

# Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

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### Cover Art: "Moses Blesses Israel" by He Qi

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# “Generations Learning Together”

## Lifelong Faith

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## From the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2009 issue of **Lifelong Faith**, with the theme of “Generations Learning Together.” There is lots of energy and enthusiasm for creating intentional intergenerational learning and experiences in churches today. And for good reason. We need and yearn for intergenerational connections and relationships, yet everything in our culture, and sadly often our churches, works to pull the generations apart and isolate them from each other. This issue presents a variety of perspectives, approaches, and strategies for becoming intentional about connecting the generations in a church community, and providing intergenerational learning experiences, programs and projects, and mentoring relationships.

Our lead article, “Bringing the Generations Together” by **Holly Catterton Allen** of John Brown University explores the questions: *Why might intergenerational Christian experiences contribute significantly to faith and spiritual development?* She examines biblical and empirical support for intentional intergenerational ministry, and integrates concepts from situated learning theory with sociocultural ideas to forge a learning macrotheory that describes the basic learning principles at work in intergenerational Christian community. She also offers practical ideas for those who desire to cultivate a more intergenerational outlook as well as some specific ways to bring the generations together.

In “Fostering Intergenerational Relationships” **Carol Howard Merritt**, pastor and author, presents a profile of the diversity of young adult life situations and how to connect young adults with all of the generations in a faith community. She writes “the church is one place where we can still have multigenerational interaction and it is crucial for the fabric of our society to preserve, maintain, and enhance the connection.”

**Earl Creps**, pastor, ministry consultant, and university professor, presents the fascinating concept of reverse mentoring in his article, “Developing Reverse Mentoring Relationship.” He explores how to build intergenerational mentoring relationships so that the older generations (and their leaders) can learn from young generations who are in closer touch with today’s culture, technology, and social climate.

The final article, “Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies,” provides a variety of proven ways for your church to develop your own intentional, intergenerational plan for faith formation. I have compiled a variety of models and strategies that you can use in your church to bring the generations together for learning, service, sharing, and building relationships. This section includes profiles of a number of churches I had the opportunity to interview about their intergenerational learning programs. Many I had the privilege to work with, through the Generations of Faith Project, as they began their journey toward becoming intentionally intergenerational.

I hope you will find this issue helpful in guiding your church toward becoming more intergenerational. There are ideas and strategies in these pages that can get your started or expand and enrich your current efforts. Now is the time to strengthen your intergenerational focus!

If you have any comments or suggestions about the Journal, just contact me at jroberto@lifelongfaith.com

**John Roberto, Editor**



# Bringing the Generations Together: Support from Learning Theory

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Holly Catterton Allen

**D**uring 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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**Holly Catterton Allen** (Ph.D.), serves as Associate Professor of Christian Ministries and Director of the Children & Family Ministry Program at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Dr. Allen's areas of scholarly interest are children's spirituality and intergenerational issues. She speaks regularly at conferences and churches concerning these issues, and has written about them in several journals; she has also written chapters in two books. She is currently a co-director for a triennial national conference, the Children's Spirituality Conference: Christian Perspectives. Dr. Allen's first book, *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices* (Cascade, 2008), is the edited volume of the best papers presented at the 2006 conference. The next conference will be held June 14-17, 2009 at Concordia College, River Forest, IL.

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> 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**

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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**

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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**

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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**

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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**

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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](http://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

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

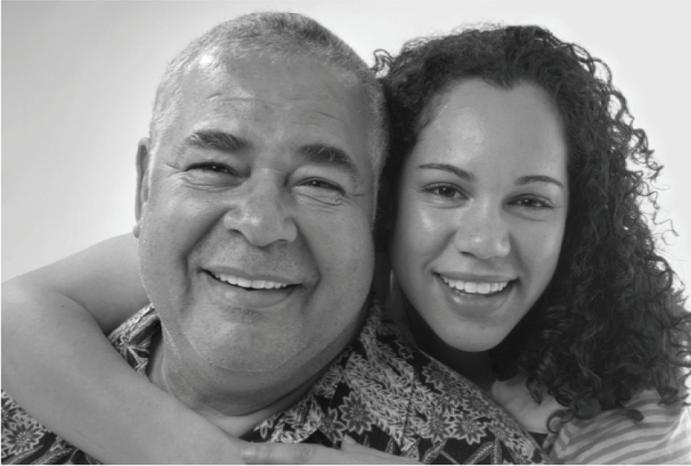
<sup>4</sup> Two learning theories dominated the 20th century:

*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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# Fostering Intergenerational Relationships

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Carol Howard Merritt

**M**arsha earned a PhD in engineering. Some years later, she left her teaching job, moved to another state, and became a stay-at-home mom. In her new surroundings, she missed the intellectual stimulus of her academic setting and found that she did not have many friends. It didn't take Marsha long to get connected with playgroups and library programs in her town where she met other moms, but finding a church proved to be more difficult. As her family visited different worshipping communities, Marsha was on the lookout for a large, program-oriented church, with a lot of parents her age and plenty of activities for her child. But much to her own surprise, she settled on a small denominational church.

Why?

Although dissatisfied that there were not more programs for her child, and although she had set out to find a congregation with people her age, Marsha found herself needing the support that she was getting from the older women. "You just can't imagine how it feels for me to be at home all week with my child. I don't think I'm doing anything right, and then I come to church, and one of the grandmothers tells me how good Rachel is. They always let me know that I'm a good mom, that I'm doing a good job. I don't get that anywhere else."

When Marsha had her second child they made up a detailed schedule for themselves so that someone was always on call and prepared to support Marsha in the early days and weeks. They surrounded her with care, making sure that her oldest daughter had someone to stay with from the time Marsha went into labor until the child's grandmother could make it into town. Even as a new resident in a strange town, an intergenerational tribe grew up around her. Marsha knew that no matter what time of day or night it was, she could call on this faithful group of women to assist her.

Although these caring women were particularly helpful, this story is not unusual. The fabric of our churches is so strong and durable that when one thread grows thin, we can rely on the many others surrounding it to keep things together. Many times, we find that assistance from generations other than our own.

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# A House Divided Against Itself

We need and yearn for intergenerational connection. Yet in our culture our lives are more and more divided based on age. Singer and songwriter John Austin says, "We get entertainment and noise everywhere. We're always around our own kind." While older people may watch the nightly news, young generations get their information from the Internet. Television producers gear programs toward target audiences, so much that we not only find a simple distinction between adult and children's programming while navigating through the channels, we find discrete shows for infants, toddlers, children, tweens, and teenagers. My sixty-year-old friends can't comprehend that my favorite shows are usually adult cartoons and fake documentaries, but I can't understand how a person comes home after a hard day's work and watches an exhausting hour-long drama.

We not only listen to a variety of music, but we collect it in different ways: buying a CD has become a nostalgic act now that most twenty-year-olds download their music. I read that sad news that the Tower Records store near the George Washington University campus closed. That would have been unimaginable when I was in college. While I shop for a stereo and plenty of CD storage, the college students I work with buy MP3 players and carry virtually thousands of tunes in the palms of their hands.

Even the way in which our phones ring is distinctive, packaged and marketed to us based on our age. Teenagers figured out that older ears have more difficulty hearing higher frequencies, so companies developed a ring tone that typically only people under thirty can hear. Now students can text each other during class without the teacher ever noticing.<sup>1</sup>

Although grateful for such a variety of music and entertainment, I'm concerned that broader generational divides will tear into the fabric of our society just as intergenerational care becomes more and more crucial. I'm worried that we will keep buying products which make it harder for us to hear each other.

Church growth trends that market specifically to younger generations while ignoring the elderly, and congregations who care for older members while neglecting young adults, exacerbate the schisms in our society. The church is one place where we can still have multigenerational interaction, and it is crucial for the fabric of our society to preserve,

maintain, and enhance this connection. Indeed, as John Austin says, "The healthiest islands are biodiverse."

## Older Generations

The segregation of our society spills over from our entertainment into most aspects of our everyday lives. Older people tend to be isolated in child-free condos, retirement communities, and nursing facilities, so we have less interaction with each other.

Understandably, living independently and not being a burden on one's children is a goal for many elderly people, and our culture is in the midst of negotiating what this will look like as people live longer. At this time, grandmothers and grandfathers rarely move to live in the same home with their sons, daughters, and grandchildren; instead, we see an increase in long-term care facilities. Even when they enter residential care, people don't always move into the same town with their sons or daughters. It often doesn't make sense to them to follow their mobile offspring from place to place; they would rather find ways to remain in their hometown, where their friends and support reside. In many ways these are wonderful trends, giving people more independence and freedom to choose their living environments and the extent of long-term care.

Yet, this separation in our culture causes us to miss the insight, history, and perspective of older generations. When contact with the elderly decreases, we become less in touch with their physical, emotional, and social needs, and in turn our own views of life, sickness, and death become gravely distorted. The cartoon caricatures of older adults that our children see on television are blue-haired and muumuu-clad. They speak with grating, gravelly voices, and are typically found hunched over a walker. Worst of all, they are usually insufferably dim-witted. These popular personalities are a far cry from the realities of the vital, wise elderly people who inhabit our churches.

Conversely, older people miss the vital company and hope that young adults and children can provide. Our empathy dulls when we do not communicate with other generations: resentment festers, stereotypes grow, and our society suffers from the misunderstandings of an ageist culture.

Grace Slick, the singer and songwriter who started her career in the psychedelic rock of the sixties, deftly sums up an ageist sentiment when she says, "Old people should be heard and not seen. Young people should be seen and not heard."

In contrast, in the church, we want the old, the young, and everyone in between to be seen and

heard. Communication between generations will become even more vital as more people retire in the coming decade. For increasingly retirement does not equal ease of living. Currently, close to one-third of retirement-aged people have no assets saved and more than two-thirds of retirees rely on Social Security for half or more of their living expenses. Fifty-three percent of workers aged fifty-five to sixty-four have no retirement savings account at all and the ones who do have a median balance of \$25,000. An unfortunate result of the high divorce rate in the 1970s is that single parents are even less likely to be ready for retirement.<sup>3</sup> As health care, prescription, and long-term care costs increase, millions of people will be living beyond their assets, and young generations will need to assume more responsibility for their parents.

