual human heart is to cultivate the ability to choose what is life-giving and nurture the soul that energizes us and holds us together.

It is evident that there is more unknown about the factors that impact faith development than is known. This poem is a concluding thought that alludes to the fragility and resiliency of faith as it is passed from one generation to the next and why the process is a worthy pursuit and holds eternal meaning.

The Way It Is

*There is a thread you follow.
It goes among the things that change.
But it does not change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.*

*While you hold on to it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die;
And you suffer and grow old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.
(Stafford)*

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Intergenerational Faith Formation Today: Its Impact and Sustainability

Jim Merhaut

It was 1988 when James White published his landmark book, *Intergenerational Religious Education*. White put into words what many people were beginning to sense in the second half of the 20th century: that there is something unnatural and unhealthy about forming children, youth, and adults in isolation from each other. Others have noted the risks of age segregation too. “This lack of intergenerational contact leads each generation to see itself as a separate subculture rather than as an integral part of an entire community, perspectives that often lead to conflict and competition rather than cooperation” (Martinson and Shallue, 4).

Until recently, the Church had always been fundamentally intergenerational both in its worship practices and in its learning practices. Only in the 19th and 20th centuries did we witness the emergence of age segregation as the primary learning environment in churches. While the age segregation model’s efficiency made it possible for church educators to operate like a well-oiled machine, its deficiencies soon became apparent as the potential for making faith stick beyond adolescence dwindled with the decline of distinctive church culture in American communities. The close of the 20th century left us wondering, in the words of John Westerhoff, “Will our children have faith?”

The first part of the 21st century has seen the development of new models of faith formation that integrate age-specific and intergenerational learning in creative ways. Many churches that

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offer intergenerational faith formation got their start with the Generations of Faith project led by John Roberto and sponsored by the Center for Ministry Development. This project, funded by the Lily Foundation, offered intergenerational faith formation training to over 1,200 Catholic churches beginning in 2001 and continuing for five years.

New research about intergenerational learning is emerging in both Catholic and Protestant circles. The churches that have endured and thrived are the focus of this article. Most of them are Catholic churches that participated in the Generations of Faith training. LifelongFaith Associates has been surfacing churches throughout the United States that are offering some form of intergenerational faith formation. We will examine some key practices that are emerging consistently in the churches that are making intergenerational faith formation a part of their culture. For some churches, it has become the way they do things.

The dedication of these faith formation leaders is inspiring. Many churches, against significant odds, are changing the way we think about religious education. They are building their programs on what they believe to be the best practices in faith formation with limited resources and minimal institutional support. They fervently believe that the journey of faith is lifelong and that dedicated Christians seek learning from childhood through old age. These churches provide opportunities for faith formation to children, teens, young adults, and older adults. They work with families and single persons. They believe that the presence of children is essential for adult faith growth and the presence of adults, including those who are not parents, is essential for the faith growth of children and teens.

In this study, we surveyed and talked to Catholic faith formation leaders in suburban, rural, and urban settings. They were large, medium, and small-sized churches. Some were combined with, or in the process of combining

with, another church. We asked faith formation leaders in churches to tell us what they have learned over the past decade. They told us about content, methods, sustainability, and the impact that the intergenerational model has had on them and the congregations they serve.

Effective Practices and Associated Outcomes

The fruits of our labor are significant indicators of whether or not we are on the right path. Results matter. Matching the positive outcomes of intergenerational faith formation with the common practices that produce them gives us a clear picture of where churches need to focus their efforts in order to be successful with intergenerational ministries. Some of the outcomes reported by faith formation leaders are:

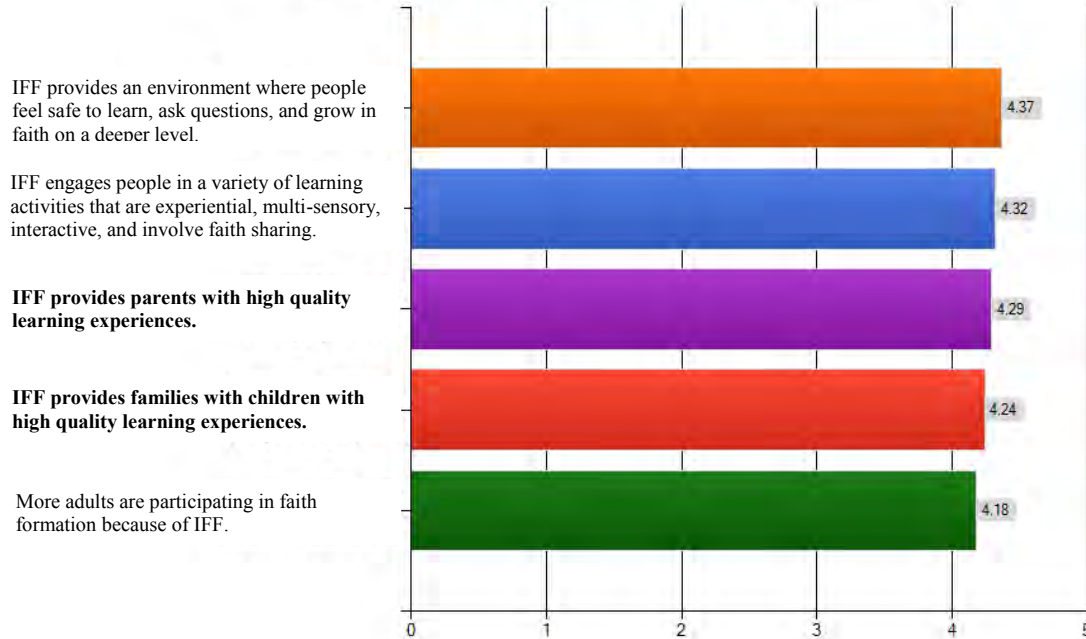
- Stronger families
- A greater sense of community
- A safe learning environment
- Motivated learners

Stronger Families

*The future of humanity passes
by way of the family.*
(Pope John Paul II)

One could also say that the future of any church passes by way of the family. Faith formation leaders see tremendous benefits to families that participate in intergenerational faith formation. We asked leaders to rate seventeen impact statements related to intergenerational faith formation on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The five highest scoring impact statements are shown in the chart below. Two of the top five are family related (see bold items in chart).

The following statements describe the impact of intergenerational faith formation (IFF) on the participants. Please rate your degree of agreement with each statement.



This finding is consistent with the 2005 study by the Center for Ministry Development, *Generations of Faith Research Study*. Benefits to the family ranked among the highest outcomes in that study as well. Families that learn, pray, talk, and serve together are much more likely to experience the positive outcomes of church membership than families that experience these faith practices in age-specific settings. The importance of nurturing family faith with the whole family together was highlighted in the *Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry*. The results were reported in *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* (Martinson, Black, Roberto, 2010). They conclude, “Youth in families where faith is often expressed by a parent in word and deed are *three* times more likely to participate in family projects to help others and *twice* as likely to spend time helping other people than youth from families that did not express faith.” The *Effective Christian Education Study* (Search Institute, 1990) found that family religiousness was the most important factor in faith maturity, even more

important than lifelong exposure to Christian education.

Intergenerational faith formation strengthens parental faith with high quality learning experiences. It also puts those same parents in a position to express their faith in the presence of their children. This dynamic helps to build stronger faith families, and these faithful families produce service-oriented children who are more likely to carry the practices of discipleship into their adult years than children and teens who participate in church faith formation experiences without their parents. Parental faith was cited by emerging adults who are connected to their faith as a key factor that sustained their faith through college. (*National Study of Youth & Religion*, Smith and Snell, 2003)

Strong churches are made up of strong families. Separating family members from each other for faith formation experiences is counterproductive for churches. Intergenerational faith formation builds family faith by providing opportunities for parents and children to talk about the mysteries of faith, to experience prayer and worship

together, and to serve those in need shoulder-to-shoulder. For the vast majority of the church's history, this is how children learned to be adult disciples. The evidence from a large body of research confirms that families remain our most powerful tool for raising faith-filled disciples.

A Greater Sense of Community

Does intergenerational faith formation strengthen relationships in the parish

community? Yes, and 86.8% of the parish leaders in our survey agreed, with 26.3% of them strongly agreeing. This was the highest ranked impact statement of all statements relevant to intergenerational faith formation's impact on the community as a whole. People feel like they belong to a parish community when they participate in intergenerational programming.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Rating (out of 5)
IFF is strengthening relationships among people in the parish community.	0%	5.3%	7.9%	60.5%	26.3%	4.08

This is a highly significant finding in light of other research. Abraham Maslow famously demonstrated that belonging is a basic human need. Human beings cannot thrive unless they feel like they belong to a community. In some cases, this is even more basic than the need for safety or self-preservation as is the case with those who stay in abusive relationships. People place a very high value on a sense of community. What does this value mean for churches today?

In a fascinating study by James Kouzes and Barry Posner summarized in their book, *The Truth about Leadership*, commitment to a community is shown to be driven more by the personal values of the members than by the corporate values of the community. Kouzes and Posner discovered that people commit to organizations when organizations understand and honor what the people value most. If people value the feeling of belonging, then organizations like churches should be building communities that are hospitable and that create a warm sense of community if those churches want committed members.

We asked church leaders to list the three greatest benefits of intergenerational faith formation for their church. The most commonly mentioned benefit is that

intergenerational faith formation builds a stronger sense of community in the church. Hospitality emerged as the key to building this sense of community. A commitment to hospitality is the most important factor for sustaining and growing intergenerational faith formation in a church. It scored a remarkably high 4.63 on a scale of 5 as most important. Perhaps more than anything else, churches need to be places of hospitality in order to build commitment from members. Hospitality creates the sense of belonging that is desired so deeply by all people.

Intergenerational faith formation leaders can think about hospitality in two key ways:

1. Building a spirit of hospitality will strengthen intergenerational programming. It is the top sustaining factor.
2. Intergenerational programming will strengthen the sense of belonging that is at the heart of a strong, hospitable church community. A stronger sense of community is the highest rated impact of intergenerational faith formation on a church community.

Put more simply: build hospitality for stronger intergenerational programming; build strong intergenerational programming to become a more hospitable church. It really is two sides to one coin.

There are many reasons why intergenerational faith formation builds a strong sense of community. An obvious reason is that an intergenerational gathering is a rare treasure in our peer oriented culture. Any organization that promotes intergenerational experiences will be an organization in the culture where welcoming is a mark of distinction. True community is intergenerational, but there are other findings in our survey that point to practices in intergenerational churches that clearly enhance this sense of community.

A Safe Place

Trust is a foundational building block for healthy growth and development. People need to work to create safe places where a sense of trust can thrive. Intergenerational gatherings are safe places where people can freely ask questions and engage in faith discussions without fear. Survey participants were presented with seventeen statements about the known impact of intergenerational faith formation on program participants. The safe learning environment was ranked #1 among all statements of impact. (See first chart.)

There can be no trust in a learning community without a safe and comfortable environment. Imagine some of the age-specific groups you have participated in over the years, especially in your adolescent years. Safety was not always a guarantee. Kindness does not always emerge in a peer group. Psychologist, Mary Pipher, once said, "A great deal of America's social sickness comes from age segregation. If ten fourteen-year-olds are grouped together, they will form a *Lord of the Flies* culture with its competitiveness and meanness. But if ten people ages 2 to 80 are grouped together, they will fall into a natural age hierarchy that nurtures and teaches them

all." Adults in general, and churches in particular, have an obligation to provide safe places for children, teens, and other adults to gather and learn without fear. Bringing the generations together enhances safety.

Church sex abuse scandals in recent years highlight the importance of being more vigilant about safety for minors. Not only are intergenerational gatherings safer than peer gatherings in terms of the emotional climate of the learning environment, they are also sexually safer because of the presence of parents and multiple other adults. Intergenerational models ideally group multiple adults with multiple teens and multiple children in the same room at the same time. Clearly no learning environment can be completely safe, but intergenerational models offer the potential of remarkable benefits for children and teens in terms of safety. While this is true, it is also important not to relax the high standards that have been wisely implemented in age-specific settings such as school and parish religious education programs when a church shifts to intergenerational programming. During breakout sessions and free time, leaders need to consistently implement and clearly communicate strong boundaries for the protection of children and teens.

Motivated Learners

Forcing people into faith formation is about as far away from the heart of Christian formation as one can get. Freedom is a predominant theme in the Scriptures and in the tradition of Christianity. When communities have to force people to participate, the battle for true community is already lost. Leaders of intergenerational faith formation note that the creative approach of the learning sessions has a high impact on participants.

The creative and diverse learning approaches used by intergenerational practitioners was ranked second highest among factors that impact participants (see the first chart). This approach to session

planning is based upon the belief that it is the responsibility of leaders to be inspirational. If we can't force faith learning, we have to find ways to motivate learners by connecting with what matters to them. We need to inspire the learners. Creative approaches and diverse teaching methodologies provide the best chance of capturing the attention and energy of learners.

Intergenerational faith formation leaders understand that there is no one approach to teaching that will work for everyone, especially when the learning community is age diverse. There is no publication that will be sufficient to meet the learning needs of the gathered intergenerational community. Successful practitioners rely upon a variety of faith formation resources, their own experience, the creative spark of community members, and the inspiration of prayer to guide their session planning.

St. Elizabeth Church in Acton, Massachusetts submitted this creative video as a way to introduce people to intergenerational learning:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2CBkYm37Cs.

Other churches develop special music ministries that are used exclusively for intergenerational gatherings. Some write and produce their own dramatic presentations. Some build elaborate props to enhance the visual learning experience for all ages. Clearly, adults represent the portion of the community that will freely choose to participate or not to participate, to make room on the calendar for faith formation or find ways to pack the calendar with other pursuits as a means of escaping a meaningless faith formation experience. Adult participation is a key barometer. If adults are not showing up for faith formation sessions, then we need to discern whether or not we are effectively designing programs to meet their learning needs. Leaders report that adults come consistently to intergenerational learning sessions when those sessions are creative and engaging. Adults will perceive the programs as relevant when leaders take the time to learn about the needs of the adults in the

community and address those needs at every gathering while using diverse methodologies to address relevant content.