Our days of single-family living may soon come to an end, as adult sons and daughters will need to convert their extra bedrooms into apartments for their parents. These large-scale adjustments will not occur without a great deal of communication, and since the church is one of the last places where the young and old still gather together it is a community we do well to nurture and celebrate. Because the fabric of our society depends on intergenerational tribes, it is in everyone's interests to guard, maintain, and nourish these connections between older adults, young families, and single people.

We give each other an invaluable gift of perspective when we talk to each other. At one time, I was incessantly badgering my parents about their health, caught in an irritating cycle, wondering why they never listened to me. Then, I discussed the matter with Joan, a retiree with a grown son and daughter. When I stopped to take a breath, she asked me, "Carol, do you like it when your parents instruct you about how to raise your child?" My mom has never done anything like that, but I could image how it would feel if she did.

"Well, it feels the same way when you nag them about their health."

Suddenly, the family dynamics made sense to me. I finally understood my parents' perspective and I remembered, once again, the importance of the intergenerational connection to my church. Presumably many conversations like that one will occur in the years to come, as our nation begins caring for an aging population.

## Young Families

It can be a scary thing to be a parent, to raise children. A parent finds a strange rash and wants to rush straight to the emergency room. It's unnerving

when it takes more than twenty minutes to potty train a two year old. And with all of the educational tools available for infants, it seems like children should be prepared to take the SAT by the time they're five.

Unfortunately, the culture of young parents can be difficult. When moms and dads gather together, they have expectations for themselves and for each other to have incredible birthday parties, the finest educational opportunities, and extensive extracurricular involvement with their children. Their schedules have to fit around nap times and sports, so it can be months before they can schedule a play date into their palm pilots. For some reason, it's easy to get lost in perfectionism even when knee deep in diapers. Judith Warner, the author of *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, writes about "the mess" in which middle-class mothers find themselves. She explains that this generation is caught up in a society where many of them do not live at the economic level of their parents, yet it's a "hypercompetitive and excruciatingly expensive age," where they put everything into their children, hoping to make them winners, knowing that "unless they succeed, they might not have a foothold on the Good Life."<sup>4</sup>

The stress doesn't end with children: we put pressure on ourselves to have it all together: our homes, the sports, the vacations, and the parent-teacher involvement. There is not a single aspect of our lives that we can let go of.

I know I get caught up in all of it, trying to be the perfect mom and homemaker on top of balancing the perfect career. A friend recently asked for a tour of "my garden." I led her through the row of hostas which stood in front of the row of azaleas, and I could tell she expected more. So I took her into the back yard where the ivy, wildflowers, and three more azalea bushes grew. My neighbor had morning glories that climbed over our chain link fence and ate one of our bicycles, entangling the spokes in their glorious viney. I loved the flowers so I just couldn't bear to cut them back until they stop blooming.

Stepping by the hopeless, hidden weed patch on the side yard, I noticed that it'd been recently decorated with a languishing kiddie pool and I flushed with embarrassment. Pages from *Southern Living* magazine haunted me with their perfect peonies and lovely lilacs. I remembered that I had never gotten around to mulching or fertilizing this year and suddenly everyone looked overgrown or wilted. I began apologizing, making excuses, and mumbling something about hiring a landscaper.

Until I finally stopped and made a mental note to myself, "Wait a second. You have a full-time job and you're a mom. You don't have to have a perfect garden. Overgrown azaleas residing in last year's

mulch are just fine.” In my anxiety, I realized the dewy manner of my bedraggled lawn. At those hungry times when we feel like we can never be enough, we are reminded that God gives us what we need, and those small mercies are new every morning.

As moms and dads, we get caught up in perfectionism. With the endless self-help and parenting books available at our bookstores, we have learned well that what we do matters in the development of our children. And somehow that knowledge can develop from healthy attachment into an unhealthy narcissism in which our children become an extension of who we are. Their behavior becomes our shame or our reward. Too much fear and guilt can turn nurturing, responsible parents into hovering, stressed-out control freaks.

Since our own moms and dads may live thousands of miles away, we often do not have the perspective that older parents have, and when we spread ourselves too thin with our worry and obsession, it’s amazing to sense that interweaving connection with older generations. They often give us the manner that we need.

I’ve experienced this on many occasions. One time, I was making a pastoral visit with Parker, a father and grandfather, and I had something gnawing in the back of my mind. I was worried about my three-year old daughter’s active imagination: she didn’t seem to be able to distinguish fact from fiction. It was a typical stage that children go through, one that my little girl quickly outgrew, but I didn’t know it at the time.

Parker could sense my distraction, so he asked me about it. I settled down for a couple hours of psychological analysis and soul-searching getting ready to dive into the depths of my past so that we could illuminate my character defects and come up with a long list of things that I should be doing as a parent to keep this from happening.

Parker’s reply was a little different from the ones that I normally got from my thirty-year old friends, though. He responded, “Well, there’s an easy solution to that one. You need to have another baby, and then you’ll quit obsessing over this one so much.” Having another baby didn’t sound like an easy solution to me, but it did help me to laugh, have some perspective in my situation, and be grateful for the wisdom of the older people in our church.

At Western Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., we met in a women’s spirituality group where the rich intergenerational nature of the class was its most precious asset. When Lisa, a woman in the group, became pregnant, we gathered quotes together, sentences that were important to us, funny sayings, bits of good sense and prayers that we relied

on as mothers and grandmothers. One night Lisa missed a meeting, so we raided the Sunday school supply closet for paper, glitter, and glue sticks, and decorated the wisdom into a stack of lovely cards to give to the new mom.

While we assemble the notes, the grandmothers laughed at all the things they thought were so important when their children were growing up. “Now, as a grandparent, all of that stuff just seems so trivial,” one woman thoughtfully told us as she shared her perspective of time. We discussed the significance and beauty of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, and I became more aware of this unique bond. Through this simple exercise we created a connection with and a rite of passage for this new mom, so she knew that she had support from a wide range of women from their twenties to their sixties that she could rely upon as her son grew.

## Young Singles

Yet, when we minister to younger generations, we must go beyond caring for the needs of young families. Someone in his twenties or thirties is probably not married with children, nor living with a partner, but most likely single. However, we often don’t acknowledge single people in our congregations. “Church is like Noah’s ark,” a young widow explained to me. “People expect you to enter two-by-two.”

This notion changes as we spend more energy with adults in their twenties and thirties. When we reach out to younger generations, we become aware that people marry later now; in fact, the median age for a person’s first marriage is at a historic highpoint and the marriage rate is decreasing.<sup>5</sup>

A clearer understanding of this reality will take more time than many pastors are now investing. When solo and senior pastors were asked, “In your ministry in the congregation, with which age groups do you spend most of your time working?” even when they were allowed to select two age categories, a meager four percent of mainline Protestant pastors reported that they spend their time working with single young adults; in comparison, 69 percent spend their time with older adults.<sup>6</sup>

Growth in a particular age group takes attention, and our mainline denominational churches spend fewer hours on young single people than any other group. When a young man slips into the pew alone, he is also slipping through the cracks in our supposedly caring congregations. Robert Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone*, notices this trend of absent single people in our congregations when he points out the “life-cycle” pattern in our churches, “Generally

speaking, marriage and children encourage greater involvement in church activities. In addition, middle aged and older people. . . seem more drawn to religion than are younger people.”<sup>7</sup>

We often think of singleness as something temporary, a stage that a person goes through before she “settles down.” We think of her not so much as being single as simply not yet married, and we ignore the particular situations of gays and lesbians. With these fuzzy delineations, single people hardly exist in the consciousness of our congregations. As a result, congregations overlook the needs and gifts of this important group and give them about four percent of our attention at a time when they just might require the connection with a congregation the most.

Single people often have a flood of relationships, career, and financial decisions to make. Since jobs are more abundant in urban areas, single people often move there, but rents are substantially higher. So, young single professionals are in a precarious position, trying to pay off their student loans and credit cards at the same time as paying high rents. Young couples want to become financially stable before they get married, but often financial stability demands two incomes. It’s a pernicious cycle.

More and more, people are choosing to be single, without children. And young singles have learned to build tribes, relying on friends and forming long-lasting relationships. They have a great deal to show the church about community and caring for one another, if only we will stop ignoring them and begin building intergenerational connections in our congregations.

## Young Couples

Couples without children are another group that’s underrepresented. Although churches often design their programs to attract married couples with children, only 10 percent of American households actually have that arrangement.<sup>8</sup> In our society, not everyone wants to have children; yet, childfree couples often endure small slights in their families of origin, like holidays that revolve around their fertile siblings. In a church service, for a couple who wishes they can have children, every Sunday can feel like Mother’s Day as well-meaning people probe, “So, when are you going to start a family?” It is an innocent question, but for a husband and wife who’ve been trying for years to have kids, the question stings.

For Jim, who lives with his wife, Ann, in a small town in Ohio, it’s been a particularly painful experience: “Couples without children — and I know many — are underrated in the church,” Jim writes. In

their struggle with infertility, they went to clinics and underwent all sorts of tests, but they have not been able to get pregnant.

During that difficult time, their sorrow became more profound as they attended church. Their spiritual community was a harmful environment for them. “We’ve found the church almost totally unequipped to deal with the issue of a couple who wants to have children but hasn’t been able. We started young. We fashioned our lives around the hope of having children.” Yet, within the church, they were considered “selfish” because they enjoyed their lives as a couple. No one seemed to understand it was out of their control; they just couldn’t have children. Finally, they learned to quit hoping, stop expecting, and not think about it.

Many people in their twenties and thirties (married and single) live with the grief and pain of infertility. Their arms ache for the warmth of a sleeping child, and they feel a profound emptiness at not being able to have children. With our church’s care of and emphasis on kids and families, we cannot forget those who cannot have children, and we must be mindful of their difficulties. These are the things that never make it to the prayer list in our congregations, but the burden and loss of it all still sits in the pews.

Furthermore, same-sex couples make up one in nine unmarried couples in our country.<sup>9</sup> While our nation grapples with the idea of same-sex marriage, this can become a fruitful time to begin understanding the difficulties that many lesbian and gay couples face when they try to adopt a child, secure health insurance, or visit a partner in intensive care. As the debate unfolds on the national stage, we can tune our ears to the particular necessities of same-sex couples and understand that their relationships require particular encouragement and nurture in a society that is often hostile to them.

## Visible Signs of Hospitality

When intergenerational bonds flourish, they can be invaluable. Each time we take the children Christmas caroling at the nursing home, we bring joy to the residents and we instruct children about how our elderly neighbors live, thus increasing empathy and contact between generations. Each time a retired person explains the particular challenges of their financial situation to a career starter, it reminds him to plan for the future. This understanding will be vitally important if current trends continue in the years to come.

Intergenerational communication works against the movements in our popular culture. When I was

growing up in the 1970s, a subtle shift occurred in advertising and marketing, and that simple five-degree turn set out culture on a path that is miles away from its original course. Television commercials began addressing children, rather than their parents, about buying toys. Corporations realized that they could begin “branding” children at a younger age.<sup>10</sup> Since then, younger generations have been directly and boldly marketed to, and they have become highly aware of when a package is for them and when it is for their parents.

Even though we congregations may not like to think of ourselves as marketing packages, we are stuck in this distorted system, and it is clear for anyone in their twenties or thirties that most of our denominational churches are packaged toward older generations. Worshipping bodies may not have a conscious promotional agenda, but as a part of a highly consumeristic society, we portray ourselves as a place for old people. So as younger people “shop around” for a church, they might see that we have a Sunday School program and a smattering of things for children, but too often church leadership, social events, and fundraisers are geared toward people who are over sixty.<sup>11</sup> In our highly segregated and ageist culture, younger generations get the message that since the church is for another generation, then it’s not for their children, and it’s definitely not for them.

In implicit and explicit ways, we communicate to children, youth, young adults, and families that the church isn’t for them. For instance, if we look at the church parlor, we may find a beautiful array of furniture: comfortable couches, shiny cherry wood end tables, and lovely curtains. It is an inviting place for grown ups to relax, sip some coffee, and discuss important matters.

Then, if we wander into the nursery we might find something completely different. There’s a crib in the corner, and the bars are so far apart that you can fit a pumpkin through them. The curtains are faded and the pulls on the blinds are dangling dangerously. The toys are a collection of attic rejects, bits and pieces of nostalgic antiquities. Parents may walk in and begin calculating how much money the church could make selling those weeble wobbles on eBay, but they hardly want their children playing with them. The Sunday school rooms have cabinets filled with faded construction paper, broken crayons, and dried up markers.

We communicate implicit messages when the sanctuary and other grown-up spaces are well kept and pleasant yet we send our children off to stale dungeons to learn about Jesus. Unfortunately, these are lessons that people keep with them throughout their lives. Ana June, a contributor to *Breeder: Real-*

*Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers*, writes her “Confessions of a Heathen:”

When I was still young enough to attend Sunday school, I once went to a church with my grandparents. I remember little from the experience, except this: The Sunday-school room smelled like barf. Strongly, deeply like barf. And everyone, kids included, tried to pretend that all was normal. There we were, singing and playing churchy games in a barfy room, and there was absolutely no missing that odor. No mistaking it.<sup>12</sup>

Many churches recognize the message that they send to their community, so they begin a radical shift to incorporate contemporary music, reaching out to young adults with expensive and slick advertising campaigns. This often works, and many congregations have taken huge risks by incorporating young generations into their worshipping communities, but they often alienate older members while they attract young members.

The other problem with this solution is that Barbie has been wooing younger generations for decades. Adults in their twenties and thirties have been marked to all of their lives and they are weary of it. Feeling manipulated and used, they long for authentic signs of hospitality. When a Starbucks opens up in the fellowship hall, a dad might enjoy a four dollar latte, but he knows that he has been the target of marketing and the double skim will quickly sour in his stomach. Young adults don’t want to be a target audience and don’t want to be labeled as “Generation X,” especially in their spiritual communities.

Ironically, many adults in their thirties reject products that are marketed toward them. They don’t want to belong to a focus group; they want spiritual depth, affirming traditions, and welcoming spaces. So they look for thoughtful signs of caring and visible bridges of hospitality that grow up when a worshipping community becomes intentional about ministering to younger generations.

When congregations want to gather an intergenerational tribe, they do well to review their space with an eye to deliberately incorporating what young adults will find welcoming. A church communicates hospitality beyond the nametag, handshake, and smile at coffee hour; many small things signal to a young person whether she belongs there. We can provide caring environments for all people from the cradle to the grave, without neglecting what’s in between. We can look through the eyes of families and singles to build demonstrations of warm reception.

# Becoming Generationally-Sensitive and Inclusive

## Families

A young mother, Lisa, held her two-year old daughter's hand as she told me about her search for a church in her new home in Maine. She came from a conservative Baptist congregation, and her family chose to join a liberal Episcopal church.

"Why'd you pick that church," I asked, perplexed by her theological turnabout.

"Because they had Purell dispensers on the wall of the nursery," was her matter-of-fact answer. I was startled by the seeming shallowness of this intelligent woman's answer; but as I thought about it more, I realized that the Purell dispenser said something important about how her child would be cared for and treated in this place. It was a small implicit sign of welcome. We can be intentional about those symbols as we carefully look for ways to broaden our hospitality, letting every generation know they are welcome.

Congregations have a variety of ways to communicate hospitality to people of all generations. To begin, it will be important to make the buildings accessible, so that physical limitations will not keep a person from attending. When the Americans with Disabilities Act passed requiring wheelchair access, many congregations put off the additional structural changes because of the tremendous cost. Now, years later, the expense has only increased and our buildings lag far behind acceptable standards; yet our worshipping communities need the ramps and widened doorways more than ever. As people live longer, they are more likely to remain active even when they lose their mobility. Anyone who is disabled or has a disabled love one knows just how difficult it is to maneuver in a building with narrow stairs, small entrances, and inadequate restrooms. Instead, we can be on the forefront of society, as a welcoming, fully inclusive, and fully accessible church.

As a congregation begins to create an intergenerational space they might imagine their congregation as newly pregnant. Even if you have no children in your church, even if you do not have anyone of childbearing age gathering for worship, you can create a hopeful space. Faithful communities are really good at this: we have an entire season for this purpose. So we can establish Advent in the church, making sure that the space has been prepared for the children who are to come. Just as a young couple begins a nesting period, a church can

begin making sure that the facilities are safe and welcoming for children.

Walk through your church with a safety-conscious mom or dad and ask them to point out the issues that your building might have. Make a checklist of all the cabinets that need latches, outlets that need covers, and cords that need to be bundled. Become aware of how the church stores cleaning supplies and where they keep the kitchen knives. See if there's a clean, safe space for a parent to change an infant's diapers or for a mom to nurse her baby. Imagine how a dad would take his two-year-old daughter to the restroom in the church's facilities.

Go through the toy boxes in the nursery and sort through the dolls and trains. Most parents will point out unacceptable or worrisome toys. The parents in our church nursery sorted out all of the tiny parts ("choking hazards"), all of the old painted blocks ("lead poisoning"), and all of the plush stuffed animals ("germ factories"). The Barbies ("too sexual") and the weaponry ("too violent") were also tossed. In their place, the parents supplied the nursery with new things that could easily be thrown into a dishwasher. They bought modern books that presented a multi-cultural world, replacing the strangely Swedish-looking Jesus found in the older Bible stories.

As we begin to look at our worship and educational spaces with the eyes of people with particular requirements, we can envision what else a small child would need: stepstools in the restrooms or drawing pads in the pews. A tiny rural congregation in Dixie Belcher, Louisiana, recognized that just as families are more likely to eat at restaurants that provide a kid's menu and something to color, so they could make church more appealing by providing worship bags for the children, filling them with children's bulletins and crayons. They began with two or three simple totes, now they have dozens.

By extension, each time the doors of the church open, we can imagine what would make church more inviting or even simply what would make it possible for various people with different needs to attend. That means, for example, planning for the possibility of children participating in every event. How might we enable that to happen? Instead of shying away from offering childcare because of the expense, why not offer it precisely so that those with children would not be hindered from attending church? If we want younger generations involved in our churches, we will provide care for people of every age or ability. That does not mean that children will always be needed, but the bulletin announcement and the nominating committee's invitation can at least communicate that childcare can be arranged.

I have spoken to parents who told me privately that the reason they turned down the nomination to become an elder or a deacon was simply that they could not afford a babysitter. If we want younger people on our governing bodies, then we have to be one step ahead of their calculations. We can begin thinking about their needs, and the interconnected requirements of an entire family: for young children, elderly parents, mentally ill loved ones, or mentally challenged siblings.

## Singles

But inclusion is not just about children and parents. Fostering tribal community means we cannot neglect single people but should intentionally nurture community for those who are students, career starters, widowed, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. We can become mindful of single people of all ages

When Western Presbyterian Church wanted to focus on young single adults, they recognized that a person likes to walk into a sanctuary and see other people like herself in the church. So, to increase the number of young members, the church began a choir scholarship program for college students hoping to build intentional bridges of welcome for single people. Now, when a person in her twenties walks into the sanctuary, she see half a dozen people like herself, up front, participating in worship leadership.

## Organic Growth

In my church's experience, the intentional process of making space for intergenerational connections to flourish often eventuates in wonderful surprises. We never know exactly where or how the development will take place. The church becomes a strange kind of farmer, like the one's in Jesus' parables, tending soil, getting rid of rocks, pulling weeds, and planting seeds. With a great deal of prayer, hope, and planning, we prepare the soil, but we don't know how growth actually happens, and rich beautiful flowers can bloom in the strangest places.

We learned how intergenerational communities grew up in our church in Barrington, Rhode Island. We were on the main road of a scenic New England town and the bookends that help the street together were landmark historic churches: the red church and the white church. Mothers drove by those lovely structures and dreamed about having their daughters' weddings there. They barely glanced at our sanctuary on the other side of the street. We did not have gentle white slats or historic brick; we had a simple concrete block sanctuary tucked back from that main road.

The congregation began an intentional process of building intergenerational connections, and I wanted to get a sense of where the membership had some energy and passion, so we met in small groups and talked about our hopes and plans for the next few days.

In each group, landscaping came up as a top priority. I breathed deeply and shook my head each time this came up, because in my mind, it should have been the last of our priorities. Yet, when we developed our long-term strategy, I placed it on the top of our list, given the congregation's stated priorities.

Our church was constructed in a U shape, the buildings wrapped around a neglected patch of land with an assortment of overgrown grasses and bubbling asphalt. One day, a group of us gathered and planned a beautiful oriental garden, with a bent pine, delicate white flowers, granite benches, and flagstone paths. It was going to take a great deal of money for our little church to create this garden, and I did not know how it would be possible. But we began, trimming back the tree, picking out the flagstone and the granite benches. During Easter and anniversary celebrations, the children gathered to plan bulbs in the space. Gradually, the garden became a reality. Money came in through a large memorial gift; a variety of generous people started contributing hours of backbreaking labor, and we began to see those sketchy plans grow and bloom.