The Leadership Question

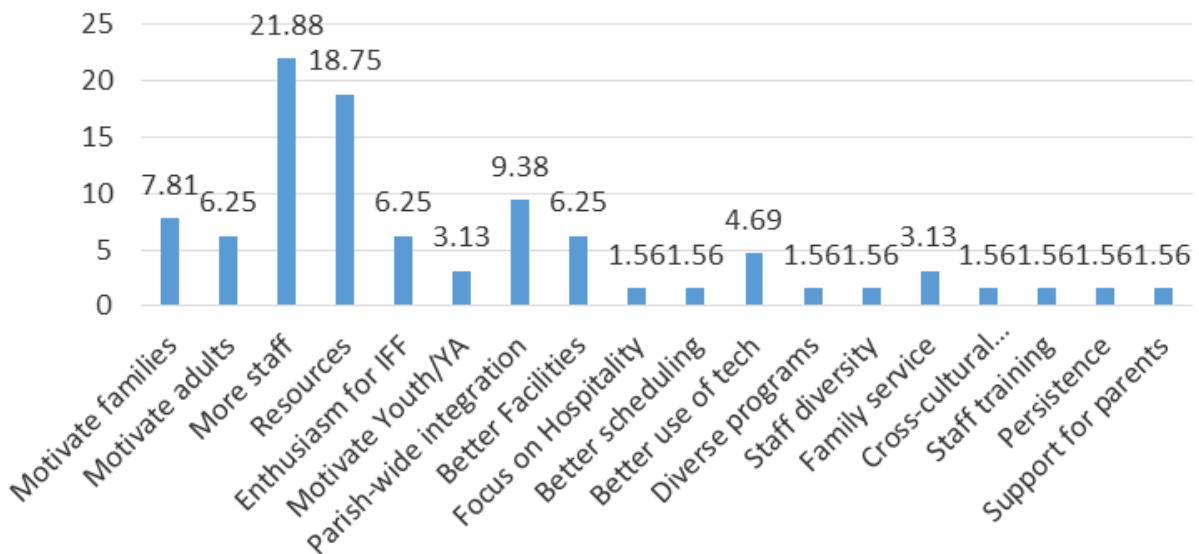
In the open-ended comments of our survey, leadership, in terms of more staff, was the top identified need of faith formation leaders.

Intergenerational faith formation leaders need help. They are looking for dedicated parish staff and volunteers to help them sustain the vision of lifelong faith formation. Resources for those leaders was the second highest identified need. Leadership training that features recruitment, training, and sustaining strategies is a growing need for faith formation leaders.

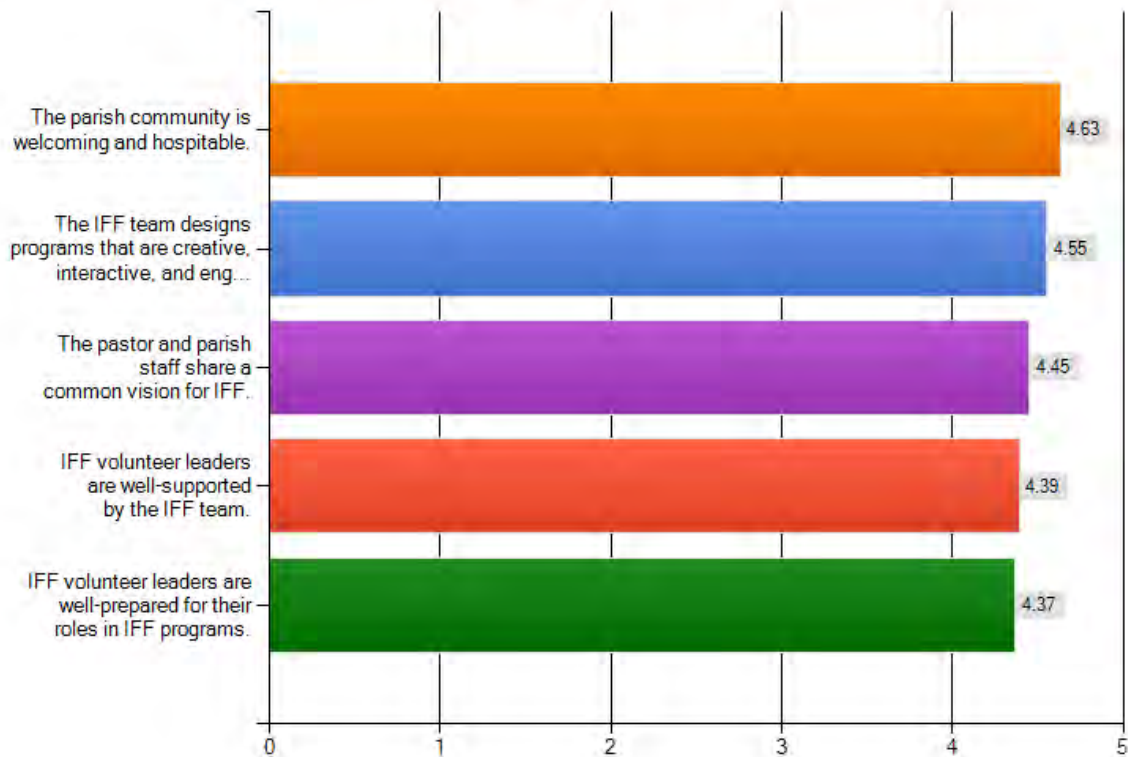
Leadership also made a strong showing in the quantitative portion of the survey. After hospitality, leadership factored in as the next four highest factors that sustain intergenerational faith formation in a church community. (See charts below.)

Dynamic and effective intergenerational faith formation is always a team leadership effort. Some parishes have more than one hundred people volunteering to put together a monthly intergenerational faith formation program. The volunteers are facilitating learning, planning and preparing meals, developing creative learning sessions, developing and preparing home materials, designing environment, creating and offering prayer experiences, developing warm and welcoming experiences for the opening of a session, and more.

Key Needs for IFF Growth Percent of Total Responses



The following statements describe factors or characteristics that help your parish sustain and grow intergenerational faith formation (IFF). Please indicate how important each factor is for your parish.



Some key leadership traits include:

- The ability to inspire large numbers of church members with a compelling vision of faith formation for the whole community
- The insight to name the highest priorities and most important strategies to bring the vision to life
- The charisma to build a working and volunteering environment filled with joy, hope, and meaningful work/ministry opportunities
- The organization skills to develop a leadership system with clear oral and written communication channels
- The flexibility to create a wide variety of ways for people to contribute to the faith formation mission
- The willingness to be supportive by offering meaningful and relevant training and mentoring to staff and volunteers at all levels of the ministry
- The humility to step back and empower others to do what they are called and trained to do
- The wisdom to step in and help when needed
- The determination and commitment to stick to the mission when difficult challenges arise
- The generosity of saying thank you endlessly, specifically, and authentically

Continuing Challenges

Leaders identified some areas of ongoing challenge for them in both the quantitative and the open-ended sections of the survey.

1. Youth Ministry

Even after decades of theoretical and research findings that promote integrating teens into the life of the whole community rather than segregating them exclusively or primarily into youth groups, there remains a significant challenge with integrating teens into

intergenerational programs. The reasons for this were not clarified in our survey, and they are likely many and complex. The influence of the broader culture and the experiences of adolescents in the educational system would seem to be significant.

Church growth movements in evangelical protestant churches also promote age segregation as a way to attract teens and young families to churches. There is a certain level of comfort in a peer group that is not present in an intergenerational group that makes age segregated ministry very tempting for shrinking churches that want to attract large numbers of new members. This has proven to be a short-sighted strategy. One of the challenges of intergenerational practitioners is to clearly articulate the vision of intergenerational faith formation in an inspiring way that matches the enthusiastic proselytizing of church growth practitioners.

Leaders also need to find new ways to integrate teens into intergenerational programs that address the needs and concerns of teens while incorporating their particular gifts for ministry. One insight that was expressed by youth leaders is that teens must be active participants in any program. They will not tolerate passive participation as much as other age groups will. Finding ways to let teens serve the program as they participate in it is helpful.

2. Faith Formation at Home

While faith formation leaders believe that faith in the home is being expressed and lived more effectively because of intergenerational faith formation opportunities offered at church, there is still a concern that faith practices in the home are far from what they could be. While 84.2% of leaders believe they are providing practical materials for families to use at home, only 65.8% of leaders believe these materials are having an impact in the homes of participants. This is an area with great promise for future growth. We know that the home is the place where faith is formed

foundationally. We also know what families need to do in order to become strong faith formers for each other at home, i.e. engage in caring conversations, develop rituals and traditions, pray and read the Bible together, and engage in service together. Now it is just a matter of developing strategies to get the job done. Intergenerational faith formation leaders will need to connect home faith formation strategies with the things that families value most. The only way to know what they value most is to ask them. Home faith formation will not become a regular practice for families until they find a way to integrate it into what they love to do. When

leaders know what families value and love, then they will unlock the key to successful home faith formation resources. The resources should be developed in light of what families value.

One thing that emerges very strongly in time studies of families is their love for television. Families spend more media time with television than with any other media device. Clearly this expresses a value that families have. They value watching television. The chart below expresses the time spent in hours per day that adults use media. Statistics for youth are similar with television as the top media form.

Average Time Spent per Day with Major Media by US Adults, 2008-2011
minutes

	2008	2009	2010	2011
TV and video	254	267	264	274
Internet	137	146	155	167
Radio	102	98	96	94
Mobile	32	39	50	65
Newspapers	38	33	30	26
Magazines	25	22	20	18
Other	48	46	46	48
Total	635	650	660	693

Note: time spent with each medium includes all time spent with that medium, regardless of multitasking; for example, 1 hour of multitasking on the internet and watching TV is counted as 1 hour for TV and 1 hour for internet; numbers may not add up to total due to rounding
Source: eMarketer, Dec 2011

134676 www.eMarketer.com

Given this information, it would seem that media literacy would be an ideal way to connect faith with what is going on in homes. Intergenerational program leaders ought to be watching lots of television to capture themes that are influencing the families in our churches. We can then connect our teaching more effectively to what is happening in families. We can develop home resources that help families spend these hundreds of hours of television viewing more actively and in light of faith values. And perhaps these viewing hours would drop a bit if families were given some assistance with developing a faith-filled way of using media in the home.

Integration throughout the Church

While leaders have considerable success offering intergenerational programs, they experience a challenge with the creation of an intergenerational culture throughout the congregation. Leaders identified this as the third highest need for the future growth of intergenerational faith formation. True churches are intergenerational at their core. The intergenerational worshipping community is the paradigm (source and summit) for church life. The intergenerational family is the foundation for church life. It would seem like an easy transition from these two core church

experiences to say that Christians ought to be intergenerational in all that they do. Not that every gathering should be intergenerational, but that every gathering should build the intergenerationality of a church. Getting a church to think intergenerationally is a significant challenge for the future. When all adult gatherings include a consciousness of and a concern for teens and children, then we are on our way. Likewise, when all child and teen gatherings include a consciousness of and concern for the adults, then we are on our way. Accomplishing this is the subject of the next article in the Journal.

Conclusion

Intergenerational faith formation is the default method for churches when one takes the long view of history. Our current culture has called us to be intentionally intergenerational in order to mine the riches of bringing young and old back together in fruitful partnership. While church leaders acknowledge the difficult work and the many challenges associated with intergenerational faith formation, they also cannot imagine returning to a program that separates the generations and focuses primarily on delivering faith formation content to children. Promoting

intergenerationality in the future will require leaders to proclaim the vision in inspirational ways, to continue to embrace creative and flexible program opportunities, to expand intergenerational experiences beyond catechetical programs, and to learn more from families about how to be intergenerational.

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Planning for Intergenerationality: Moving Beyond the Program

Jim Merhaut

‘Intergenerational’ is not something churches do—it is something they become.
Brenda Snailum, intergenerational study participant

Intergenerational programming is one thing; intergenerationality is an entirely different thing. While the two concepts are related, there are significant differences. The primary difference comes down to one word: culture. Are you offering intergenerational programs, or has your church been transformed by embracing and owning the culture of intergenerationality? How do we promote and sustain the integration of the spirit of intergenerationality across every organization in the church? This article will address that question.

Integrating intergenerationality across all ministries and organizations means that there is a collaborative spirit in the church, which helps ministry leaders and group representatives put the good of the entire community, all ages and generations, before the good of their group. Perhaps a better way to say this is that the groups integrate their priorities with the priorities of the whole congregation, and this process of integration is a top priority of the church as a whole.

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Imagine the Possibilities

Imagine a church that is embracing this vision of intergenerational integration as leaders prepare the entire faith community for Lent. Lent is coming and the entire community is getting ready.

A team of representative members, called the Intergenerational Integration Team, has designed a variety of ways to assist the various organizations in the church with their Lenten preparations. They have focused their efforts on the theme for the year: “The Three Practices of Lent: Fasting, Praying, and Almsgiving.” The resources they have discovered and/or created fit the groups perfectly because the groups’ members were consulted before the resources were developed. The church groups know the drill and implement the ideas seamlessly into their meetings because this process has become a part of congregational culture over the past five years. It’s just the way they do things now.

Young adults—those at home, in college, or in the military—receive an email every Friday morning with a simple reflection on fasting. The reflection is designed to help the young adults who are away call to mind the children and older adults back home. They are encouraged to experience solidarity with their families, their fellow parishioners, and with the poor by participating in a fast each Friday during Lent. They are also encouraged to look for ways, wherever they are, to reach out with acts of kindness toward people who are both older and younger than they are.

Adults will experience the same kind of integration. All of the adult faith-sharing groups in the church dedicate their first session during Lent to “Three Practices of Lent” by exploring the meaning of Lent and reflecting on the Lenten lectionary readings in light of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Within the prayers, special attention is given to children, teens, and young adults. All of the parish committees and councils that meet prior to or at the beginning of Lent open their meetings with a special prayer service on the Lenten theme, also with special attention to the needs

of children, teens, and young adults. Some of these groups are preparing special prayer experiences and activities they will share with their children and grandchildren.

Families with children are called to reflect beyond their own needs. Home materials are developed for faith formation gatherings of families and children. These materials may have a particular focus on the needs of older adults. Families give alms this Lent by reaching out in service to older adults who live close to them. These older adults have been coached to practice the almsgiving of hospitality to the younger families who will arrive at their homes to offer a little help around the house.

Teens will be challenged to stretch their minds and spirits beyond the pressing needs of adolescence. Their Lenten prayers and activities will include reminders of and prayers for the particular needs of young children and older adults. They will prepare all Lent to offer a special version of Stations of the Cross for the whole community. Next year, they plan to “give away” the responsibility to prepare some of the stations to a group of children and other stations to a group of seniors. Perhaps the following year, all of the stations will be prepared intergenerationally.

Each group is called to intentionally reflect on those who are different in age from their own group and to explore ways to interact with the other generations in the parish.

The church’s website features inspiring artwork, photography, and videos showing meaningful and fruitful relationships across the generations. A special bulletin insert for each week of Lent is distributed at Sunday services reminding everyone about the vision of intergenerationality toward which the church is moving in a particularly focused way during this Lenten season.

The worship committee designs Sunday worship with an emphasis on the three practices and how they can be practiced for the benefit of those from other generations, and the pastor preaches in ways that help parishioners immerse themselves in the theme’s meaning while discovering practical ways to live the three practices intergenerationally in daily life.

Wherever you go in this faith community, people of all ages and generations are united in a common endeavor: to prepare for Lent, to experience Lent fully at home and in the congregation, and to integrate their learning into their daily lives. They are doing this with a sharp focus on the experiences and needs of those who are different in age. Faith formation is in the midst of a transformation. The church is moving toward a culture of intergenerationality.

What does it take to get a church to this kind of integration so that every activity of the parish is grounded in a spirit of generosity and hospitality toward those who are different in age from myself or from my group? It takes a good plan, a lot of work, and perseverance. . . . all of which are sparked by visionary leadership. It starts with the pastor and the church staff.

The Pastor and Staff: A Key Relationship

The task of promoting the culture of intergenerationality is usually the responsibility of a coordinator of faith formation and his or her team. Faith formation is the ministry area that is usually most conscious of the need for intergenerational perspectives in ministry. *For this reason, this article will address the intergenerational transformation of a church from the perspective of the faith formation leaders.*

Faith formation is a primary responsibility of the pastor, who shares this responsibility with a coordinator of faith formation and his or her leadership team. This person may be paid or volunteer. The coordinator works closely with the pastor to create and develop the plan, and this person should have the administrative skills to implement the plan smoothly. The pastor is responsible for empowering the faith formation coordinator by providing adequate, on-going direction and support at appropriate levels. A professional

relationship built upon mutual trust is critically important if the overall faith formation plan will be implemented properly. Little can be done for the good of the faith formation ministries when the pastor and the coordinator have not taken the time to develop a healthy, professional working relationship. A church cannot nurture a healthy spirit of intergenerationality if the pastor and the faith formation leaders are not on the same page and do not share the same vision.

The coordinator of faith formation can do much to build a positive working relationship with the pastor so that the pastor will be an effective ambassador for intergenerationality across the parish. Consider the following ideas::

- **Learn the Culture and Build Connections:** Observe your pastor closely to discern the kind of culture the pastor is building in the congregational. This is especially true if you have been working for a pastor for a year or less. Identify the ways in which the culture that is being built is consistent with an intergenerational culture. Note these opportunities, and engage the pastor in discussions about them. Keep the discussions positive and affirming. Express gratitude for how the pastor displays a sensitivity to the benefits of intergenerational relationships.
- **Ask Questions:** Keep probing questions at the front end of your conversations. Avoid the temptation to put forth your agenda until you understand where your pastor is coming from on any given day and/or topic.
- **Clarify the Mission:** You and the pastor need to be on the same page regarding the mission and goals of the ministry plan for the church.

- **Communicate Empathically:** Choose communication methods that work well for you and your pastor. Communication works best when we consider the needs of the other first.
- **No Surprises:** Keep the pastor well-informed about your progress on current projects as well as any new ideas you are considering for the future. Especially keep the pastor informed when problems develop. The pastor should hear about potential problems from you before anyone else.
- **Credit the Team:** Few things help to build a good relationship with a pastor more than quality work that is credited to the team. When you enjoy success in your ministry, make it clear that it is only possible because your pastor, other staff members, and volunteers supported your work. Teams, not individuals, accomplish great things. It's all about the body of Christ.

The pastor participates directly in faith formation in a number of key ways. Preaching is the most visible and consistent way a pastor forms the faith of the parishioners. The sermon is perhaps the best opportunity to build a consistent faith formation message across all ministries. The coordinator of faith formation who has taken the time to build a strong working relationship with the pastor can assist by providing clear and simple summaries of how intergenerational themes connect with the liturgical cycle or worship themes. Jesus lived in a culture that was thoroughly intergenerational; therefore, gospel stories ooze with intergenerationality. Church staff and leaders that meet together regularly can make lectionary-based prayer a regular part of meetings. Staff might consider praying the lectionary a month or more ahead of the cycle so that your prayerful reflections might have an opportunity to influence the pastor's homiletic preparations and general liturgy planning. Making connections between

intergenerational themes and liturgy is critical in the effort to build cross generational integration throughout the church, and the sermon is a key strategy toward achieving that goal.

Special appearances by the pastor at formal faith formation gatherings are effective ways to keep the pastor connected to faith formation efforts. Some pastors are excellent teachers and are willing to participate in programs as presenters. If not, the pastor can lead prayer experiences or even make informal visits to mingle with learners during less structured moments in the programs. As the pastor experiences what is happening in faith formation settings, the faith formation staff will have experiential reference points for discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of the programs in terms of their integration of intergenerational spirit and practice.

The Role of Leadership Councils

When you attend to the relationship you have with your pastor, you will notice that the pastor is more willing to support your efforts throughout the church. It will be important for the pastor to make space at meetings of church councils and leadership groups for faith formation updates *and* for faith formation experiences. If you are a member of the church's leadership council, you will have plenty of opportunities to work with the council. If you are not a member, the pastor may have to initiate this plan unless you are invited to become a member. Either way, if intergenerational perspectives and practices are going to be integrated into all ministries, it will have to happen with a variety of leadership groups.

Prepare to take the church's leadership council through an intergenerational discernment process that will help them not only to appreciate the benefits of a culture of intergenerationality, but also to incorporate

intergenerational perspectives and practices into council meetings. Request an opportunity to address the council on the need for a culture of intergenerationality in the congregation. The following information may help you make your case.

The Biblical Roots of Intergenerationality

- Deuteronomy 6:9, Teach your children.
- Deuteronomy 29:10-12, The whole community enters into covenant with God.
- Joshua 8:34-35, All of what Moses taught is passed on to the men, women, and children together.
- Psalm 78:1-8, Whole generations pass on the faith to the following generations.
- Isaiah 11:6-9, On God's holy mountain, those who are naturally different shall come together, and the young are a paradigm for hope.
- Jeremiah 1:4-10, No one is too young to be a messenger for God.
- Joel 2:15-16, The whole community is called to fast.
- Malachi 3:22-24, The Old Testament closes with a call for parents and children to turn their hearts toward each other.
- Mark 10:13-16, Jesus affirms the presence of children in the midst of adults as a special sign of the kingdom of God. How can adults come to know God's kingdom without regular contact with children?
- Matthew 18:1-5, Jesus is teaching in an intergenerational setting and uses a child as a visual reminder of the disposition necessary for salvation.
- Matthew 14 & 15, Jesus teaches with whole families present (see 14:21 and 15:38).
- Acts 16:25-34, Paul and Silas baptize a prison guard and his entire household

together in his home. (See also Acts 16:14-15 for a similar example.)

- Acts 20:7-12 & Acts 21:5-6, Paul teaches and leads prayer with young and old present together.

The Social-Scientific Importance of Intergenerational Relationships

- Jean Piaget: The experience of disequilibrium is a catalyst for cognitive development. Adults are the agents who facilitate the experience of cognitive disequilibrium in children and adolescents.
- Erik Erikson: Two key concepts of Erikson's theory of human development call for intergenerational interaction:
 - *Mutuality* is a concept that is often ignored in Erikson's work. It states that the generations need each other for the maturation process to unfold. He said that the generations "grow each other up."
 - *Generativity* calls adults to become more conscious over time of their responsibility to pass wisdom to the generations that follow them.
- Robert Kegan: Holding environments (such as healthy families or communities) serve three purposes, all of which point to the need for an intergenerational community:
 - Purpose 1: Give a person a comfortable environment in which to assimilate new information. While peer groups can create a comfortable environment, the environment can become too comfortable so that new information is not welcome or sought.
 - Purpose 2: Challenge a person to consider new ways of thinking and acting in response to new information. Most developmental

challenges come from outside of a peer group.

- Purpose 3: Provide an ongoing environment of stability throughout the assimilation and change process in order to sustain the change over a significant period of time. Intra-generational groups do not have the staying power of intergenerational groups. The experiences of family and society, for example, are more permanent and more stable than the experience of a particular grade in school.

■ The Search Institute's Developmental Relationships: This is the latest research being done by the Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN, and it is based upon their prior research on developmental assets. Chief among the assets that help children and teens mature in healthy ways are the positive relationships they engage in with parents, teachers, and other caring adults in the community. These relationships are not possible without regular intergenerational experiences at home, at school, at church, and in the wider community. The research shows that intergenerational relationships have a powerful impact on positive outcomes for children and teens socially, academically, and emotionally while also protecting them from negative outcomes.

■ Intergenerational Tradition: You will want to note that the vast majority of church ministry experiences throughout the history of Christianity have been and continue to be intergenerational. From house churches in the first century through Sunday liturgy today, intergenerational experiences have been the hallmark of church caring, praying, learning, celebrating, & serving:

- Caring: Formal and informal/planned and spontaneous expressions of care across the generations at church and at home such as caring conversations and kind gestures
- Praying: Communal prayer services at church and at home in addition to an intergenerational awareness within private prayer practices
- Learning: Forming faith up and down the generational spectrum at church and at home
- Celebrating: Intergenerational worship, sacramental rituals, celebrations and traditions at church and at home
- Serving: Intergenerational service learning experiences through church programs and planned/spontaneous service through family/neighborhood experiences

The role of a leadership council from this point forward is twofold: 1) setting an example for all ministries; and 2) advising you as you work to implement intergenerational experiences in other church organizations.

Leadership council meetings can include prayer experiences that are specifically designed to help council members reflect upon the gifts and the need of all ages and generations in the faith community. The council agenda can also include items that are relevant to all ages and generations in the community. Someone on the council can be charged with the task of keeping everyone in the community on the council's radar screen.

Another strategy to help the council feel the importance of intergenerational culture is to invite representatives from each generation to offer brief presentations to council. These presentations will help the council members to experience affectively what is happening for all of the generations in the faith community. It is one thing to think about and pray for a certain population; it is quite another thing to engage in face-to-face encounter with them.

Intergenerational Integration Team

Now you have the pastor and the leadership council supporting your efforts to integrate intergenerationality into all ministries. Consider establishing a team of people who will embrace and implement the vision to integrate all ministries with the parish's intergenerational plan.

Selecting the right people for your Intergenerational Integration team is an important process that should be done in consultation with your pastor and other key members of the staff. The team will be more effective if there is broad representation from across the congregation. This is not a team that will impose its will on ministries and groups; rather, it is a team that represents the flavor of the various ministries and groups operating in the parish. Think about the American Revolution when you form this group. Why were the colonists so up in arms? One reason was that decisions were being made in England without representation from the colonists in America, and then those decisions were imposed on the colonists. The battle cry was, "Taxation without representation!" It was clear how the decisions benefited England but not always so clear how they benefited the colonists. Don't ignore this lesson. Forming diverse representative leadership teams prevents rebellion when you get to the implementation stage. While it is not necessary to have every group represented on the team, it is important that every group have a voice. In other words, someone on the team must be able to speak about any given group with a good level of familiarity either because he/she knows the group from experience or knows someone well who belongs to the group.

Representation is not all that the team will do. They will not just discuss issues; they will also compile (or create) and implement resources for various parish groups. The team members will need to be willing to develop

and/or find resources that work for various groups and create delivery methods so that the resources get into the right hands and are used effectively. The team will then evaluate how faith formation is being integrated into the parish groups and make adjustments based upon their findings.

Team members will need to be proven collaborators, excellent listeners, and detail-oriented implementers. They will serve the needs of multiple ministries and groups, and will have to develop an excellent rapport with the leaders of those ministries and groups. They will become trusted spiritual resource people for many members of your congregation. Team members should have a good track record of building and sustaining trusting relationships that last.

Resourcefulness and creativity will be helpful attributes for team members. Where can you find the right resources for each particular ministry or group? Team members will have to be able to answer that question. If nothing adequate can be found or purchased, team members may have to develop resources tailored to the particular needs of a ministry or group. This kind of resource development is enormously rewarding to a creative person and equally as frustrating to a person who is not gifted as a writer or program planner. Be sure to have at least a couple of creative programming types on your team.

Developing a clear profile for the right candidates for your team will greatly enhance your work and eliminate lots of potential problems with the integration plan. See the next page for a proposed job description for a member of the Intergenerational Integration team. You may use this job description or develop one of your own which addresses the particular needs in your congregation.

Job Description

Program: Faith Formation

Job Title: Intergenerational Integration Team Member

Tasks to be Performed with Other Team Members:

1. Represent one or more ministries or groups
2. Assess the integration intergenerational perspectives and practices across church ministries and groups
3. Identify and/or develop intergenerational resources for ministries and groups
4. Assist particular ministries or groups with implementation of resources
5. Evaluate resources in collaboration with each ministry or group
6. Evaluate the process of intergenerational change in the congregational culture

Abilities Needed (skills, attitudes, understandings):

1. Ability to work well in group settings
2. Openness to new ideas
3. Excellent listening/communication skills
4. Appreciation for diverse spiritualities
5. Resourceful
6. Compliance with safe environment

Length of Commitment

- Start date:
- End date:
- Meetings:
- Orientation:

Support and Supervision

- Who provides support and supervision:
- When and where:
- Training and preparation offered:

Benefits of the position

- *To the volunteer leader:* The opportunity to exercise your baptismal

call to ministry with a creative and diverse team of individuals and deepen your faith while you experience the joy of Christian service

- *To the community:* Building a more welcoming and supportive community across the generations.

Completed by (name)

Date:

Establishing Your Mission and Setting Your Goals

Now that you have the support of the pastor and the leadership council; and now that you have identified, recruited, and trained team members for the Intergenerational Integration team, it is time to begin the work of integrating intergenerational perspectives and experiences into all ministries and groups.

All good work begins with clarity of mission. What is the purpose of the Intergenerational Integration team? A clear and concise mission statement will communicate the purpose of the team to both team members and the congregation. I would like to propose the following mission statements for your consideration:

The Intergenerational Integration team serves all church ministries and groups by providing them with simple and relevant resources in order to help them appreciate, embrace, and promote intergenerationality in our congregation.

OR

The Intergenerational Integration team promotes and supports intergenerational perspectives and/or experiences every time people in our faith community gather in the name of the church.

These statements leave little doubt about the core purpose of the group. Goals and strategies will help to flesh out and give shape

to the work of the team. Goals and strategies can change from year to year as the group's work progresses. Goals should clearly state the top priorities for the group in the coming year or two. Integration teams will have goals which address the following areas:

- Relationship of team to pastor and leadership council
- Relationship of team to church ministries and groups
- Communication methods
- Resource development
- Funding
- Evaluation

After goals are established, the team will discuss *how* to accomplish each goal. Concise strategy statements answer the "how" questions. Most goals will generate three or more strategies which will guide the particular actions of the team members as they work toward their goals.

The Work of the Intergenerational Integration Team

Similar to the work that was done with the leadership council, the team assists leaders in church ministries and groups to raise their awareness of, their support for, and their interaction with the ages and generations that are not generally a part of their group. For example, if youth ministry has been predominantly a place for teenagers to gather without the presence of parents and other adults, the youth ministry leadership team will need to have a representative on the Intergenerational Integration team. As this person learns more about the need that teens have for healthy and abundant intergenerational relationships, new programs and resources can be developed to provide regular and relevant interaction between teens and adult. The group will also consider appropriate ways to connect teens with

younger children on a regular basis. Much of the efforts with youth ministry can be accomplished simply by integrating teens into many of the adult ministries that already exist in the church, especially liturgical or worship ministries.