Just like the parables Jesus told, the seeds of labor began to spring up to create a deep spiritual connection within the church. An Alcoholics Anonymous group that met in our fellowship hall gave us a note, thanking us for this important meditation garden. It had become a place for people to walk and take the steps of sobriety.

I noticed a woman in her early sixties, who had just lost her husband to a hungry cancer, stepping around the stones in silent reflection before her loved one's funeral.

The garden quickly spread, cherry trees were planted in the front lawn and people began tireless working, pulling out the invasive poison ivy and prickly red berries that had grown up. Two wonderful women, Gail and Deb, joined the church and jumped in, finding a place of service within the congregation. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, they pulled on their work boots and cleared out the unwanted shrubs and leaves.

Gail and Deb cultivated another spot around the side of the church that they named the "Anything Goes, Everything Grows" garden. People brought the particularly beautiful cuttings from their own yards and placed them in the fertile soil. One person who felt alienated from the congregation timidly

planted some flowers from his own yard, and Deb quickly affirmed his gift to the garden, giving him the validation that he needed from the community.

In the midst of all this, Anna arrived. She was in her late thirties, athletic, and tall. One Sunday morning, she cycled by the church and noticed the new life springing up. The gardens lured her, she got off of her bike, wandered into the back row of the sanctuary after the service, and left the moment the last hymn was sung. She returned each Sunday that followed, so I began to chase her down, trying to make some sort of connection, while trying to respect her obvious desire to remain anonymous.

Then one morning, Anna stopped by my office on one of her bike rides. This thin, robust woman—a picture of health—sat in the chair across from me and told me that she was riddled with cancer. It was stage four and she didn't have more than a few months to live. Anna had not been to church since she was a child, but when she saw the flowers springing up, she was somehow drawn to our sanctuary. She asked me if I could teach her how to pray.

We began trading books, I prayed for her, and she learned how to pray. She didn't want the congregation to know about her condition; she seemed unwilling to make too many new friends. She just needed a space in that important time. In her final months, she longed to nurture her connection with God and I watched as her bond grew deep and rich as the gardens around our sanctuary matured and expanded.

Then one Sunday, Anna no longer showed up. When I called her home, there was no answer. I hung up the receiver and sat at my desk for a moment. Then, spontaneously, I walked out to the garden. With nervous energy, I circled the flowers over and over again, letting the reality of her death settle within me. When I rested on the cold granite bench, gratitude began to flourish as well; I was so grateful for the time I had had with her, and I knew that within our worshiping community Anna had learned to nurture her bond with God. Through the church, and through those gardens, Anna found her spiritual home and realized her calling to die well.

Months before when we listed "landscaping" as a goal in our long-term planning process, I had no idea what kind of rich intergenerational connection would grow up with those iris bulbs. As the oldest man planned the garden, the youngest toddlers planted flowers, and everybody in between hauled asphalt, spread much, and laid paths, the miraculous thing was how God worked through this creation. During that precious process of renewal, our bonds with each other strengthened and we watched the Holy Spirit blossom with those flowers.

**I imagine a wonderful and rich time of growth in the years to come as denominational churches increase in generational understanding. As our congregations begin to share in the right practice of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, we will grow in tolerance and hospitality. As we develop bonds with God, each other and the world, we will begin to observe the vital traditions that ground us. As we trust and nurture the strengths of our young leaders, our bodies will begin to reflect the rich diversity of young adults. And as we cultivate that ground where our lives intersect with hardship, something miraculous will occur. God will allow that seed to grow up into a rich, nourishing tree. Our congregations stand at the intersection; we are well placed to provide justice, hope, and community.**

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Melissa Block, "Turn 'Repeller' into Adult-Proof Ringtone," *All Things Consider* (NPR), May 26, 2006.
- <sup>2</sup> Sue Kovach Shuman, "Counterculture Meets Mall Culture for Grace Slick," *Washington Post*, January 13, 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> Anya Kamanetz, *Generation Debt: Why Now Is a Terrible Time to Be Young* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 148.
- <sup>4</sup> Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 215-216.
- <sup>5</sup> Kamanetz, *Generation Debt*, 184. In 1970, the median age of a person's first marriage was 20.8 for women and 23.2 for men. In 2004, it was 25.8 and 27.4. The marriage rate is also declining.
- <sup>6</sup> Jackson Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI:

Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 117. The minister participants were asked to choose two age groups from Older adults, Middle aged adults, Married young adults, Single young adults, Youth 12-18, and Children to age 12.

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Ethan Waters, *Urban Tribes: Are Friends the New Family?* (New York: Bloomsbury), 124.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Roberts, *Who We Are Now: The Changing Face of America in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Times Books, 2004), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Juliet B. Schor, *Born to Buy* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 252. Putnam reports on the percentage of adults who attended church weekly in 1997-1998. For 18-29 year olds, it was 25 percent; for 30-44 year olds, it was 32 percent; for 45-59 year olds, it was 37 percent; and for 60+ year olds, it was 47 percent.

<sup>12</sup> Ana June, "Confessions of a Heathen," in *Breeder: Real-life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers*, ed., Ariel Gore and Bee Lavender, 238. (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2001).

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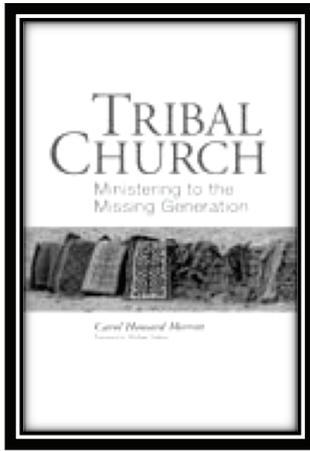
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# Book Excerpt

## Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation

Carol Howard Merritt  
(Alban Institute, 2007)

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In my bedroom, I have a Gabbeh rug, woven in deep browns and greens. Not the typical elegant Persian rug, this one has thick choppy wool, rough edges, and crooked lines. Made with vegetable dyes, each row changes colors, leaving a wonderful earthy richness. In a region known for its fine and intricate carpets, these rugs are bottom of the line because they are constructed and carried by nomadic tribes who pack them on animals until they set down a temporary home, then unfold them onto the ground, where their family can gather on that four by six-foot area.

While preparing to put our house on the market before our move from Rhode Island to Washington, D.C., I realized I needed a carpet to cover the shiny wood flooring my husband and I had recently installed. I also imagined it would be comforting to have a bit of familiar space to unpack upon reaching a strange land. So as I got ready to move for the seventh time in sixteen years, I bought the carpet and packed it into the trunk of my car. I needed a familiar space that I could take with me, something that was sturdy, warm, and not likely to wear out anytime soon.

I don't travel with a caravan of extended family and friends, but like many in my generation of thirty-somethings, I move often with my spouse and daughter, increasingly away from my family of origin. When I unpacked my boxes in Arlington, Virginia, I rolled out the rug in my bedroom. My daughter and I sat down on the thick pile as we listened to books on tape and admired the brown and green diamond shapes. The soft itchiness tickled my hands, connecting me to my history in Rhode Island, as well as its own years of tradition tightly wound up into its threads.

### Urban Tribes

The carpet reminds me that each place I find myself, I try to quickly set up a little area where I

can meet friends and gather a makeshift family. Evidently, even though I feel dreadfully alone sometimes, I'm not alone. Ethan Watters wrote an article about meeting his young unmarried friends every Tuesday night at a particular restaurant and labeled them an "urban tribe." From the outpouring of mail the little piece received, he realized that the sociological trend was widespread, so he wrote a book on this development.

The term "urban tribe" strikes a chord with me too, although I'm married and have a child. Away from my family of origin, I long for community. As a pastor, I see that the best work of our church springs up when these groups begin to form: small, cohesive parties who can depend on each other for interesting friendships, pet sitting, and meaningful holidays.

### Forming Tribal Churches

When I began as a twenty-seven-year-old pastor of a small rural church, ministering to young adults seemed like an impossible task, especially when I looked at newspapers, philosophy, and church growth trends. Newspapers and magazines often dressed young adults up as greedy slackers, ever-sponging off our parents and never assuming responsible roles in society.

I often did not recognize the people our popular culture described. No matter what cause united moms, how much volunteering dads engaged in, or what trends twenty-year-olds began, they were inevitably compared disparagingly to Baby Boomers, the civil rights movements of the sixties, and were eternally dwarfed in that Boomer-looming shadow. How could the church understand young adults if it continually looked at them through the tinted spectacles of older adults?

Then I read church growth material, which thoughtfully categorized younger generations. I loved studying books like *Soul Tsunami*, but when I

tried to put some ideas into practice in my elderly congregation (like the instructions to “get global”), I realized the great gulf between where we were as a church and where we needed to be to implement the suggested ideas. I began swimming and swirling, feeling hopeless, like I had to reinvent two thousand years of solid traditions and practice to reach out to my generation.

Visiting contemporary worship services particularly designed for young adults made me feel irritated and empty. I was a part of a large, growing segment of spiritual young adults who wanted nothing to do with contemporary worship. As soon as I saw that white screen slither down from the ceiling, I knew that I was going to have a difficult time stomaching the next twenty-five minutes. Someone was trying too hard to be hip. Like my high school English teacher’s attempts to be fashionable and cool, it just seemed *wrong*.

I was being unfair. Actually I think that I was just jealous. Obviously, there was a place in our society for slick worship, but I was like most pastors. I could never be hip, even when I tried really, really hard. I could buy a pair of designer jeans to wear on a Sunday morning and use the word “awesome” a lot, but I was still perfectly square.

My rural church was far from cool too. It was small, ancient, and full of people over sixty—and the perfect place to effectively care for young adults. Like those nomadic tribes, our church needed a rug—a comforting space for young adults, a place where years of tradition formed something beautiful. And they came, and they began to join. Over time, we began to weave a rich tapestry of diverse, intergenerational people. We did not discover the formula for a booming Gen X megachurch in just three years; instead, we reversed the trend of lost membership, kept the original members, and had a consistent ten percent growth made up of individuals of various ages. Our congregation became an intergenerational meeting ground, a place for supportive tribes to form, and I began to realize that our mainline denominational church has great assets for reaching out to young adults. When I moved to Rhode Island, I noticed the same thing happened in that bayside New England town of Barrington. Then I joined the staff of Western Presbyterian Church, an urban church in Washington, D.C., where the flow of young members seemed to rise every week.