In transforming youth ministry programs into intergenerational programs, it will be important to continue to offer high quality age-specific activities for teens. Peer ministry remains a significant part of youth ministry and should not be disregarded in the effort to become an intergenerational church. The most effective churches strike a healthy balance between age-specific programming and intergenerational programming. This is also true for child and adult ministries.

Groups that are primarily adult will continue to thrive in the church, but they can be invited to a more intergenerational perspective. Like the leadership council, it is helpful to design prayer experiences for them that call them beyond themselves to an awareness of and care for those from both younger and older generations. Also, if the group has a particular skill that it practices, it can be a wonderful opportunity for the group to mentor younger people into the skill. Here is an inspiring video of how that happens in one community with a retired group of men who are expert woodworkers:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9wkrSAZaWs.

Use the grid on the following page to inspire your own thinking about how to integrate intergenerationality in various groups.

Group	Contact	Group Purpose	Group Readiness	Potential Resources	Source of Resources	Team Member	Progress Notes

Be Patient, Hopeful, and Persistent

Changing the culture of an organization is a long-term project. You will need to find ways to celebrate small wins for yourself and your team on a regular basis. You will also need to expect challenges to arise regularly. You will be asking the congregation to do things that are counter cultural. You may have a mix of initial enthusiasm and resistance. Support the enthusiasm and help it to grow so that the resistance becomes less relevant as the culture changes. The counter cultural dimension of intergenerational experiences should not be underestimated. People will feel unnatural at first. Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, comment on these challenges:

...change is hard and there will be complaints. Intergenerational experiences do not always meet the immediate felt needs of everyone present: the children *may not wish* to participate in an idea-oriented discussion; seniors *may not wish* to have young children disrupting a special event; the youth group *may not wish* their parents to be among them; the parents may not wish to be with their teens; and those whose offspring have recently flown the nest *may not wish* to reenter the world of children and chaos. The ministry leaders themselves can become discouraged reframing and tweaking already-existing community events and activities to embrace intergenerationality. Leading people out of their comfort zones may create initial uneasiness; moving into new forms of ministry requires more energy and commitment than remaining on the

well-known path. (*Intergenerational Christian Formation, 179-80*)

Your integration plan will evolve like a work of art over time. It is not something that will take shape overnight. Be patient...you may only be able to integrate a group or two at a time. As these groups become more ingrained in the perspectives and practices of intergenerationality, you will be freed up to direct your attention to other groups. Word of mouth will spread if your early efforts are done with great care and achieve notable success. Prepare well, persist with hope, and you will finish well. You are offering a service in the name of the noble cause of parish unity. You have every reason to be hopeful. God blesses all works of unity.

Faith formation can and should be a unifying force in your community. Planning to become an intergenerational church will help your community grow together as people of all ages experience caring, praying, learning, celebrating, and serving together. Working closely with your pastor and your leadership council to get things started will generate the right kind of support to bring the plan to completion. Organizing the Intergenerational Integration team will be a critical step toward getting the work done. Be sure to take the time with the team to develop a clear mission statement along with goals and strategies that will guide your actions as a group and as individuals. Finally, don't forget to enjoy and celebrate the fruits of your good work.

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Emerging Models for Intergenerational Ministries

Jim Merhaut

The twentieth century was marked by an obsession with the enticing experience of age segregation. The twenty-first century promises to bring the generations back together in fruitful harmony that will benefit everyone. Separating the generations can be a meaningful and helpful tactic when it is used judiciously and with a specific purpose in mind. It is not wise to separate people into age groups just because it is easy or because it's the way our church has always done it. It is also not appropriate to put people in age groups because they like it better that way, a tactic frequently used by mega churches to increase young family membership. Age-segregated experiences are valuable only when they are used at the service of the whole community. The default and paradigmatic Christian experience is intergenerational.

Most churches worship intergenerationally and always have. Some churches have begun to educate intergenerationally. Some very innovative churches have begun to experiment with intergenerational service learning experiences and prayer experiences that are designed to capture the hearts of all ages and generations. The results have been very positive, and the promise of restoring a deep sense of community in churches across the country offers great hope to Christian communities suffering from decline and a general lack of purpose.

All of the ministries of a Church reflect the culture and climate of the community. If the culture is disjointed by age groups that rarely come together, then the ministries will operate in

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isolation from each other and feed a cycle of disunity. Churches that are culturally intergenerational find themselves transforming all of their ministries with both intergenerational experiences and perspectives. We have identified five ministry areas that are ripe for intergenerationality. These five areas represent the life and work of any church community.

When they are transformed through a commitment to building a culture of intergenerationality, they become both signs of and instruments for the full experience of the body of Christ. The five ministry areas are:

- **Caring:** Formal and informal/planned and spontaneous expressions of care across the generations at church and at home including hospitality, caring conversations, gift-giving, and gratitude
- **Praying:** Communal prayer services at church and at home in addition to an intergenerational awareness within private prayer practices
- **Learning:** Forming faith up and down the generational spectrum at church and at home
- **Celebrating:** Intergenerational worship, sacramental rituals, celebrations and traditions at church and at home
- **Serving:** Intergenerational service learning experiences through church programs and planned/spontaneous service through family/neighborhood experiences

This essay will explore all five ministry areas through the lens of ministry models that are being implemented in churches today. We will also offer additional theoretical models based upon intergenerational practices that have been honed within intergenerational ministries over the past twenty years.

1. Caring

I recently gave a presentation at a church before Sunday worship began. I was introducing some new initiatives for youth ministry in the church. I informed the church members that researchers recommend that teens have at least five adults in their lives whom they can trust. That is five adults in addition to parents. I challenged parents to talk to their teens when they got home to identify those five trustworthy adults by name. I also asked them to identify which ones were from this church community. A couple of days later, I was talking to a man who was at the church when I had issued this challenge. He told me that one teen looked at his hand while I was speaking and began counting. He got to three and hesitated. Then he got to four. He couldn't think of the fifth adult he trusted. Later in the service the man sitting behind the teen greeted the teen at the ritual exchange of peace with the words, "My name is Steve. I'll be your number five." The man who shared the story said that the teen's face lit up. It was a true and genuine expression of care that will make a difference in this community as it journeys toward a culture of intergenerationality.

Offering expressions of care across the generations is a skill that needs to be developed in church communities if intergenerationality is going to become part of the church culture. Caring expressions are both a starting point and a sign of success when a congregation is intentionally becoming intergenerational. We offer formal intergenerational programs to help our parishioners connect emotionally with each other across the generations. After years of working at these programs, we begin to notice that spontaneous expressions of care across the generations happen on a regular basis. The caring that we planned at the beginning becomes the spontaneous and natural way that church members treat each other intergenerationally as a sign that the Christian

bonds of love are woven from young to old and old to young.

Expressions of care are distinct in that they tend to the emotional side of faith formation. We offer them because we feel connected to the other person, and we want, not only with our heads but also with the desire of our hearts, what is best for the other. Expressions of care create the warm emotional climate that is necessary for a person to want to enter into a relationship with God and a faith community.

Models for caring are often woven into other intergenerational program models such as learning or serving but they can also take the shape of programs unto themselves. Indeed an entire church can build its ministries around a model of caring by focusing its vision and mission on the practices of expressing care. Models for expressing intergenerational care include the best practices of hospitality, conversations, gift giving, and gratitude.

Hospitality

Hospitality has been identified as a top priority for any church that wants to become culturally intergenerational. Our lives will be enriched and our communities will come alive when we offer a warm welcome to those who are different from us and embrace the changes that the other will bring into our individual and communal lives. Expressing care across the generations is a form of hospitality. It is a way that I can welcome someone different from me into my life.

Catholic Worker Houses are unique among organizations that serve the needs of the poor because of their singular focus on the practice of hospitality. Much can be learned from their operational model which is thoroughly intergenerational. The Catholic Worker movement models itself after a family. The Dorothy Day House in Youngstown, Ohio is a Catholic Worker House that welcomes people of all ages into the homey building for a good meal, good conversation, and a shower if

needed. There are no forms to fill out, no eligibility requirements, and no stipulations except that you walk through the door with a willingness to share a meal with others.

A central idea is that those who minister at a Catholic Worker House are in a privileged position to encounter the face of Christ as he presents himself uniquely in the poor and vulnerable members of the civic community. It is the poor, the recipients of the ministry, who are offering the greatest service in this model. By committing themselves to the practice of hospitality, Catholic Worker servants open themselves to a special transforming encounter with God.

Those who come for the meal notice the difference. They frequently comment on the different tone or climate of the Catholic Worker House in comparison to other places in the city where they might get a meal. "This place feels like home," is a common phrase heard around the dinner table that sits in a room designed to function as a place for a family meal. Before implementing a model like this, you will want to train a team of volunteers in the practice of hospitality. A good starting point would be www.practicingourfaith.org/hospitality.

Here's what the model might look like:

- Create a warm and welcoming physical environment by attending to lighting, temperature, furniture, colors, room size, and décor
- Attach no strings to participation. (There are no "shoulds" and "musts" to determine whether or not a person or family may participate.)
- Create a plan for welcoming people of all ages as they walk through the door. (Children will enjoy a different kind of welcome than seniors.)
- Offer food and drink.
- Engage the skills of meaningful conversation across the generations. (See caring conversations below.)

Building programs with a hospitality model are good in themselves as is the case with the

Catholic Worker movement, but this model can and should be a guide for all church gatherings. The principles and practices of the model are central to Christian faith.

Caring Conversations

When people talk about what matters most to them in a relationship, (whether that relationship is a marriage, a friendship, a mentor, or a coworker) caring conversations usually rises to the top of the list. People want to connect with each other, and conversations are a primary way of doing that within any culture. On the flipside, people often complain when they can't connect with someone because that person is weak in the skill of conversation. It's difficult to talk with a person who never stops talking. It's equally difficult to talk with a person who does not respond. We feel unappreciated when someone's eyes are constantly averted when we are having a conversation. Anger derails the hope for a reasonable and safe exchange of words. We feel invisible when someone responds to our communication with an entirely unrelated or self-centered comment. There are best practices for creating meaningful conversations, and any model for intergenerational caring will incorporate these practices into the model.

- Create an emotionally safe and non-judgmental environment.
- Make eye contact.
- Balance between speaking and listening.
- Focus on interest in the other.
- Provide and seek feedback for the sake of understanding.

Create an emotionally safe and non-judgmental environment.

People won't talk openly and honestly if they don't feel safe. Conversations should only continue as long as both parties involved are expressing care and concern for each other. Anger and judgment are key indicators of a

conversation that is moving into an unsafe realm. An emotionally safe environment is characterized by calm exchange of words and general feelings of joy and peace.

Make eye contact.

Eye contact is the simple, physical, non-verbal expression in a conversation that says, "I care about you." It also expresses a willingness to be self-revealing. Expressing both care for the other and honesty about self are two hallmarks of meaningful conversation.

Balance between speaking and listening.

Taking turns is one of the most basic ways that we teach children to be fair. Justice is a part of caring conversations. Partners in conversation need to live out the principles of justice by not taking more of their fair share of the stage and feeling secure that the other will not take his/her fair share either. Facilitators of good conversations need to be aware of introvert/extravert personality tendencies when working to promote balanced conversations.

Focus on interest in the other.

It has often been said that everyone's favorite topic of conversation is the same, i.e. we all like to talk about ourselves. We feel good when someone takes an interest in what is happening in our lives. Great conversationalists wonder about the depth of mystery within the other. They paradoxically commit themselves to exploring the other, knowing that this exploration will be self-rewarding. We often find wonderful treasures about ourselves when we focus our attention on another person. By expressing care for another through interest in his/her life, we will come to discover surprising truths about ourselves.

Provide and seek feedback for the sake of understanding.

The goal of a good conversation is to build understanding and unity between two or more people. Giving and receiving feedback are

essential strategies for creating understanding. In a meaningful conversation, each person repeats in his/her own words what is perceived to have been said by the other. This gives the other an opportunity to clarify confusion or confirm understanding. This strategy is dependent upon the first strategy of creating an emotionally safe environment. Honest feedback is nearly impossible to offer in an unsafe emotional environment. Insecurity also makes one hesitant to seek honest feedback.

Most churches that succeed at intergenerational programming understand the dynamics of caring conversations and build them into group discussions that occur within the program. People are not just told to talk about things. They are given rules and guidelines that clarify how they will talk about things. The rules or guidelines are gently enforced by trained facilitators during group discussions. When discussions happen in pairs, the overall facilitator reminds the pairs briefly to keep the conversations focused, respectful, and balanced.

Gift Giving

God is love; that is who God is. But what does God do? God gives. God is a great gift giver. God generously gives what we need. God's greatest expression of care is the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. This expression of self-giving meets the deepest felt human need for both security and connection. Giving is a central theme in Christianity, and there are models for giving that can help us understand how to give to the church community as a whole and also can help us provide guidelines for caring expressions of giving between church members across the generations.

Service learning models often capture the true spirit of Christian giving. In high quality service learning experiences, those who serve are prepared well to meet the real and expressed needs of those they serve by giving not what the servant thinks should be given,

but rather what the recipient thinks should be given in light of the communities understanding of best practices for addressing the needs of those who are trapped in a cycle of poverty. There is general agreement that people who live in impoverished settings need understanding, restored relationships, educational opportunities, and empowerment in addition to financial assistance. These are well-known needs, expressed both by researchers and by people in poverty, which elicit creative and effective responses of giving from reputable service learning organizations and projects. Good giving happens in these cases because the giver understands, honors, and respects the dignity of the receiver.

This model applies to ministry leaders who give programs and resources to church members. Leaders too often give programs and resources without first checking to see if there has been any expressed need for what the program or resource offers. Effective giving models include assessment and constant evaluation to help the giver discern if the gifts are hitting the mark and meeting the need.

Interpersonal gift giving is no different. I recall a time years ago when I gave my wife a frying pan for Mother's Day... big mistake! This self-centered gift signaled to her that I had not taken the time to consider her needs before I purchased the gift. I was using a model of gift giving that dooms both individuals and organizations to failure. I gave a gift that reflected my desires more than her desires. This says that I care more about me than I do about her. I learned from the mistake... she got a redbud tree that I planted in the yard for her in a subsequent year. I had learned that she loves redbud trees, and she doesn't love gifts that invite her to work harder at housekeeping. Who would have guessed?

Intergenerational ministries that are built upon of a giving model will be designed with the needs of each generation in mind.

- Young children need security. Give them the freedom to stay with their parents during breakout sessions if they wish.

- Elementary children need simplicity, clarity, and movement. Give them clear illustrations of concepts and clear instructions for activities. Give them opportunities to shift gears regularly from listening to talking to sitting to standing to moving, etc.
- Teens need empowerment in the midst of meaningful connection with other teens and mentoring adults. Give them the opportunity to provide input into how the sessions should be designed to engage their interest and participation. Give them exposure to adults who are prepared to work with them in youth-friendly ways.
- Parents need help with parenting and, if married, time with each other. Give them resources for best practices for parents of infants, children, teens, and young adults. Give them childcare services to provide opportunities for spouses to make meaningful connections with each other during programs.
- Older adults need to experience the rewards of generativity. Give them opportunities to share their gifts and wisdom with the younger generations.

Giving leaders will relentlessly learn about the needs of each of the generations in their community by staying on top of generational research and by asking representatives from each generation what their particular needs are in this local community. The research will help you identify the powerful gifts you can give to the generations, but your church members will help you identify the gifts that will motivate them to participate in your program. Assessing the needs of your members can be done with surveys, focus groups, and ongoing soft research such as developing planned questions for spontaneous conversations. If you can match what the generational groups in your church tell you

they desire with what researchers tell you they need, you will have a winning combination that will make your gift of ministry hit the mark every time.

Gratitude

A primary reason for Christian worship is to thank God for the generous gifts we receive in abundance. A gratitude spirituality is an essential component of a healthy intergenerational community. Great gift giving, of course, is the easiest way to inspire the kind of gratitude that leads to authentic worship, but nurturing the disposition of gratitude across the generations will certainly promote a thankful spirit and a greater sense of community in your church. When older adults are grateful for the contributions of children and teenagers, intergenerationality thrives. When teenagers appreciate their parents, positive developmental assets abound. Encouraging the practice of gratitude rounds out the model for intergenerational caring.

The practice of gratitude is both simple and powerful. Leaders can regularly encourage church members to focus on the numerous blessings of daily life and discourage members from falling into the temptation to focus on what is wrong. Focusing on what's wrong is appropriate only if there is a clearly communicated vision or path to move toward something good. Even in this case, we can encourage gratitude for the awareness of what is truly wrong and for the hope provided by the alternative direction.

Intergenerational gratitude can be nurtured on a daily basis in the homes of church members by inviting them to express appreciation for the gifts of older and younger church members. Church leaders can prepare simple prayer resources that can be used at the dinner table to accomplish this purpose. This will also help church members to avoid the common practice of focusing their prayer life on their needs and wants. Prayers of gratitude are other-centered and will help to build an awareness of the needs of others as well as a

desire to connect with and meet the needs of others, especially those vulnerable church members who are older or younger.

During intergenerational gatherings at church, leaders can provide regular opportunities for feedback from participants, focusing the feedback on what participants appreciate about the contributions of those who are older and younger than themselves. This may be awkward at first for some communities, but the more it is practiced, the more it will become a part of the culture. These simple gestures of caring will help to transform an age-segregated community into a fully intergenerational church.

2. Praying

Family Way of the Cross

Stations of the Cross is a prayer ritual that churches often practice during the season of Lent. It is usually offered for the whole community, so one would suspect that it would be an intergenerational prayer experience, but those who show up to a traditional stations prayer service tend to populate the adult generations. Teens and children may be dragged along by some of the more zealous church families, but they generally attend reluctantly.

New models have emerged in recent years that help to make this traditional prayer more accessible for all the generations. Most of these models happen at church, but Liguori Publications recently released a model for families to use at home. *Way of the Cross for Families*, available in English and Spanish, is a simple resource that helps families pray the stations at home. It could also be easily adapted for an intergenerational experience with multiple families and other adults in a church member's home or at the church itself.

The home model for stations can take on a number of formats:

- Families can reflect upon one station per day during the season of Lent. Using this schedule, they will experience each station three times during the season. It is short, simple, painless, and meaningful.
- Families can add an element of creativity by using modeling clay to develop their own images of the stations and place the images throughout their home. They can visit the images and share what they understand about the station. Each family member can be encouraged to offer a prayer based upon their sharing.
- A church can form family faith groups made up of three-five families who agree to meet weekly during Lent to pray the Stations of the Cross in their homes. Each family can take turns hosting the gathering that might feature a simple Lenten meal in addition to the stations.

Intergenerational Living Stations

Peter Fortier of St. Patrick Church in Collinsville, CT reports that about a dozen people generally attend their regular Stations of the Cross ritual on any given Friday during Lent. But, when they offer living stations featuring their youth ministry participants, the attendance swells to about 150 people representing all ages and generations. This intergenerational prayer event is happening in more and more churches around the country with great success. The model works partly because it engages large numbers of people in the planning and presenting of the prayer ritual. Friends, relatives, and others who have heard about the event attend because they know the presenters and they've heard that it is a high-quality prayer experience. Broad participation in planning and presenting is one way to transform a dying practice into a vibrant intergenerational experience, but

many leaders offer other suggestions that typically make intergenerational prayer effective.

Characteristics of Effective Intergenerational Prayer Service Models

Church leaders who plan and implement prayer services for intergenerational groups agree on a number of things that need to be considered when offering prayer in intergenerational settings. While the list is not exhaustive, it provides insight into what works:

- Dynamic storytelling
- Diverse prayer expressions with a good mix of the traditional and the contemporary
- Interactive reproductions of traditional prayers such as transforming the rosary into a living rosary with participants standing on large beads made from colored paper or holding candles that are ignited as each part of the prayer is prayed (ideas offered by Diane Brennan and Peter Fortier)
- Call and response prayers from side to side
- Use of contemporary Christian music with guitar, bass, drums, and keyboard
- Using representatives from all age groups in prayer leadership roles
- Using audio/visual technology to enhance the sensory experience of the prayer

Using a wide variety of prayer forms and expressions creatively is essential to capture and address the spirituality of all ages and generations. Extra effort in this area reaps abundant spiritual benefits for the community.

Private Prayer with an Intergenerational Twist

Intergenerational prayer is not limited to communal prayer. Church leaders can also encourage individuals to nurture an intergenerational perspective in their private prayer. Youth ministers can promote this perspective among teens by challenging them regularly to bring to mind church members and others who are in need from all of the generations in the faith community. Modeling this at youth group meetings will encourage teens to incorporate this perspective into their private prayer as well. Developing simple prayer cards could be a helpful resource for teens. The prayer cards can focus on short prayers for parents, seniors, and children.

The same concept can be used for adults and children. Church leaders can challenge each generations to keep in mind the hopes and needs of those from the other generations and to take those needs to the Lord in prayer. Nurturing intergenerational perspectives in private prayer will help to plant the seeds for intergenerationality throughout the congregation by getting individuals to think and pray beyond the perspectives of their own age group.

3. Learning

Generations of Faith

Most of the intergenerational learning models used today in Catholic churches are indicative of the influence of the Generations of Faith project coordinated by John Roberto and sponsored by the Center for Ministry Development in the first decade of this century. John and his team (Leif Kehrwald, Mariette Martineau, and Joan Weber) trained over 1200 parishes in a three year span. New parishes receive training up to the present day but not at the accelerated rate that occurred under the Generations of Faith project.

Generations of Faith offered churches essentially two models from which to choose. The primary model consisted of intergenerational faith formation from start to finish at all sessions and usually replaced the classroom model that a church was currently using. The features of this model include:

- Once per month gathering usually during the school year
- Three-hour learning session beginning or ending with a meal
- Opening prayer
- All ages opening activity functioning as an icebreaker and topic introduction
- In depth learning in one or more of the following groupings:
 - Whole group together
 - Small breakout groups (age-specific or intergenerational)
 - Learning centers through which small groups rotate
- Reflection and application session for groups to share learning and explore ideas about how to apply learning to daily life
- Closing prayer
- Send off with materials to extend the learning into the home

The second model was called the blended model and provided the opportunity for churches to experiment with intergenerational learning while maintaining their current classroom model. The learning sessions for the blended model are structured the same way as the sessions for the primary model outlined above. The difference was the number of sessions offered per year. With the blended model, a parish generally offered between two to four sessions per year. They usually used the sessions to prepare people for significant church feasts or seasons, such as All Saints Day or Lent.

Inspired by the baptismal catechumenate and the pioneering theoretical work of C. Ellis Nelson and Charles Foster, both models in the Generations of Faith approach promoted events-centered catechesis. The great biblical

events in Judeo-Christian history (the death and resurrection of Jesus), the regular events on the liturgical calendar (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter), the predictable events of church life (sacramental ceremonies such as baptisms, 1st communions, penance services), and the irregular events of significance (triumphs and tragedies of daily life such as the dedication of a new church or a terrorist attack) are the curricular subjects of each unique church community. In an events-centered approach, the faith formation sessions are designed to prepare participants for the upcoming event as well as reflect upon the event and its ongoing meaning in daily life after it has been experienced.

Weekly Lectionary Based Faith Formation

A weekly lectionary model was designed by and used successfully at St. Patrick Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina for 18 years before staff changes caused it to be cancelled. It is also an events-centered approach, but the emphasis is mystagogical reflection on the prior Sunday's readings rather than preparation. Joe Long, a parish staff member for more than two decades, reports that a doctoral candidate studied the learning outcomes of the children who participated in this program in comparison to children who attended a Catholic school. The ACRE (Assessment of Catechesis/Religious Education) test was used as the instrument to measure learning outcomes for both groups in the study. While the Catholic school children scored slightly higher than the parish program children, the researcher found no significant difference between the scores even though the parish children were only meeting for formal catechesis 30-35 times per year for 90 minutes with a significant portion of the time spent in prayer. Intergenerational models are founded upon the widely accepted principle that parents are the most powerful faith formation agents in the life of a child. The presence of parents in this program would give the

children a distinct advantage over the Catholic school children even with the far fewer contact hours for formal faith formation.

The model used by St. Patrick was scheduled on Wednesday evening from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. Nursery services were provided for children under four years. It opened with a well-planned experience of the Liturgy of the Word from the previous Sunday. The Liturgy of the Word was led by a member of the staff (pastor, deacon, or lay staff on a rotating basis) and included a homily and reflective comments by the leader. This was followed by breakout sessions with age-specific groups. Then the groups would return and report back to the large group and close with a prayer. Here is the model in outline form:

1. Gather
2. Liturgy of the Word from previous Sunday
 - Opening prayer
 - First reading
 - Psalm
 - Second reading
 - Gospel acclamation
 - Gospel proclamation
 - Homily
 - Creed
 - Prayers of the faithful
3. Breakout session for reflection and learning
 - Preschool group
 - Primary grades group
 - Intermediate grades group
 - Teens
 - Adults
4. Gather in large group for feedback
5. Closing prayer

A possible adaptation of this model could be to focus the midweek learning session on the readings for the upcoming Sunday. If this option were used, one could gather the participants and begin with a reflection on how the previous Sunday's readings are currently influencing their lives in the midst of the current week. This would be followed by the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word for

the upcoming Sunday. Then a learning session on the upcoming Sunday's readings would both prepare participants for the weekend liturgy and set them up for the mystagogical reflections at next week's learning session. This would accentuate the situating of Sunday worship in the center of the faith formation program. It would literally be the middle experience in the week and the middle experience in the learning session. Here's how it looks in outline form:

1. Gathering, hospitality, and icebreaker
2. Reflection session on how last Sunday's readings are being applied in the lives of participants featuring:
 - Witness talks
 - Small group sharing
 - Large group feedback
3. Liturgy of the Word for the upcoming Sunday
 - Opening prayer
 - First reading
 - Psalm
 - Second reading
 - Gospel acclamation
 - Gospel proclamation
 - Homily
 - Creed
 - Prayers of the faithful
4. Core content session on the liturgical and catechetical themes that emerge from the readings and the prayers of the liturgy using:
 - Oral presentation with audio/visual accents
 - Small group work...
 - In family groups
 - In age-specific groups
 - At learning centers
 - Large group feedback
5. Application plan
 - Brief presentation on possible application ideas
 - Small group work to generate application ideas
 - Commitment ceremony to motivate participants to go out and apply what was learned

6. Closing prayer and song taken from upcoming liturgy

Weekly models, once thought to be too ambitious, are doable and sustainable over time. Many Protestant churches have used parallel learning for all ages on a weekly basis for decades. In parallel learning, age-specific groups learn at their own level, and all groups focus on the same themes at the same time. The advantages of weekly, lectionary-based, intergenerational faith formation include:

- Regular contact helps to build a positive faith formation habit into the life of families and individuals.
- A weekly check-in provides leaders a regular opportunity to coach families and individuals on how to live out what they learn during the rhythm of their weekly routines.
- Weekly focus on liturgy enhances Sunday worship, which is the most important gathering of any Christian faith community.
- Parents and other adults exploring their faith every week in the presence of children and teens sends the clear, unspoken, and powerful message that faith formation is a lifelong adventure that does not end with the onset of young adulthood.

There are also challenges with the weekly model. Resources are hard to find for a weekly model, but there are a few worthy of note. Pflaum's *Gospel Weeklies* can be helpful when used in conjunction with other Lectionary-based resources. *Celebrating the Lectionary* by Liturgy Training Publication is another Lectionary-based resource that offers session plans for various age groups. *Living the Good News*, now published by Cokesbury is another resource to consider that is based upon both the Catholic Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary. Churches that adopt this model will need to develop a creative design team to write dynamic and relevant learning

sessions to engage all ages in the learning process.

4. Celebrating

Sunday Worship: The Intergenerational Paradigm

The epitome of a church celebration is the Sunday worship service. Liturgy, literally the work of the people, is the intergenerational stronghold in Christian history. Liturgy is not the work of *some* of the people. It is the work of the whole community, all ages and generations gathered to worship the one God who binds them together in unity. Even in the midst of the obsessive age segregation of the twentieth century, most churches did not abandon intergenerational worship. Only the market-driven church growth movement within some Protestant denominations did so in an intentional way.

All ministries flow from and lead to authentic Sunday worship. The weekly liturgical gathering of the faith community is a paradigm for all ministry. Gathering, proclaiming, communing, and sending forth in mission are foundational to all ministries. It is significant that we gather as a whole community, the Word is proclaimed to the whole community, the breaking and sharing of the bread is for all of us and binds us together to be sent forth as the body of Christ for the world. Together we are a church, and being together is the fullness of who we are in all that we do.

St. Katherine Drexel Church in Ramsey, Minnesota takes intergenerationality seriously during their Sunday worship services. Lectors are as young as 3rd grade. Ushers mentor teens who want to become ushers. Whole families sometimes usher together. Children and teens are active in the music ministry along with adults. They assign a volunteer to operate the church sound board during the liturgy. The sound engineer is often a teenager who has a passion for sound technology. The choir

includes keyboards, guitars, and drums to try to capture a musical style that can be appealing to all ages.

Sacramental Celebrations: Transforming Family Rituals into Whole Community Celebrations

Many of our sacramental rituals outside of Sunday liturgy have become family events rather than full intergenerational or whole community events. First Communion, for example, is often celebrated with the families of children who are receiving communion for the first time. The rest of the community is either not invited or not encouraged to attend. Baptisms, the entry point into the community, looks more like a family initiation rite than a church initiation rite. The community is only represented symbolically when it is just as easy to have them present both symbolically and really. While funerals have the same kind of distance from the Sunday liturgy, the community tends to be present in larger numbers. Why? Is a funeral more significant than a baptism? They are both one-time events, each with profound significance for the whole community. One welcomes a member while the other says goodbye.