## Weaving Connections

Though young adults came, we realized how easy it was for them not to. It’s no longer important for someone in their twenties or thirties to go to church. Denominational affiliation has very little power in our politics or workplaces. The societal expectation to attend worship is gone, the blue laws faded a long time ago, and now children have plenty of sporting and scouting opportunities during those once-sacred hours.

When a young person walks into a church, it’s a significant moment, because no one expects her to go and nothing pressures her to attend; instead, she enters the church looking for something. She searches for connection in her displacement: connection with God through spiritual practices, connection with her neighbors through an intergenerational community, and connection with the world through social justice outreach.

The church has been making these vital connections for thousands of years, and we can easily respond to the young, weary travelers in our midst, letting them know that they can find a spiritual home within our worshiping communities and that we will provide a supportive space for them so that they can form their tribe.

Our churches can weave a source of connection. I have seen tribes gather in a variety of settings: in a college town, the rural countryside, a New England community, and an urban setting. Watching relations and groups develop in a church, creating and maintaining space for them, is a vital part of what I do as a pastor.

Envisioning what the church will look like in the next twenty years, I imagine a body that gathers together to worship God, strives for social justice, and cultivates tribes. Even the smallest churches—*especially* the smallest churches—have the resources to respond to young adults in meaningful ways when they understand their contexts and make a place for them. These relationships take shape when our intergenerational groups of displaced families and single people begin to weave a rich tapestry of familiar space.



# Developing Reverse Mentoring Relationships

Earl Creps

*In American culture, the notion of younger teachers for older students found traction in a variety of fields, many of which trace its inception to the example set by Jack Welch at General Electric in the late 1960s. His dramatic mandate that top executives follow his own example by learning communication and e-business technology from young staffers put the phrase “reverse mentoring” into the vocabulary of the corporate world. Reverse mentoring is going on in every sector from education to media. The reason for its growth parallels conventional mentoring: it works, increasing cultural awareness, transferring skills, and stimulating creative thinking.*

A few years ago I described my work with different generations of leaders as “worldview therapy,” defined as anger management for the young and grief recovery for the old. Thinking I had this kind of thing pretty much sorted out, I encouraged the young to look past their anger to some new sense of mission, and for the old that their best days could still be ahead if they listened for God’s voice. Bobby Welch, president of the Southern Baptist Convention characterized the possibilities: “There are two roads to the same dream. One road is traveled by the older folks who have gotten near the end of their ministries and never got to where they envisioned themselves going. They are disappointed and feel like they’ve failed. They are hungry for one more shot for giving their best for the rest of their lives. The other road is traveled by younger folks who are looking for something to give the rest of their lives to.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the cynicism or despair involved in my conversations, I never lost hope that, in Welch’s terms, reconciling young leaders looking for a cause together with older leaders looking for an opportunity might give God a chance to change everyone.

Then things began to change in my communication with both tribes. First, a group of youth ministers at a retreat shocked me with their positive statements about their senior pastors. They expressed not just loyalty but love and admiration for the Boomers leading them. Didn’t they know that I frequently cited this very relationships as a case study in intergenerational tension? Just weeks before, a midlife ministry leader admired

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Earl Creps has been a pastor, ministries consultant, and university professor. Along the way Creps earned a Ph.D. in communication at Northwestern University and a doctor of ministry degree in leadership from Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. He is the author of the new book, *Reverse Mentoring* (Jossey-Bass, 2008) and *Off-Road Disciplines* (Jossey-Bass, 2006). Creps has been personally involved in reverse mentoring for several years and has spoken and written on the subject extensively.

(“Developing Reverse Mentoring Relationships” is reprinted from *Reverse Mentoring* with permission of Jossey-Bass Publishers. All rights reserved. Copyright 2008.)

by his peers confessed in front of a discussion group: "I am so tired of church." His comments took the air out of the room but found an echo in another pastor who asked me rhetorically whether he really wanted to spend his life in meetings to decide how many video surveillance cameras the nursery needed. The representativeness of these examples defies exact measurement, but they certainly suggest that at least some generational tensions are easing. Perhaps the Xers entering the midlife season that their Boomer leaders are already navigating have more in common that they realize.

A second change in my conversations involved a brand new discussion of the Millennial generation, who, outnumber their own parents, have millions of representatives in their twenties feeling ready to lead right now. The sheer size of their cohort makes our population bimodal, with Boomers on one end of the age spectrum and Millennials on the other, and relatively small Gen X cohort in between. Tapscott, Ticoll, and Lowry of Alliance for Converging Technology characterize this generation as "exceptionally curious, self-reliant, contrarian, smart, focused, able to adapt, high in self-esteem, and globally oriented. These attributes, combined with [their] ease with digital tools, should threaten and challenge the traditional manager and traditional approaches to strategy. This generation will create a push for radical changes in existing companies and established institutions. . . Their first point of reference is the Net."<sup>2</sup>

Adding this new variable to the generational equation made everything more complex. The Builder-Boomer-Buster scenario I had relied on now seemed dated and inadequate. Yesterday's twenty-five-year-old Gen X youth pastor now serves as today's forty-year-old senior pastor balancing the need to lead both the Boomers on the board and the Millennials running the youth ministry.

The surprising (to me) softening of some Boomer-Xer tensions paralleled by the arrival of new challenges for both groups in the form of the Millennials suggests an important opportunity to use reverse mentoring to form what missiologists refer to as a "third culture," a jointly fabricated space where members of two dissimilar cultures meet to begin learning to communicate. Humility and urgency are the adhesives for holding the third culture together. The question asked by older leaders about this possibility generally come down to, "How do I get started?" This article deals with the practical side of finding and developing cultural reverse mentoring relationships, a special form of cross-cultural friendship the very unlikeliness of which softens hearts and grows leaders.

## Reverse Mentoring Relationships

The corporate experience with R-mentoring, as well as that of ministry colleagues, supports the idea that friendship is the core dynamic. The world produced more than 160 billion gigabytes of information in 2006 (equivalent to all the books ever written — multiplied by three million).<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, much of this data holds great significance, but something of value also resides in another form: human beings. The ultimate revelation of God comes to us in the person of Christ, rejected by many of his culture's insiders but embraced by it outsiders. Similarly, transforming wisdom comes to us through surprising, unlikely people if we possess the humility to lay aside our own expertise long enough to embrace the relationship. I cannot call you the "mentor" until I have called you "friend."

Assuming I can say "I'm not cool," "I'm not relevant," and "I don't get it" (or their functional equivalents) out loud, these healthy RM (reverse mentoring) friendships display certain regular features.

### Surprise

A small group of young adults invited me one evening to join them for a dinner of Subway sandwiches in a convenience store before they returned for the evening session of the conference we were all attending. Averaging perhaps nineteen years of age, they expressed the communal customs of their tribe by refusing to let me eat alone. I felt awkward (Boomer culture is more individualistic) but joined them anyway at the yellow Formica booth bolted to the floor beside the store's front window. Eating my sandwich, I listened to them describe something new: the other side of Millennial life. Their narrative communication style generated stories of heartbreaking failure, painful rejection, stunted aspirations, and persecution by other Millennials — not for being Christians as much as just for being distinct. These anecdotes added up to a photographic negative of the way experts usually describe their generation. Instead of sparkling with motivation and hungering for success, these three young people sounded downcast, even a little desparate, with the sense that most of their friends in the world were probably right there sitting in that convenience store both at the moment. Millennial stereotypes, then, even though perhaps generally accurate, my derive so much of their content from the highly nurtured,

college-bound, upwardly mobile young adults that the generation's struggles remain in the shadows.

My three-person faculty delivered an unexpected lesson that evening on the difference between portraying a group and reducing it to a bulleted list of traits that render some of its members invisible. Working with a protégé model with R-mentors, then, requires shock-absorbing grace to lessen the impact of the unforeseen. The search for that grace encourages the kind of humility that acts as both the cause and the effect of reverse mentoring. The primary attribute of this humility consists of *not reacting* when a comment reveals our limitations, or an observation discloses our ignorance, or the R-mentor's example implicitly questions mine. Stifling the natural tendency to debate, disagree, or try to trump the R-mentor's thoughts with our own is essential to preserving the integrity of the process and the humility so crucial to its power.

## Variety

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Reverse mentoring opportunities present themselves in diverse formats. Actually, the conventional understanding of the word *mentor* as a more experienced person who imparts knowledge to the less experienced describes most of my R-mentoring relationships. Experimenting with another form, I asked Dave, a cultural informant, to round up a group of his fellow youth pastors for an interview at a downtown coffee house. With a pledge of anonymity in place, and plied with liberal doses of French press coffee, they began to tell me of the secret world of the American youth pastor. Their candid self-disclosure provoked more than research conclusions, confronting me inadvertently with how my own leadership had failed youth pastors who worked for me. The groups format lent an inescapable credibility to both their story and its implications for senior pastors.

Most R-mentoring probably takes place in a person-to-person (P2P) model, with small groups representing the second most common approach, but the practice finds its way into other forms as well. Triads, for example, in which two people—sometimes a married couple—work with one protégé (P22P, person to two-people) also offer some valuable dynamics. Interviewing Sonia and Peter on the attitudes of young Pentecostal leaders toward their tradition, I found that the triad format allowed my R-mentors to interact with each other *while* they were interacting with me, supporting refinement of their insights and enriching my understanding with nuances unlikely to come from just one person. As Sonia spoke, Peter supplied examples or suggested

alternative ways of looking at things. Sonia did the same for him as I, listening to them both, learned more from their interactions as times than from my own questions. This simple feature, of course, benefits the protégé in any format involving more than a sole R-mentor, so long as group interaction remains possible.

However, learning is also available in far larger groups. Looking over fifty text messages sent by several hundred college students during a talk, I felt proud of myself for using (actually copying) an edgy method. A group of about a dozen Gen X leaders helped me debrief the next day, searching for the implications of these messages and producing a fascinating exhibition of thirty-year-olds struggling to understand twenty-year-olds. As usual the struggle yielded some surprises for all of us:

- *Style*: There were many more texts about my new hipster glasses than about Jesus. “The glasses should stay. It takes the focus off your bald spot,” one recommended.
- *Peers*: The cryptic texts plainly conveyed the idea that we were peers. “Hey, Earl. I have funky glasses too,” one student remarked, “That means we’re both fabulous.”

The MP2P (many people-to-people) encounter revealed that their assumptions about communication seemed to be modeled after the Internet, where connectivity tends to be multiple, simultaneous, and lateral. Confrontation, then, seemed not to offend them at all so long as I never used it to imply a superior position. The MP2P format, amenable to many methods other than texting, offered the vibe, the scale, and the anonymity that produced genuine insight.

## Depth

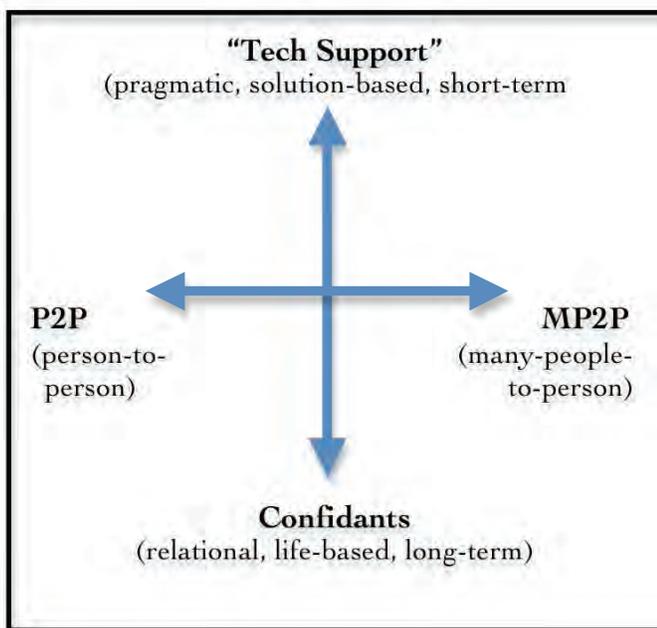
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Like friendships in general, R-mentoring takes place on many levels of interpersonal bonding and over many intervals of time. Important learnings result from both profound, long-term relationships with R-mentors who become lifetime friends and brief, one-time conversations with the person next to us on an airplane, and from every possible variant in between. I think of the shallower, short term form of RM as the “tech support” model in which, for example I e-mail a younger friend, as I did today, asking why my Word documents do not attached properly to my e-mails. My mentor and I may enjoy a very meaningful friendship on other grounds, but these requests only accompany it; they do not create it. On the other end of the scale, protégés who begin with a simple request

for a solution or insight find themselves, over time, developing the kind of vulnerability required to grow into long-term confidants. I continue to benefit from mentors of both kinds.

Growing as a leader takes many forms and happens in many ways, some as simple as applying a new technology and others as profound as searing repentance and reconciliation. R-mentoring offers one vehicle flexible enough to accommodate learning and transformation in multiple forms. Potential protégés need to realize that attempting to fit these relationships into a one-size-fits-all model demonstrates exactly the attitude that RM specializes in undoing. Allowing each mentoring connection to find its own level offers a more organic and productive approach to the discipline because it allows my mentors to specialize in *their* giftedness rather than in my preferences. Along the way, protégés benefit from the ability to draw on multiple R-mentors at varying times and in varying combinations to bring the full diversity of the body of Christ to their aid, “so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”<sup>4</sup> Shared concern helps form the third culture in which R-mentoring operates.

The huge variety of R-mentoring formats can be depicted in a simple diagram placing the diversity dimension into relationship with the depth dimension. Most of the commonly used models can be located somewhere within the territory defined by the intersection of these two traits.



For purposes of clarity this diagram casts these dimensions as polar opposites (they are not) and excludes the variety of communication channels through with R-mentoring flows (ranging from in-person to the Internet). The point of the enterprise is to encourage the new protégé to take full advantage of the many paths forward that RM offers, as well as to explore new ways of employing the practice. The closer a leader comes to the confidant end of the scale, the greater the potential for profound change, but great benefits can also accrue in every other form of this discipline, often when we least expect it.

## Reverse Mentoring Best Practices

Saying “I am not cool,” “I’m not relevant,” and “I don’t get it” starts the RM process, to which the young can respond, “I respect that,” “I can help,” and most of all “I’ll be you one day.” This kind of vulnerability is the Esperanto, the contrived but common language of reverse mentoring; it offers not a cure for generational tension but a way of preventing these natural struggles from squandering our potential together.

This potential develops through a simple process of building respect and trust using certain common ingredients.

## Believing

Without faith that God could use this practice in an important way, no mere technique will change a leader into a protégé. Evading these relationships is just too appealing to the part of us that exults in status. However, simple trust that God moves when we humble ourselves positions us both to find R-mentors by design and to embrace the “accidental” learning experiences that often are the most fruitful variety. In fact, the gap between generations is not always as wide as we think. In one survey, three-fourths of workers over fifty-five reported that they relate well to their younger co-workers, with 43 percent saying they learned from them. About half of younger workers (eighteen to thirty-four) reported they got along well with their older peers, while almost two-thirds claim to have learned from them.<sup>5</sup> Market research and employee surveys hardly constitute a substitute for faith, but they do help to deflate our doubts about the potential for spiritual reconciliation leading to intergenerational collaboration.

## Choosing

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Most of my R-mentoring relationships started as a “sacred accident,” a surprising intervention that somehow turned out to accomplish God’s purposes. On more than one occasion, a chance meeting in a hotel lobby or an invitation for late-night coffee with a small group changed my attitude, broadened my understanding, or offered the best form of rebuke: the unintentional kind. Sometimes the people involved sought me out, but even the original plan never really included my serving in the protégé role; that came later. After a long chain of these seeming accidents, many of them starting with a small request for technical help, it was a pattern of learning, change, and enjoyment that appeared, encouraging me to begin serving as a protégé by design. As many corporations have done, I started with the issue of technology, getting help from young people like Kevin and Glen, generally in response to some kind of computer emergency. As I learned from them, I soon realized that they were teaching me more than just nuts and bolts, and I began to seek out their counsel on issues ranging from the sociology of college students to church planting to the subcultures of the Millennial generation. Sometimes these R-mentors emerge from circumstances, and at other times we choose them. In the former case, a leader simply takes advantage of a precious, though unanticipated, opportunity, but in the latter she or he approaches the unlikely person(s) and begins learning by asking questions. Both scenarios require that the older leader exercise the power to choose, because the younger person is very unlikely to volunteer mentoring services.

## Asking

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The choice to define oneself as a protégé (although I have never heard a reverse mentor use this term) begins the process of conversation. Although these connections may be in person, by phone, or through a growing number of Internet channels, the principle remains the same: leadership development through simple dialogue. In longer-term P2P reverse mentoring, these talks often involve certain kinds of questions, albeit not necessarily in the order given here. The protégé must resist the temptation to offer answers to the questions. The process is not about talking; it’s about asking questions:

- **“How do I do this?”** Asking for help with practical issues is the easiest way to begin a relationship with an R-mentor. Invariably, this

kind of request produces a prompt outburst of helping behavior, parallel to the way your new friend helps her or his own parents in a similar predicament. Graciously accepting the help and thanking the young person appropriately keeps the door open for more assistance in the future—a good thing, because you are going to need it. R-mentors, in turn, need to exhibit the same kind of graciousness, never making the protégé feeling silly or disgraced by lack of skill.

- **“Who or what is that?”** A conversation sparked by technical assistance affords an opportunity to ask questions at the next level about the R-mentor’s behaviors. If white wires dangle from their ears, the protégé might ask about the artist being listened to. When the R-mentor replies with the name of an obscure underground metal band from the Czech Republic, rather than backing off (and here’s the key) press in by asking: “Who’s that?” Even a small but authentic demonstration of interest in the other’s world opens the door to begin asking more detailed questions about something like their musical tastes. Things work best when the protégé avoids pressing too hard (as if interrogating a suspect or data-mining the Internet) and the mentor remains cooperative, even if the suspicion level rises a bit. If the mentor offers a response that seems intriguing but is unclear or too brief, the protégé can simply say, “Could you talk more about that?” If the R-mentor asks the reason for the questions, the mentee should be completely honest about wanting to learn from primary sources. Needless to say, pretending to be friends just to learn things corrupts the relationship into something ugly. Patronizing a protégé does the same.
- **“Why is that?”** Background information about the R-mentor’s preferences supplies the raw material to begin inquiring about the much more important issue of *why* the young person’s world is arranged the way it is. Chances are the protégé will be the first person ever to ask this type of question. At this point, both parties benefit: the older leader gains valuable insight from a primary source while helping the younger mentor think through the reasons behind their default culture. Sometimes conversation stalls at this point because diagnosing the causes of social phenomena is difficult enough to occupy the whole field of sociology, and it may not be of any particular interest to the mentor just because the protégé asks. Patience at this juncture gives everyone a chance to consider the issue at length

and often yields much more fruitful discussion in the future. In the interim, protégés must avoid the temptation to treat their newfound knowledge of three alternative rock bands as an insignia of youth or an excuse to drop their names at the next staff meeting as proof that they “get it,” a tragic shift from asking back to talking.

- **“Can you tell me a story?”** Ethnographers studying subcultures place great value on the insights gained from narratives. In addition to other research tools, time spent listening to stories in common locations such as a local store can yield the kind of insight that makes sense out of quantitative studies.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, mentors often teach the most when they recount an event in their own lives, rather than just passing on things they observed or read. I have learned more about how young adults think by listening to them describe their daily lives than in any other way. One female staff pastor, for example, described the culture of her church’s leadership by recounting a meeting in which she suggested that the ministry consider measuring its effectiveness by means other than just attendance. The deafening silence was followed by a group rebuke for the mere thought of using another standard. It hurt just to listen to her story, but it gave me a feel for how the young sometimes experience the practices of older leaders in a way that nothing else could have. Protégés need to remember that the stories are the most illuminating part of any meeting, not an alternative to *real* information. Mentors should interpret passages of the narrative beyond the understanding of their charges (what does it mean when I say a new DVD “dropped?”), and mentors must ask for a translation when one is not forthcoming.
- **“What kind of relationships do we have?”** At this point, the experience usually either proves as temporary help or shows signs of developing into something longer-term. The mentor and protégé will want to make the status of the relationship itself explicitly understood between them. This arrangement may mean the mentor agreeing to e-mail new cultural discoveries from time to time, a regular series of schedule meetings, or simply the understanding that the protégés office is always open for a drop-in visit. An open door tells the mentor that the relationship is valued more than the insights. The Harvard Business School’s Monica Higgins points out in this regard: “Research suggests that a mentoring relationship works best when it evolves over time, in an informal fashion, through a shared

interest in professional development. . . . Other research shows that effective mentoring relationships are those in which the communication styles of the mentor and the protégé match one another.”<sup>7</sup> At this junction, or perhaps earlier, all parties likely sense whether their styles match enough to proceed further or simply to harvest the benefits from the conversations so far and begin pursuing others. An RM association need not be long to offer the opportunity for important learning and real change.