Intergenerational churches are always looking for ways to tie key religious celebrations into the fabric of the whole community while continuing to honor the significance of the event for the families who are celebrating a milestone for one or more of their members.

Many churches, such as St. Michael in Canfield, Ohio and St. Patrick in Collinsville, Connecticut, incorporate their First Communion ceremonies within regular weekend liturgies. Families are welcome to select any of the weekend liturgies for their child's ceremony. Some churches have even offered the option of allowing individual families to celebrate First Communion at any weekend liturgy during the long seven-week season of Easter. It allows for the possibility of one or two candidates to receive First Communion at a time. This model highlights

the connection between Easter and initiation in an ongoing way. It also gives the whole community many opportunities to affirm their younger members while it gives younger members many opportunities to display the wonder of child-like faith to the rest of the community. In pastoral terms, it provides a welcome option clothed in simplicity and dignity for families that are not impressed by the pomp and circumstance of some church celebrations. Church leaders do a wonderful service to families when they create celebration models that meet the needs of a wide variety of families without compromising the integrity of the church's celebration.

Baptisms are also being celebrated more and more as a part of the Sunday liturgy. Private family celebrations are being transformed into intergenerational celebrations. The whole community is present to welcome its newest member. What could be more appropriate? Some churches offer this as the only baptismal model while others offer it as an option. Families who are having a child baptized need to be thoroughly prepared for the ceremony. Church leaders should not dismiss their concerns about standing before the entire community. This can be an intimidating experience for young parents. Talking through their concerns and fears with pastoral sensitivity and practical suggestions will help parents embrace the idea more readily.

Other Intergenerational Celebration Models

Sacramental celebrations are not the only ways churches gather to celebrate. There are other intergenerational models being implemented that bring the whole community together to celebrate who they are and what they stand for.

Immaculate Heart of Mary in Austintown, Ohio initiated in 2013 a new hospitality event called *Welcome Home* that they will offer every summer for the whole community and anyone else from the surrounding community.

The event begins with an outdoor Sunday liturgy in the church parking lot. Church members bring their own lawn chairs, but extra chairs are provided by the community as a sign of hospitality for those who forget or who “missed the memo”. Worship is followed by a picnic lunch, some of the food provided by the parish as a whole and some provided potluck. Later in the afternoon there is a big dinner planned similarly. All of the church committees and organizations are invited to contribute to the event by developing an activity or offering a service that will enhance the experience. There were games for children, a Christian praise band performed, free chances were given away for gift baskets; it is essentially an intergenerational church fair that focuses on celebrating the church’s commitment to hospitality. Some members feared the financial burden of opening an event to the whole community. In the end, over 500 people showed up, but the spontaneous donations outweighed the expenses... not part of the plan, just a pleasant surprise!

An Eagle Scout in Canfield, Ohio developed a music event that was offered to the whole community. It was a celebration of the arts with all the proceeds going to pay for a water well to be built in the impoverished country of Haiti. The event featured many area bands donating their time, food booths offering their services at a discounted rate, bounce around inflatables for children, and a dunking tank for anyone. Reaching the financial goal would require over \$5,000 in donations. The event ended up generating enough donations to build three wells!

Beer, Brats, & Bingo is a program offered at a church in Minnesota for the whole family. Yes, a beer-drinking event for the whole family. Lots of churches have whole community events where alcohol is served. Not everyone, of course, drinks the beer; but the beer drinking is done intergenerationally. What does that mean? It means that when adults drink alcohol, they can either drink for themselves or with the whole community in mind. Drinking is an acquired skill, not an

inborn talent. People need to be mentored into responsible use of alcohol. Who can do that better than a caring, intergenerational church community? When adults are coached to be conscious about the effects of their behavior on the younger generation, they will be more likely to engage carefully rather than selfishly in adult activities such as drinking. Church leaders can help children and teens by designing programs in which adults are reminded about their responsibility to show the younger generations that responsible use of alcohol is a moral issue.

Celebrating intergenerationally cuts to the core of Christian identity primarily through Sunday worship. The paradigmatic experience of liturgy on Sundays is the model for Christian celebration and ministry in general. Aligning sacramental rituals and other celebrations with Sunday worship build a cohesive community that expresses the fullness of the body of Christ far more effectively than age-segregated ministries and celebrations.

5. Serving

Families on a Mission

The research is clear that the experience of Christian service has a more lasting impact on children and teens when they serve with their parents. We also know that children mature in healthier ways when they have at least five significant adults in their lives beyond their parents. Intergenerational service is an outstanding way to fulfill a core mission of a church while providing a meaningful formation experience for adults, teens, and children.

I was the Project Coordinator for a Center for Ministry Development resource called *Families on a Mission*. The program was piloted at St. Michael Church in Canfield, Ohio in June of 2012 and then offered to churches around the country in 2013. The model was designed to be a local experience to

complement the usual long-distance service learning trips that churches often do with teens and/or adults. The local emphasis helps a church fulfill its role of being a leaven for the community in which it is established. It strengthens the relationship between the church and the poor and vulnerable members of the surrounding community. It also promotes the church as a valuable resource in the community. In developing this model we often asked church leaders if anyone but church members would notice if your church closed tomorrow. Many leaders reported that they didn't think too many non-members would notice. It was a wakeup call to the awareness that churches often become too inward looking. They become overly focused on the people who walk through the doors and forget that they have an essential mission to the world beyond their membership.

The mission to serve is a core Christian value. Service is what churches do in response to God's generous love. Service is not reserved for Confirmation programs or youth groups. It is an essential expression of real faith. Every Christian of every age and generation is called to serve. The family service model promotes service among the whole community in a uniquely powerful way. It gives parents and other adults an opportunity to mentor children and teens into the Christian life of service. It gives children and teens an opportunity to feel the power of making a significant difference in the lives of others. It gives local service agencies the opportunity to partner with a church that can provide much needed volunteer hours. And it gives the recipients of the service an opportunity to show the face of Christ to church members in a way that only they can do.

The model features three mornings of community service in agencies and organizations close to the parish. Entire families offered service together, parents and children working side-by-side to serve the needs of poor and vulnerable members in the local community. During the St. Michael pilot program, some families helped out at an educational facility offered for single mothers

and their young children. Other families provided recreational activities in a nursing home. One family with a teenage daughter helped out at a facility that serves children from families who have a member suffering from HIV/AIDS.

All of the families met in the morning to pray together, engage in a thematic icebreaker experience, and anticipate some key dynamics that would likely happen at the service sites. After splitting up and working at the service sites (each family served at the same site every day to help build relationships between the site participants and the families), the families returned to the church to engage in two-three hours of service learning experiences. The families then departed to their homes for the evening and returned the next day to experience the same basic schedule.

This model has some similarities to a Vacation Bible School program, but the focus is Christian service and the methods are intergenerational. The flexibility of the model is one of its advantages. Leaders would not want to limit the model to three consecutive days in the summer. The days could be split up into three consecutive Saturday experiences, or the families could be challenged to arrange their own service experiences and then be called together to go through the service learning sessions. When working with families in intergenerational settings, flexible and adaptable programming is a key to success.

As is common with family and intergenerational programming, deep friendships were formed across the generations among the participants. The families continue to socialize together over a year later and reminisce about how good the program was for all of them. They also continue to incorporate service into their routines, but they do it with a greater sense of purpose.

Here is a link to the Families on a Mission promotional video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eZU_gzcGc

Monthly Family Service Learning Project

This model features a different service experience each month. The First Unitarian Church of Omaha organizes an intergenerational service experience on the last Sunday of every month from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. The service experience is followed by lunch. Participants have volunteered at the local humane society or they've given their time to clean up a local walking trail. They've also done hospital visits. They promote the program to "children, youth, adults, and elders." In addition to giving back to the community, the program builds relationships among church members and gives them a way to live out their values.

Family Service Learning Trips

There are organizations that sponsor service learning trips domestically and abroad for whole families. While the price tags for these programs are significant for a family, the rewards are enormous. Some families use their vacation time to participate in a family service learning trip. While you may not opt to participate in these programs with your church families, you can certainly learn about family service trips by exploring the features of their programs. Here are some links to webpages that will get you started with your exploration of family service trips:

- Cross Cultural Solutions:
www.crossculturalsolutions.org/discover-what-you-can-do/family-volunteer-opportunities
- Outreach 360:
www.outreach360.org/volunteer/gettingstarted
- Global Volunteers:
www.globalvolunteers.org/serve/family.asp

St. Michael Church in Canfield, Ohio offered a family service learning trip for ten

years that focused on assisting a small community in rural Kentucky to develop a community center in a vandalized school building. Approximately 40-50 church members of all ages made the six-hour trip by car each year to spend a week renovating the building and helping to design and participate in community outreach programs especially for women and children from the surrounding area. Over the years, children and families from St. Michael forged friendships with children and families from the small Kentucky community. Both communities learned much from each other and benefited from the project. The trips ended when the community center developed into a thriving resource run by a small professional staff and many volunteers who participated in the programs during the building project. This family service learning experience was designed and implemented entirely by volunteer parishioners who partnered with a small service organization in Carter County Kentucky run by two Franciscan sisters.

Family Service Nights

Family Service Nights are simple, self-contained programs that feature five-ten service booths where families can do a simple project for the benefit of someone or some group in need. At one booth they might create greeting cards for the elderly or for sick church members. At another booth they might make blankets for a homeless shelter. At another booth they might bake cookies or make sandwiches for a soup kitchen. There are lots of ways to contribute to service organizations without having to leave your church building. Doing Good Together is an organization that promotes and supports family service. They publish a manual on how to organize a family service night. You can learn more about them and their resources at www.doinggoodtogether.org/index.php/resources-and-services/family-service-night/.

Katy Hager of St. Katherine Drexel in Ramsey, Minnesota offers a repeat opportunity every month for church members of all ages to participate in a simple service project. The church has partnered with a program called *Feed My Starving Children*. Intergenerational groups gather monthly to pack food that will be shipped overseas by the charity. The simplicity of this experience would make it easy to build service learning around it, and it could be a very non-threatening entry point for many people to get started on building their practice of Christian service.

Conclusion

Intergenerational experiences are not just for Sunday worship and a handful of faith formation sessions throughout the year. The benefits of bringing the generations together are many, and church leaders can create significantly stronger faith communities by looking for ways to transform current age-specific ministries into intergenerational ministries. The body of Christ is not complete when parts are missing. Church members of all ages are called to care, pray, learn, celebrate, and serve as one body. The full power of Christianity is engaged when representatives of all the generations clasp hands and fulfill the mission of the church together.



Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies

John Roberto

Every church can become *intentionally intergenerational*! Most churches are intergenerational or multi-generational by membership. Some churches are *intentionally* intergenerational. They make their intergenerational character a defining feature of their community life, ministries, and programming. These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, and storytelling; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages, and to engage all generations in learning together. For these churches, being intergenerational is a way of life. It is an integral element of their culture. It is who they are!

Bringing generations together within the church provides benefits and blessings on a variety of levels. Insights from research and pastoral experience tell us that being intentionally intergenerational. . .

- reclaims God's intent for faith to be shared in community and across generations
- affirms each person's value in the total community (regardless of age).
- fosters a foundation of support of each other's concerns, interests, and activities
- provides "up close and personal" formation in faith as children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults engage in sharing faith, teaching, learning, and praying for one another
- teaches us to care for one another
- provides role models for children and youth
- teaches us to value older adults
- allows us to pass on the traditions of family and faith
- enhances people's identification with their congregation and integration within the community
- encourages greater faith in all generations
- creates special relationships between adults and youth
- fosters leadership regardless of age or stature
- utilizes the strengths (the wisdom, experience, and knowledge) of one generation to meet the needs of another generation
- promotes understanding of shared values and respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life
- utilizes the creative talents of younger and older generations to provide service to the church and community
- overcomes the age-segregated nature of our society, taking a pro-active, counter-cultural stance in the face of the countless ways society separates and pigeon-holes into age-specific groups

John Roberto is the editor of *Lifelong Faith* and founder of LifelongFaith Associates. He is an author, teacher and trainer, and consultant in lifelong faith formation. He has a special passion for intergenerational faith formation and helping churches become more intentionally intergenerational and lifelong.

Where to Begin

There are dozens of ways that a church can become intentionally intergenerational. We have already seen examples in the articles by Holly Catterton Allen, Carol Howard Merritt, and Earl Creps. In the next section a variety of stories and examples provide more ideas to inspire your own efforts at becoming more intentionally intergenerational. They are organized in the following categories:

1. Intergenerational Social Events
2. Intergenerational Mentoring
3. Intergenerational Storytelling
4. Intergenerational Service
5. Intergenerational Learning
(with profiles of parishes implementing intergenerational faith formation)

Here are several ideas for beginning your journey toward becoming intentionally intergenerational, and for moving from ideas to action:

1. Gather your church's key leaders and/or develop an "Intergenerational Task Force" made up of people in leadership roles from all the generations in your church.
2. Review the "Strategies for Becoming More Intentionally Intergenerational" (below).
3. Read the stories and examples in the next section.
4. Analyze your church's intergenerational strengths and weaknesses. Consider church life, ministries, specific intergenerational programs, projects, and events.
5. Identify areas for growth and improvement.
6. Develop a plan of action:
 - Identify strategies that your church can initiate that will bring an intergenerational focus to existing ministries and programs.
 - Identify new initiatives and programs that your church can launch to bring the generations together.
 - Identify long-term goals (3-5 years) for your church so that becoming intentionally intergenerational is an integral element of the culture of your church.
7. Present your plan to church leaders and the community. Make a solid case for the need to be intergenerational and the blessings and benefits that it will bring to the church community. Share your plan—short term

and long term goals and projects. Invite feedback, suggestions, and ideas.

8. Begin to implement your plan. Evaluate your efforts, but be patient. Each effort provides new learning that you can use to continue to move toward becoming a more intentionally intergenerational church.
9. Keep innovating! Each year introduce new projects and programs. And don't be afraid to communicate the stories and examples of the benefits and blessings that are coming to your church community.

Strategies for Becoming More Intentionally Intergenerational

Before we turn to the stories and examples, here are several strategies for bringing an intergenerational focus to your current community life, ministries, and programming. These strategies can start your journey toward a deeper and richer intergenerational experience in your church.

Focus on Community Life

- Examine your church's activities—from worship to faith formation to social events—to determine if they are welcoming to all generations, especially the underserved and uninvolved (e.g., young adults).
- Explore how your church's activities can incorporate opportunities for more relationship building across generations.
- Provide community building at church-wide events. Include introductions and a brief community builder. This will help people get to know each other.
- Have one generation provide hospitality at parish-wide events for all of the other generations.
- Involve the parish community in praying for all the generations, for example: young people on a mission trip or retreat weekend; milestones in the life of individuals and families, such as the birth of a new child, marriages, graduations, and retirements.
- Offer simple, one-time opportunities for the older generations (adults) and the younger generations (children, youth, young adults) to get to know each other. These may include social events, service projects, or educational experiences. Make a concerted effort to invite

people from all generations to plan and participate in the activities.

- Encourage adults of all ages to share their faith journey, beliefs, and values with young people. Invite young people to share their stories, too.
- Link people of different generations (older-to-younger or younger-to-older) in the church who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to the other, such as mid life and older adults helping young adults and new parents with money management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate e-mail and the online world.
- Through worship services, newsletters, adult education, and other settings, urge all adults in the church to form meaningful relationships with young people in all areas of their life, including neighborhood, workplace, and social activities — not just in the church.

Infuse Intergenerational Relationship-Building and Programming into Existing Programs and Activities

- “Intergenerationalize” age-group programming — take a child- or youth-only program and re-design it to include other generations, such as an intergenerational service program.
- Integrate intergenerational programming into the age-group program plan and calendar, such as quarterly intergenerational nights as part of the children’s faith formation program.
- Structure age-group programs with an intergenerational connection, such as an educational program that includes interviews, a panel, and/or storytelling with people of different ages.
- Incorporate intergenerational dialogues into programming — provide opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions. Then *reverse* the process and provide opportunities for the older adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Develop mentoring relationships between youth and adults, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvement, and Confirmation mentors. Mentoring

programs can replace some of the parish’s gathered youth programs.

Incorporate All Generations into Ministries and Leadership Roles

- Break-down an “adult-only” mentality by identifying specific roles for the younger generations in church leadership, such as adolescents serving as teachers in children’s faith formation or as worship leaders (lectors, greeters, musicians, artists to decorate the worship space).
- “Intergenerationalize” church councils and committees. Be sure to involve at least two members of each generation. This can be a time for mentoring younger generations by assigning an veteran member of a council of committee to support and nurture a younger member.
- Organize a leadership or ministry apprenticeship for younger generations to serve in church ministries and leadership positions.
- Create new parish or community leadership roles that are led by younger generations, especially young adults, and which draw upon some of their unique and special gifts that can benefit the entire community.
- Create a youth program or task form to analyze youth involvement in the parish or community. For example: working in teams, take a month to explore the life and ministries of the parish. Create a report on youth involvement in parish life for young people, for the parish staff and leadership, and for the parish community.

Create New Models of Intergenerational Programming

- Design intergenerational service programs (or redesign existing programs) that accommodate the needs and interests of all generations.
- Sponsor music and art projects such as a community concert where musicians of all ages perform together, or an intergenerational art exchange or exhibit, or an Advent or Lent music festival.
- Organize social-recreational activities, such as an intergenerational Olympics or a Wednesday night simple meal and Bible study during Lent.
- Offer intergenerational learning programs throughout the year that involve all generations in learning, relationships building, faith sharing, prayer and celebrating.

Intergenerational Social Events

From: "Breaking Down the Age Barriers." Amy Hanson (Leadership Network, www.leadnet.org)

Because relationships that cross generational lines do not happen as naturally in American culture as they did in the past, some churches plan events that have intergenerational contact as the primary goal.

Encouraging connection between the generations is a major thrust of the older adult ministry at **First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, CA** (<http://evfreefullerton.com>). One of the primary ways they champion this value is through events called **Back to the Future**. Junior high students, high school students, and young adults of First Evangelical Free have all participated in the Back to the Future nights. The event involves approximately 24 older adults who come to a regular youth group activity. The entire group is broken into small groups so that one to two older adults are interacting with about 10 to 12 students. The older adults are given a list of questions to discuss with the young people:

- What was it like for you to be a 12-year-old? A 16-year-old? A person in your mid-20s?
- What was your first car? What were the popular dances, singers, and actors of your youth?
- What did your classroom look like and who was your best friend?
- When was a time in your life when God started to make sense?
- How did you come to know Christ?

Often the older adults will bring their yearbooks, letter jackets, and report cards for the younger people to see. The students are encouraged to ask questions and simply talk with the older adult about dating, family issues and other things of a concern to them. Rosalyn Encarcion, director of senior adult programs, says there are many benefits that come from these events. "Our older adults realize that their lives are significant and valuable as they pass on the lessons learned from their own life experiences. In turn, the youth have a broader worldview as they hear the wisdom of the older adults. The event is also a great way for breaking down the negative stereotypes that each generation may have toward the other. For example, not all older people are cranky and not all

young people are irresponsible and reckless."

Rosalyn also says that mentoring relationships and prayer partnerships are sometimes formed from the connections made during the Back to the Future nights.

Dave McElheran from **Cedar Mills Bible Church** (<http://www.cmbc.org>) says that you have to believe in the value of these types of events in order to get them started. "I sat down with our youth pastor and we brainstormed various activities that we thought the students and older adults would both enjoy. This is how our yearly **miniature golf event** was born." After people have signed up for the event the youth pastor and Dave match approximately two teens to one older adult. "We put a lot of care into how we pair the people up as we want to create the best environment we can for on-going relationships to occur." The night of the event they have a meal together and are given various questions that they can use to get to know each other. After this, they ride on busses to the miniature golf course. There are various prizes awarded, such as a Starbucks gift card that the older adult and the teens are to go out together and enjoy. "Everything about the night is to encourage positive relationships." Each golf team has their picture taken and then the names of the people along with their phone numbers are written on the back of the photo and given to each person. 75% of the teams maintain at least an acquaintance relationship and about 25% develop a lasting relationship that continues on and goes deeper.

Dave tells of one older woman, Peggy Horning who was flying to the east coast with her husband. When Dave asked her why they were making the trip, she said it was to attend the wedding of a special young woman from the church. How had this older woman and this young adult gotten connected and developed such a strong relationship? It began through the miniature golf event.

In the beginning it took a lot of effort to encourage the young people and the older people to get involved. "Both age groups had a fear of the other group, which is precisely why we do these kinds of activities. Now, after doing this for five years, we have junior high students that cannot wait to be in high school so that they can be a part of the mini-golf night."

Intergenerational Mentoring

From: "Breaking Down the Age Barriers." Amy Hanson (Leadership Network, www.leadnet.org)

A mentor as defined by Webster's Dictionary is "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher; a loyal advisor." The concept of an experienced and wise adult passing on their knowledge to a young person has been gaining momentum in recent years. Schools and other secular organizations, such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters have seen the value of older adults spending quality time with a young person. Churches are also finding that one-on-one mentoring relationships can become a way for love, care, and support to occur between the generations.

Formal Mentoring Programs

Some churches participate in formal mentoring partnerships with local schools and community groups. Mike Smith, a lay leader at **Cedar Mill Bible Church** heard about a local high school mentoring program through a Chamber of Commerce event. The school had an existing mentoring program, but the only mentors had been parents from the school. Mike was the first "outside" person to volunteer and has now been participating for over four years and has mentored 6 students. When Mike first began meeting with one of his current mentorees, the student was struggling to maintain any grades above a D, but now he has a 3.0 grade point average. Mike says, "It is hard to describe how great it feels to know that I'm making a difference in the lives of these high school boys. To see the smiles on their faces or to have them run down the hall to give me a hug makes it worth all of the time and energy that I invest."

Many of the students participating in the program come from broken homes or just difficult situations. Each student has to personally ask to be matched with a mentor and their parents have to approve of the relationship. The mentor then makes the commitment to meet with the teenager for one hour, once a week, for an entire year.

Research has shown that students who have a committed mentor have better school attendance, a better chance of going on to higher education, and tend to trust their parents more. In addition, mentoring appears to help prevent substance abuse among teenagers.

But even beyond these benefits, some students are getting to hear about Christ. "During one of my first visits, the student asked me if I was a

Christian. For the remaining hour I told him about my faith and answered many of his questions. We've even had some of these teens visit our church."

Cedar Mills now has an on-going relationship with the school and supplies them with many mentors each year in addition to providing the training of all new mentors (whether these mentors come from the church or the community). Dave McElheran says, "We have a very good relationship with the school, thanks to Mike. In fact the principal attended one of our Sunday church services to publicly thank our congregation for our commitment and partnership. It is a great way that our adults are able to make a difference."

Informal Mentoring

There are a number of organized mentoring programs throughout the country but it is difficult to quantify how much mentoring occurs outside a formal structure. Iola Boyd at the age of 82 was one of the founding members of the **Compassion House at First Baptist at the Mall in Lakeland, Florida** (<http://www.fbclakeland.org>).

Iola tirelessly gave herself to the ministry, working every day that it was open, which totaled three days each week. During her years serving many young people, home school kids, college students, and teenagers would volunteer their time. Iola personally took these groups under her wing, trained them, and put them to work. Before Iola passed away, she told Dave McClamma, senior associate pastor of adult ministries, "I want these young people to serve in this ministry when I am gone." Dave said, "It was her desire to reproduce her passion in each of them—and she did." One of the best examples was seen at her funeral service. In her years serving with the Compassion House, Iola constantly was asking people to donate peanut butter to the ministry. Anytime she was given an opportunity she would tell people, "don't forget the peanut butter." Iola worked at the ministry until she passed away at the age of 90 and at her memorial service the front of the church was lined with hundreds of jars of peanut butter.

Intergenerational Storytelling

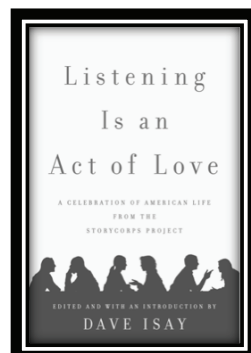
Grace Presbyterian Church (www.gpch.org) in Houston, TX recognized the power of preserving the individual stories of people and took on a book project *Stories of Grace*. The 174 pages in this book tell the individual stories of 24 people—stories of children, young adults, middle-age adults, and older adults. Each person was interviewed and asked to specifically consider the question, “Where are the handprints of God in my life?” The interviews were then edited and written in the form of stories. Doug Ferguson, the senior pastor of Grace Presbyterian said in the forward of the book, “Among the things that hold families together are the stories that are told and passed on from generation to generation... they are the stories of God’s mighty acts among us, stories of faithfulness and stories of grace.” The book brings value to each generation, recognizing that everyone has a story that needs to be passed on to others.

Dave McElheran, older adult ministries pastor at **Cedar Mills Bible Church** (www.cmbc.org) in Portland, OR has attempted to capture and share the faith stories of older adults by using multimedia. Harvey Scarper, a member of Cedar Mills, lost his wife and was searching for purpose. After being asked to serve in the children’s ministry, Harvey began to involve himself in various ministries around the church and grew in his relationship with the Lord. Even after discovering he had cancer and only a short time to live, he continued to communicate his great joy found in Christ. Harvey tells of serving on a short term missions team in Slydell, Louisiana and being so thankful to God that he was not given his cancer diagnosis until he returned from this trip. Speaking about this event Harvey said with a huge smile on his face, “Isn’t God good? He waited to reveal this to me until after my time working in Louisiana! Isn’t that great!?”

Dave wanted to honor Harvey and have his legacy of faith be heard so he interviewed Harvey while a professional photographer from the church video taped the interaction. After editing the interview and weaving photographs into the film, the result was a six minute media presentation of Harvey sharing his testimony. The piece has been used in a variety of settings including adult Sunday school classes, high school groups, and even with individuals in Dave’s office. “I show it to individual older adults in order to disarm many of their excuses about being involved in the later years of life. Harvey’s testimony shows people that even

when you are not feeling well or you think you are too old, God can still use you.” The DVD was also viewed by the entire church family during a Sunday morning service with Harvey present. Dave said, “The presentation helped to breakdown the fear that our young people had toward older people and also helped our older adults be much more assertive in their ministry with the church. Overall, it communicated to the entire church body that our older adults are valuable.”

Resource: The StoryCorps Project (<http://www.storycorps.net>)



StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit project whose mission is to honor and celebrate one another’s lives through listening. By recording the stories of our lives with the people we care about, we experience our history, hopes, and humanity. Since 2003, tens of thousands of everyday people have interviewed family and friends through StoryCorps. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to take home and share, and is archived for generations to come at the Library of Congress. Millions listen to our award-winning broadcasts on public radio and the Internet. The book, *Listening Is an Act of Love* by Dave Isay, presents a sampling of the stories that have been recorded. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, creating a growing portrait of who we really are as Americans.

The heart of StoryCorps is the conversation between two people who are important to each other: a son asking his mother about her childhood, an immigrant telling his friend about coming to America, or a couple reminiscing on their 50th wedding anniversary. By helping people to connect, and to talk about the questions that matter, the StoryCorps experience is powerful and sometimes even life-changing. Our goal is to make that experience accessible to all, and find new ways to inspire people to record and preserve the stories of someone important to them.

Go to www.storycorps.net for resources on developing your own storytelling project.

Intergenerational Service

Intergenerational service is a great way to engage all of the generations in working together to respond to the needs of individuals, communities, and people around the world. Eugene Roehlkepartain and Jenny Friedman offer a number of practical guidelines and suggestions for family service, which can easily be applied to intergenerational service. They suggest the following:

1. Make the activities meaningful, so that every person, regardless of age, can contribute in a significant way.
2. Supply mentors or mentor families to individuals or families that have had little or no experience in service.
3. Offer various options to suit individuals and families with different ages, interests, time constraints, and locations.
4. Include preparation and reflection as part of any church-sponsored service activity.
5. Offer some simple “in-house” activities. Although some families are enthusiastic about and ready for community ministry, others may be more comfortable initially with simple service activities they can complete at the church.
6. Hold a service fair for all generations.
7. Provide service resources (books, media, websites) for families and all generations; include children’s books that focus on caring for others.
8. Become a clearinghouse for local and global service opportunities.
9. Organize regular family-intergenerational service days and events.
10. Organize an annual family and/or intergenerational mission trip.
11. Celebrate what church members are already doing.

Intergenerational services provides many benefits to individuals, families, and the whole church community. Intergenerational service. . .

- appeals to busy families who want to spend more quality time together
- helps people grow spiritually as they pray for, give to, and do service together
- helps narrow the generation gap between older and younger church members

- recognizes that all people in the church, regardless of age, have talents to contribute that are valuable and important
- assists children and youth in feeling a part of the church today, not just the church of tomorrow
- connects the generations and builds relationships as they serve God by serving their neighbor
- emphasizes the importance of teamwork
- communicates that it is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of age, to serve people and work for justice as a follower Jesus Christ

Ideas for Intergenerational Service

There are so many ways to act on a particular need or issue. And there are so many people and organizations already engaged in transforming the world that will provide assistance in developing intergenerational service projects. You can develop a service project at the level of your local community, the country, or the world. There are organizations—local, national, and international—dedicated to transforming the world around almost every important need or issue. The internet provides everyone with access to ideas and organizations to assist you.