The orderly questions presented here are actually a composite drawn from hundreds of conversations over several years. In real life, they almost never follow this pattern exactly because, outside of a mandatory R-mentoring system, these relationships simply refuse to obey a script—which is the best thing about them. This spontaneous quality, especially the wild unpredictability of what the protégé will learn, is a major source of the enjoyment and authenticity that keeps the friendship alive. Having dinner one night with Greg and a group of young friends, for example, we learned that among his peers marriage is considered to be only semiexclusive and semipermanent. Raised in the shadow of a divorce epidemic and saturated with media images of celebrity lifestyles, Greg’s twenty-something friends enter marriage as an experiment in commitment and become involved with other partners fairly regularly because the experiment is only a general format for the relationship, not a binding covenant. In other words, everyone involved (especially the men, in Greg’s view) retains free agent status. The point here is not the state of matrimony in the United States, but the ready availability of such powerful insights into the thinking of some young adult subcultures, insights that emerged spontaneously over Indian food. The greater our own commitment to the discipline of RM, the more these supposed accidents tend to happen.

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## Growing

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If reverse mentoring on issues and problems leads to a more developed relationship, certain signature behaviors begin to appear:

- **Correction.** As a mentor and protégé build mutual respect, a point arrives at which the younger person feels enough trust in the relationships to offer outright correction to the older person. One of my R-mentors recently point out several flaws in some of my plans, while

another punctured a treasured assumption about young adult ministry, and a third called me on misspelling the name of a popular band. Although those moments stung just a little, all of these friends meant well and all were sending a message something life “If our friendship is going to be for real, I have to be able to say this.” Also, these mentors would have received the same from me. R-mentors should deliver these words very gently, and protégés should respond graciously.

- **Conflict.** With or without correction, R-mentoring relationships frequently involve some level of conflict between the parties owing to the obvious differences between them. Describing cross-cultural learning, urban specialists Conn and Ortiz advise “recognizing conflict as part of the learning experience. . . conflict often proves to be our friend, expanding our understanding in unexpected ways.”<sup>8</sup> Without the ability to resolve difficult issues, like any other relationship our reverse mentoring partnerships will develop no further than the first disagreement.
- **Reciprocity.** A large proportion of my reverse mentoring experiences have developed over time into a mutual mentoring situation. The track record of the practice in the corporate world also offers many accounts of an older leader’s strengths that ultimately help the younger mentor as much as or more than the reverse process. Typically, the R-mentor gains confidence and valuable insight from spending time with a senior leader; the latter picks up technical skills and great cultural sensitivity. My role as a protégé has led to a role as mentor in dozens of relationships. Developing mutuality in the association ultimately proves to be its most gratifying feature and stands as the test of maturity both for the participants and for their partnership.

## One More Shot

The possibilities for reverse mentoring models are almost as diverse as the people available to participate in them. The hunger among leaders for something more than working harder within the limits of the same paradigm represents a rising tide among those I meet. One mid-fifties Christian educator described it this way: “I am convinced that there are many of God’s best seasoned leaders who don’t know what to do at the season we are in, and are bored with leadership titles and roles in hierarchies of organizations, board meetings, but who

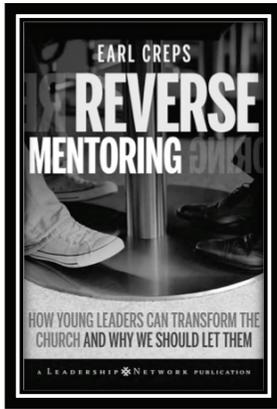
now have the most value to add to younger generations, if they will do it out of friendship, not a command-and-control types of leadership.

A learning relationship with the young offers a crucial element in revitalizing older leaders for “one more shot,” and for development of the young who will continue on after our watch.

In a multiyear study of three generations currently employed in the corporate sector, employee retention specialists Robin Throckmorton and Linda Gravett found that in practices such as reverse mentoring “the generations born furthest apart have the most to teach on another. . . . Once people start learning from each other, it combines the best elements of experience and innovation.”<sup>9</sup> Embracing the diversity of RM models and accepting the reality of multiple, unanticipated outcomes, the process of asking questions and then listening—really listening—cultivates a powerful learning experience that ultimately benefits mentor and protégé alike.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> B. Welch in Turner, C. “Draper Calls for Revolution at Younger Leaders Summit.” *Lifeway* [http://lwc/article\_main\_page/0,1703,A%253D160296%2526M%253D50011,00.html]; accessed Jan, 9, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Tapscot, D., Ticoll, D., and Lowry, A. “Human Capital in the Business Web.” *Workforce Management*, June 5, 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> Shaffer, K. “New Technology Changes Culture.” *Church Relevance*, July 2007.
- <sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:25.
- <sup>5</sup> 2006 Randstand USA Survey, in Tang, C. “The Great Divide,” *Insight Magazine*, Jan.-Feb. 2007.
- <sup>6</sup> Conn, H.M. and Ortiz, M. *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2001, 279.
- <sup>7</sup> Higgins, M.C. “Too Old to Learn?” *Harvard Business Review*, Nov.-Dec. 2000, 7.
- <sup>8</sup> Conn and Ortiz, 275-276.
- <sup>9</sup> Robin Throckmorton in Grady, M. “Each Generation Can teach Others New Ways to Work.” *East Valley Tribune*, May 8, 2007. See also Throckmorton, R. and Gravett, L. *Bridging the Generation Gap*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2007.



## Book Excerpt

# Reverse Mentoring:

How Young Leaders Can Transform the Church  
and Why We Should Let Them

Earl Creps

(Jossey-Bass, 2008)

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This book is about the ways in which young and old leaders can serve each other through a relationship called reverse mentoring. The concept of mentoring takes its name from *The Odyssey*, the Greek epic in which “Mentor” appears as the person responsible for guiding Odysseus’ son as the father goes off to war. In virtually all types of leadership development, this principle of the older and wiser instructing the younger and less experienced remains in force. And for good reason: it works. Paul doubtless mentored the younger Timothy during their travels preaching the good news about Jesus to the Roman Empire of the first century. I take my doctor’s advice on medical issues, but he never asks me for the same because only one of us possesses the training and experience worth listening to. In general, then, the kinds of knowledge and wisdom produced by age and experience qualify a person as a mentor.

Reverse mentoring assumes a completely opposite perspective on learning. While acknowledging the proven value of the older-to-younger approach (teaching down), it provides the vital complement of a younger-to-older method (teaching up). Reversing the traditional dynamics feels unnatural to some, especially older leaders like the Baby Boomers who now make up almost half of the American workforce and 60 percent of senior pastors and who have been waiting most of a lifetime to take charge. However, the rate of change in our culture puts younger people in touch with things for which their elders sometimes lack even the vocabulary, suggesting the need to go beyond intergenerational tolerance to reconciliation that leads to a new collaboration.

The young teaching the old represents only an example of reverse mentoring. In truth, I struggled with using the term “reverse” because some infer that the younger person is somehow lesser in value. However, bereft of better wording, I have retained the term used almost universally in both research and practice. Another issue with the topic of

generations is the perception that focusing on age differences marginalizes divisions of other kinds. Without question, our world needs multiple forms of reconciliation. The principles involved in reverse mentoring apply across all these cultural fault lines. Generational concerns simply present a familiar case study for grasping the practice, using an example common to a wide variety of leaders. The key to the relationship, then, is not who is greater or lesser, but the unlikeliness of the learning connection. The reversal is as much one of expectations as of position or age. Every culture subsists in part by having boundaries that define it, but these boundaries also serve as barriers that cut people off from each other, making a teaching relationship unlikely. Reverse mentoring (RM) is cross-cultural in that it actually uses the unlikely possibility of a relationship to benefit both parties through mutual learning from honesty and humility.

Spontaneous (and later intentional) teaching-up experiences with a network of twenty-somethings created this book. My intrepid wife Janet partnered with me in most of these adventures as our young friends became the faculty of our lives, teaching lessons large and small:

- *Cuisine*: Hannah, after travels in Europe, tutored Janet in making the perfect cup of tea—just the way the Irish do.
- *Research*: riding to lunch in his SUV, Justin walked me through how to use my cell phone to perform Google searches using text messaging.
- *Connecting*: Joel first said the word “Xanga” to me, opening up the world of social networking sites, which led me to MySpace and then Facebook.
- *Chatting*: multiple mentors cajoled me to set up the online chat (with its inherent multitasking) that I am using to communicate with my friend Donnie as I write this

- *Resourcefulness*: Ryan explained that I could scavenge free wireless signals from the apartment building behind a Starbucks where we sometimes have coffee.

These examples can seem puny compared to the challenges that spiritual leaders face. How will Irish tea reinvent my ministry? However, their significance resides not in the immediate payoff, but in the transforming effect of unlikely relationships and in the potential for learning increasingly significant things later. My friend Ken, for example, managing editor of my denomination's national magazine, received mentoring from Danny, a young man living thousands of miles away that created a global presence for the publication in the blogosphere. After "getting blog literate," Ken describes reverse mentors simply as, "young guys who help the older guys learn young stuff." To put it simply, after many years of taking similar instruction from the young, I cannot imagine my current life or ministry without them.

The practice of reverse mentoring claims no inventor or official start date, having been around as long as humans have been learning things. In American culture, the notion of younger teachers for older students found traction in a variety of fields, many of which trace its inception to the example set by Jack Welch at General Electric in the late 1990s. His dramatic mandate that top executives follow his own example by learning communication and e-business technology from younger staffers put the phrase "reverse mentoring" into the vocabulary of the corporate world. Around the same time, Procter & Gamble developed its Mentor Up program designed to solve the problem of attrition among female employees. These and many other examples lent RM cachet sufficient to attract imitators, mainly among those seeking to update the tech skills of their management or increase their awareness of youth culture, hopefully with a corresponding increase in creativity. From there, the principle of teaching up has become influential in almost every imaginable field:

- *Security*: Ira Winkler teaches companies how to prevent corporate espionage by breaking into their information systems, once stealing plans for a nuclear reactor in less an hour.