Serving the Poor and Vulnerable

Here are examples of direct action to serve the poor and vulnerable—locally and around the world—that can be designed into intergenerational service projects.

- Prepare and serve a meal at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Donate goods such as food for the local food bank, clothing, school kits for children, “personal essentials” for those at a homeless shelter, a toy collection at Christmas, gift packages for prisoners.
- Care for the elderly by visiting them at a convalescent home or senior citizen facility or doing chores and shopping.
- Build or repair homes.

- Support efforts to provide vaccines and medical care to the world's poor, such as provide mosquito nets for malaria prevention, immunizations against childhood disease, and HIV/AIDS treatment.
- Work with people who have disabling conditions.
- Conduct a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to a) support the efforts of local and national groups who work directly with the poor, b) adopt a community in another country by supporting them financially and learning about their culture and community life, and/or c) support organizations that are building schools and libraries for children in the poorest countries of the world by providing books and/or our money to purchase books for children.

Acting for Justice to Ensure the Rights of All People

Here are examples of action for justice projects that can be designed as an intergenerational initiative.

- Develop intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God's creation, and build peace by a) becoming familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people's basic needs, b) writing advocacy letters or emails, c) working with advocacy groups, and/or d) work with organizations that are changing the structures that promote injustice.
- Support organizations that are working for justice—locally, nationally, and internationally by promoting the purpose and activities of organizations, providing financial support, and volunteering time to work with the organization.
- Develop a program or campaign to educate people in your church or community about a particular justice issue.
- Hold a Fair Trade Festival to provide a way for members of the church community to buy fair trade products, such as coffee, chocolate, and crafts, that benefit local producers in the developing world.

Working for Peace

Here are examples of ways to work for a peaceful world that can be designed as intergenerational projects.

- Work to end the violence of human trafficking of children by working with organizations seek to shut down trafficking rings and providing support for the victims.
- Address violence in the media through a church-wide or community-wide campaign that encourages by not purchasing and/or abstaining or limiting exposure to violent TV shows, movies, video games, and toys.
- Sponsor an intergenerational community-wide peace festival, working with organizations that seek to build bridges of understanding among people.

Caring for Creation

Here are examples of working for a peaceful world that can be designed as intergenerational projects.

- Conduct an campaign to educate and raise funds to adopt a piece of the planet through the Nature Conservatory's "Adopt an Acre" and "Rescue the Reef" programs, and the Rainforest Alliance's "Adopt-a-Rainforest" program; or protect endangered species and their habitats through the World Wildlife Fund's projects.
- Sponsor a community-wide "care for the environment day" by planting trees in your community and cleaning-up the community.

Example: "Care Kits"

Organizing and assembling "care kits" is a great opportunity for intergenerational action and for the whole church to learn about important justice issues. Here are two examples of projects sponsored by World Vision (www.worldvision.org).

AIDS Caregiver Kits

World Vision (www.worldvision.org)

Too many caregivers lack the basic supplies they need to safely and effectively minister to those who have AIDS in poor communities. Caregiver Kits provides basic supplies for those living with AIDS while protecting caregivers and preventing the spread of infection. For an average cost of just \$28 each, Caregiver Kits bring practical help to

caregivers and have an immeasurable impact on many people within the communities they serve. Churches and small groups raise funds for and assemble Caregiver Kits, which are shipped to World Vision distribution centers and then to AIDS-affected communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. World Vision coordinates the bulk purchase of kit contents. Churches pay for the bulk purchase. Participants sign up for “assembly day,” when everyone comes together to assemble the kits.

SchoolTools Kits

World Vision (www.worldvision.org)

Millions of children living in poverty miss out on the chance for an education simply because they can't pay for essential supplies that go hand-in-hand with learning. That's why World Vision created SchoolTools—a program that inspires hope in children by providing them with the valuable school materials they so desperately need. SchoolTools collects kits of specific school supplies made from individuals, groups and organizations and delivers them through various ministry partners to needy children who wouldn't be able to attend class without them. Work as a church to assemble kits full of simple supplies that will light up the faces of the children who receive them. Through your gift to SchoolTools, you'll experience the blessing of knowing you've helped children in the United States and all over the world turn their dreams of education into reality.

Church Wide Service Day

Faith in Action (www.putyourfaithinaction.org), a national project sponsored by World Vision, is a four-week, church-wide campaign that creates an outward focus and a heart to serve in a congregation. The first three weeks are preparation through worship and learning, and the identification and organization of service projects. The fourth week culminates in a service day where the entire congregation engages in service projects in and with the community.

Here's the story of one church's experience:

“We decided to do Faith in Action before their materials were even printed,” recalled Jeff Lanningham, Associate Pastor at First Baptist Church in Vernon, Texas, where Dr. Ken Macklin is Senior Pastor. “We thought it was such a great idea—we didn't want to wait. And

our people loved it. Afterwards, one senior citizen said to me, “This was the best day in the life of our church!” “Our Faith in Action program was completely lay-led,” explained Pastor Jeff. “We gathered some lay leaders, laid the idea out to them and then explained that first they needed to decide whether to proceed with the program, and then they would need to take the bull by the horns and run it themselves.” So these leaders recruited more leaders, chose the service projects, recruited for each team, and began publicizing the day within their church family. “The spirit was unbelievable,” Pastor Jeff recalled. “We normally run 400 in worship—and we had more than that involved that day. In fact, it went down in our records that we had more than 100% involvement in missions on May 6.” Because of their commitment, First Baptist received a “church of the year” award from their state Baptist association and were asked to host a booth at the state's convention to explain to other pastors what they'd done and how they'd done it. On May 6, teams from the church served the community in many different ways: several kids' ministry teams gathered up kids in a local park, from nearby apartment complexes and government housing areas. They hosted games, activities and Bible stories for them. “Moms and dads came along too, just to watch,” said Pastor Jeff, so they were able to visit with parents. Other teams worked in the yards of needy families; one team visited families door-to-door, praying for needs. Others worked at light construction projects, building porches, replacing windows and roofing a patio. Other groups held worship services at the local jail, youth detention center and retirement homes. “In the meantime, a prayer team hunkered down at the church, with phones so that teams could call in with up-to-date requests. A group of nursery workers at church kept all the members' pre-school kids so parents could minister. And a third group prepared a quick breakfast before sending the teams out; plus lunch at mid-day for them to refuel before going back to serve.” Our Faith in Action Day was a fantastic opportunity for our church to get outside our own walls and into the community,” Pastor Jeff summed up. “Too often, we as churches get too complacent and fall into maintenance mode. This was an awakening for us to recognize once again that God put us in this community to be a light to them, by serving them.”

Intergenerational Learning

The Learning Model

James White, in *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Religious Education Press, 1988) identified four patterns of relationships that have become the basic pattern of intergenerational learning experiences: 1) In-Common Experiences, 2) Parallel Learning, 3) Contributive-Occasions, and 4) Interactive Sharing.

Most churches design their family-intergenerational learning programs using these four movements, adapting the process to fit their particular needs. The stories of churches with intergenerational faith formation illustrate the different adaptations of this basic process.

1. **In-Common Experiences.** Intergenerational religious education begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together. In-common experiences of generations are usually less verbal and more observatory than in the other three elements. In this pattern there is something “out there” or “over there” for us to see or do, something that equalizes the ages. Thus, at the same time and place and in a similar manner, different-aged people listen to music or sing, make an art project, watch a video, hear a story, participate in a ritual, pray together, and so on. In-common experiences for the most part remain at what Jean Piaget calls the “concrete operational” level, where all can learn together.

Shared experiences are absolutely critical for building IGRE. They are the stuff by which other patterns of relationships are built. To the point, Fred Rogers, of television’s *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, makes the case for what is prescribed here when he asks rhetorically, “How can older and younger people respond to each other if they have no experiences together?”

2. **Parallel Learning.** Parallel learning is the second major IG relational pattern. With it the generations are separated in order to work on the same topic or project, but in different ways at a “best fit” development, interest, or skill level. Some of the developmental levels we are talking about are cognitive, psychological,

physical, moral, valuational, and so on—all the ways that make people different and special. Though age groups may be separated, each one is focusing on the same learning task or topic. One of the major criticisms of IGRE is “the tendency to view equality or persons across the age spectrum with uniformity of experience,” with that experience only from the vantage point of the child. By engaging in parallel learning, however, this IGRE shortcoming is avoided.

3. **Contributive-Occasions.** The third pattern of learning is that of contributive-occasions. These occasions are often the step after parallel learning. What is involved is a coming together of different age groups or classes for the purpose of sharing what has been learned or created previously. The joining or rejoining becomes a contributive-occasion where separated pieces to a whole are added together for everyone’s benefit.

Contributive-occasions are more participatory than the other three patterns. If the contributions come from a previous period of parallel learning, the last part of that parallel learning would have been concerned with how to communicate acquired insights or behaviors to other age groups. By engaging “in mutual contribution” to one another, IG learners discover that the educational whole is great than the sum of its parts.

4. **Interactive Sharing.** Interactive sharing is the fourth major pattern in IGRE relationships. It is a distinctive style or way of learning. Here persons are provided with an opportunity for interpersonal exchange, which may involve experiences or thoughts or feelings or actions. At its best, interactive sharing facilitates a “crossing over” to hear and respond to another’s perspective.

In an ideal IGRE program or event, all four of the patterns of relationships will be enacted. People come together and have an in-common experience. Then they break to separately investigate the common subject at a level appropriate for their highest learning abilities. They come back together to present their

insights and work in a shared program. Finally, different generations interact with one another, giving and receiving in the exchanges. In the latter case the participants are sharing, reflecting, debating, and dreaming from the side of the other but for their own edification. (White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 26-30)

Together with my colleagues at the Center for Ministry Development (Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber), we developed a model of intergenerational learning based on White's four patterns, which is being used by Catholic parishes in the Generations of Faith Project and in the intergenerational sessions for the *People of Faith* series (a 6-volume series of intergenerational programs from Harcourt Religion). This process is also described in the book *Intergenerational Faith Formation* by Martineau, Kehrwald, and Weber (Twenty-Third Publications).

In this model, intergenerational learning experiences are designed around a four movement learning process.

- Welcome, Community Building and Opening Prayer
- 1. An **All-Ages Learning Experience** for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
- 2. **In-Depth Learning Experiences** that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format*: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups)
 - *Age Group Format*: learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages
 - *Learning Activity Center Format*: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers)
- 3. An **All-Ages Contributive Learning Experience** in which each generation teaches the other generations.
- 4. **Reflection** on the learning experience and interactive group sharing. Preparation for living one's faith at home and in daily life.
 - Closing Prayer

Approaches & Ideas for Intergenerational Learning

I. Develop a faith formation curriculum for the whole community using intergenerational faith formation as the primary learning model.

Many churches across the country have adopted intergenerational faith formation as their primary learning model. The intergenerational curriculum becomes the core faith formation curriculum for the whole Christian community, supplemented by age-specific topics for children, teens, and adults. For example, many churches offer monthly intergenerational learning sessions for the whole faith community. They may offer the same intergenerational program several times each month to accommodate the number of people in the church, using different days and times to make it easy for people to participate.

Churches organize their curriculum in a number of different ways using the rich resources of the Christian tradition, such as:

- the three-year cycle of readings in the Sunday Lectionary
- Bible themes
- Christian practices
- core beliefs and practices of the Christian faith, such as the following schema for the Catholic parishes: liturgical year feasts and seasons, the Creed, sacraments, morality, justice and service, and prayer

2. Extend a topic featured in the faith formation program for children or teens, to the whole community through intergenerational learning.

A topic that the children are studying can be extended to the whole community through intergenerational learning. For example, if the children are studying about Jesus, consider offering an intergenerational program on the identity of Christ. Schedule it within the same timeframe that the children are studying the unit on Jesus.

If the young people are preparing for a service project or mission trip, use the opportunity to conduct an intergenerational session on Christian service, and get everyone engaged in supporting the teenagers. Intergenerational learning provides a common learning experience for the whole

community that can support age group learning programs. Examine your age group curriculum and look for the opportunities and topics for extending age group learning to the whole community.

3. Replace a topic in the children or teen program with intergenerational learning on the same theme.

Intergenerational learning can provide a different learning model for teaching the same content that would have been taught to the children. For example, replace the children's sessions on prayer with one or more intergenerational sessions on prayer for all members of the community. Children will benefit greatly by learning together with their parents and the other generations of the Christian community.

4. Add intergenerational learning to sacramental preparation and celebrations.

Sacrament preparation offers a marvelous opportunity to offer intergenerational learning for the whole community and/or the extended family of the one preparing for the sacrament. The celebration of a sacrament, such as baptism or Eucharist, is an opportunity to enrich the faith of the whole community. For example, your church can offer intergenerational learning each year around the celebration of First Communion, focusing on different aspects of the Sunday liturgy within the context of the sacrament. During the Christian initiation formation process (RCIA), intergenerational sessions can be offered on initiation themes, such as the baptism and conversion. In addition, many Catholic parishes conduct intergenerational learning programs to prepare the community for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation in Advent or Lent.

5. Conduct intergenerational faith formation before liturgical year feasts.

The church calendar is rich with possibilities for intergenerational learning for the whole community. Conduct intergenerational programs to prepare all generations for major liturgical feasts and seasons, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and Pentecost, as well as significant events in the life of your church, such as the anniversary of the founding of the church, stewardship Sunday, or a ministries fair. There are dozens of opportunities for

preparing the whole community to participate more intentionally and meaningfully in church events.

6. Add intergenerational learning to a vacation Bible school or summer program.

Many churches sponsor summer programs for children. This is another opportunity to add an intergenerational learning program for the whole community. Take a theme from the summer program and offer an intergenerational program on that same theme for families of the children and the whole community. For example, if the focus of the program is being a friend of Jesus, the church can sponsor an intergenerational program on becoming a disciple or living as a disciple.

7. Conduct intergenerational learning for justice issues and action projects.

Justice issues, events, and action projects provide opportunities to engage the whole community in the work of justice and service, as well as learn about the biblical teachings on justice. For example, prepare the community for a justice and service project, such as helping to feed and clothe the poor in your community, with an intergenerational program on poverty and the needs of the poor. Celebrate the national holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr., by conducting an intergenerational program on racial equality or peace and nonviolence, and then engaging in an action project. Enlist the whole community in supporting the work of national and international organizations by adopting an organizations' project, such as building homes through Habitat for Humanity, and then conducting an intergenerational program on housing and poverty.

8. Sponsor an intergenerational retreat for the whole community.

Many churches conduct a community-wide retreat over several days each year, usually with weekend and evening sessions. This is a great opportunity to enrich the faith of the whole community. Organize your retreat by conducting intergenerational sessions, rather than sessions for individual groups. Develop a focus, such as following Jesus, or growing in prayer, or what we believe as Christians. Select individual topics for each session of the mission and provide participants with materials to continue the retreat at home.