- *Seniors*: BT Rangers, a UK - based Website, recruits young people to teach seniors Internet skills, an accomplishment celebrated on Silver Surfer's Day.
- *Teaching*: Finland employed thousands of children to teach their teachers about technological issues.
- *Legal*: the California Bar Association began the Senior Lawyers Project to bring older attorneys into the information age with the help of law students.
- *Retail*: Procter & Gamble created a cosmetics company led by net-savvy young people.

From humble beginnings, then, reverse mentoring established itself in the mainstream of business, education, medicine, and many other sectors. After reviewing the practice, journalist Cindy Goodman concludes that, "reverse mentoring is going on in every sector from education to media . . . it is a trend I see increasing." The reason for this growth parallels conventional mentoring: it works, increasing cultural awareness, transferring skills, and stimulating creative thinking.

The seeming disinterest in reverse mentoring among ministry leaders creates a void of much greater concern. Unlike their peers in the corporate world, for whom reverse mentoring appears to be a growing trend, Christian leaders seem much less inclined to treat the young as serious sources of information and insight. Scant reference to the discipline appears in either the literature or the conversations of church leaders, which indicate that barriers of some sort are blocking cooperation among the generations. The obstacle may be as simple as the belief that old-to-young learning remains the only valid, biblical method for training and disciple making. It is difficult enough for the mature leader to think of herself as a protégé, let alone the "disciple" of someone half her age.

This attitude, certainly not unique to ministry leadership, may explain why a simple Google search turns up two thousand hits on "mentoring" for every one on "reverse mentoring," while the ratio for a title search on Amazon is 320:1. The lack of reverse mentoring in Christian and other organizations, then, may result from something far more serious: a humility deficit.



# Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies

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John Roberto

**E**very 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

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## 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

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- 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**

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- “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**

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- 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 or 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**

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- 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](http://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](http://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

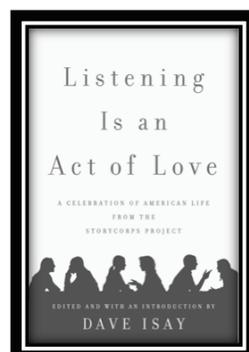
**Grace Presbyterian Church** ([www.gpch.org](http://www.gpch.org)) in Houston, TX recognized the power of preserving the individual stories of people and took on a book project *Stories of Grace*. The 174 pages in this book tell the individual stories of 24 people—stories of children, young adults, 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](http://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](http://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

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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

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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

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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"

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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](http://www.worldvision.org)).

### AIDS Caregiver Kits

World Vision ([www.worldvision.org](http://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](http://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

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**Faith in Action** ([www.putyourfaithinaction.org](http://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” developmental, 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.

# Profile: Holy Infant Catholic Church, Durham, NC

([www.acswebnetworks.com/holyinfantchurch/hi\\_life](http://www.acswebnetworks.com/holyinfantchurch/hi_life))

(Download their faith formation handbook at <http://images.acswebnetworks.com/1/443/HllifeHandbook.pdf>)

Holy Infant Catholic Church has made a serious commitment to promote lifelong faith formation and to devote our full attention to whole community catechesis. In whole community catechesis, faith formation is not just for children. Embracing the vision (as stated in the *General Directory for Catechesis*) of the parish as a learning community, we aim to:

- Transform the focus on children-only by implementing lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations, including and especially adults.
- Transform “start and stop” catechesis by implementing lifelong and continuous faith formation—learning for a lifetime through involvement in the events of Church life.
- Transform age segregation by implementing intergenerational faith formation—making connections among the generations in learning programs and parish involvement.
- Transform the focus on the “textbook as the curriculum” by utilizing the events of Church life as the curriculum for all ages and generations—tapping into the educative and transformative power of the Church Year, sacramental celebrations, community prayer, and works of justice and service and by providing catechesis that prepares everyone for learning by participating in the events of church life.
- Transform catechesis as a separate “program” by implementing a more collaborative and integrated process that involves all of the parish’s ministries in faith formation. Catechesis is interconnected with liturgy, sacraments, the Church Year, justice and service, and prayer.

At Holy Infant Church households come to our faith formation Gatherings together. Parents are empowered to live out the promises made at their child’s Baptism to “be the first and foremost teachers of the faith and to keep the flame of faith alive” (Rite of Baptism). Our **HI-life** process is based on the Generations of Faith approach, which integrates home and parish into a comprehensive model of faith formation. Empowering and equipping individuals and families to live their faith

at home and in the world are constitutive of this approach to faith formation. The Generations approach views the family as the church of the home, and a community of learning and practice. The parish-wide focus on a common theme helps build a partnership between the home and parish. The key components of HI-life are the parish core curriculum, intergenerational parish Gatherings, home activities, and celebrations of events.

**HI-life** (Holy Infant) is the name that our parish has chosen for this process of whole community catechesis.

- **Learning together:** We come together for a monthly gathering at the parish to unite people of all ages and generations.
- **Inspiring one another:** We encourage communication, understanding and cooperation among family members and parishioners.
- **Following Jesus:** We follow the church calendar of events of Christ’s life in our formation as disciples of Christ.,
- **Embracing the ordinary:** We are guided by the “everyday” holiness of St. Francis de Sales as we try to “Live Jesus” at home and in the world.

**HI-life** aims to help households grow in their Catholic identity and emphasizes:

- participation at the weekend liturgy and other special feasts
- praying and living the faith at home
- rediscovering our Catholic traditions
- making decisions through the lens of our Christian values

Through our **HI-life** process we cover the core tenets of our Catholic faith over a six year period:

1. celebrations and seasons of the liturgical year
2. sacramental life of the Church
3. justice and peace
4. the Creed
5. morality
6. prayer

## Parish HI-life Gatherings

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We invite parishioners of all ages to participate in our **HI-life** Gatherings—our intergenerational learning gatherings, which are the foundation of our life long faith formation process at Holy Infant. Our monthly gatherings are a time of fellowship, faith formation, and fun.

### 1. Sharing a Simple Meal Together

*No cooking - just come and enjoy*

At a typical gathering you are welcomed by greeters in the Hospitality Room and escorted to a table in the Fellowship Hall to enjoy a simple meal with fellow parishioners of all ages. At your table there may be a single adult, a family of four, a retired person, and an empty-nest couple. There may be a table blessing and a couple of questions to focus the table talk.

### 2. Whole Group Opening Experience

*Introduction of the topic to be experienced*

After the meal, everyone will move to the church for an opening prayer and an activity to set the tone for the evening, such as a story or video segment. Each household will receive their **HI-life Home Kit**, which they will learn to use throughout the evening.

### 3. Exploring the Topic through Age-Specific Learning Activities

*All ages learning about the same topic according to their stage in life*

Then the group will divide into smaller groups for age-specific learning activities. A typical evening might have adults staying in the church for a speaker and group discussion, young adults in meeting room #6, JYM youth in meeting room #3, TYM youth in the Hospitality Room, and parents with young children (approximately ages 5-11) together in the Fellowship Hall. There will be lead catechists for each group to teach and guide the learning activities of the evening and trained facilitators to assist the parents and children at each table.

### 4. Whole Group Sharing Experience

*Closing of the Gathering for all ages and distribution of the HI-life Home Kits.*

To conclude our evening, everyone will reunite in the church to share what has been learned, to pray together, and to be sent forth to continue learning at home in preparation for the church event or season which is the focus of the month.

## HI-life Gatherings for 2008-2009 “Life is Fragile—Handle with Prayer”

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Our fifth year of whole community catechesis focuses on Prayer and Spirituality. Our theme is *Life is Fragile—Handle with Prayer*. We will look to St. Francis de Sales and the Salesian saints to guide us through an exploration of the rich spiritual heritage of our Tradition. We will also explore many aspects of contemporary spirituality. Hopefully, everyone will learn to be better “pray-ers” through our **HI-life** process this year.

- September: We Are Called to Pray
- October: Is There a Wrong Way to Pray?
- November: Praying as Jesus Prayed
- January: Praying with St. Francis de Sales
- February: Lent – Refocus and Reflect
- March: Holy Week and Easter through Mary’s Eyes

### Meeting Times

Thursday	5:45-8:30pm
Friday	5:45-8:30pm
Sunday	3:00-5:30pm

Friday and Sunday Gatherings are for all ages.  
Thursday Gatherings are for adults and older teens.

# Profile: St. Anthony on the Lake, Peewaukee, WI

([www.stanthony.cc/CF.htm](http://www.stanthony.cc/CF.htm))

## The Family Program

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Our parish strives to be a community where everyone grows in knowledge of faith, and communion with Jesus throughout their lifetime. As one means of creating this community of lifelong faith formation, our parish has adopted a total family catechesis model. The Family Program is for parents as well as children from newborn to High School. We offer three regular Family Programs and new in 2008-09, a Pilot Family Program for families with children only in grade 3 and younger.

Every Family Program includes:

1. Time for gathering and community building
2. One hour for age-related classes using a textbook series or program designed for each age group; adults meet together for an adult session (childcare is provided for children under age 3)
3. Families gathering together again for a family activity or a presentation
4. Closing community prayer

Classes run from October through March, generally twice per month. The times for each program are as follows:

- Sunday Morning 9:00 Mass (or families may attend another Mass) until noon (snack included)
- Sunday Evening 3:45 pm (dinner included) until the end of 6:00 pm Mass (or families may attend another Mass)
- Monday Evening 5:30 until 7:30 (dinner included)
- The Pilot Family Program meets from 8:30 am to 10:15 am on the same Sundays as the regular Family Programs.

### Pilot Program for Families with Children in Grade 3 and Younger

- Meets 12 times between October and March from 8:30 to 10:15 am
- Format changes every other session: parents teach their own children at different learning

stations or parents join a discussion group while the children are in grade level classes

### Sunday Program for Families with Children of Any Age

- Two rooms: one for families with children grade 6 and younger, and one for families with children grade 7 & up (even if they also have younger children)
- Meets 12 times between October and March from 10:00 am to noon or 3:45 pm to 5:55 pm
- Format consistent although the order may change
  1. Snack (20 minutes)
  2. Age-Specific: Grade level classes for children and teens, and a program for adults at the same time (60 minutes)
  3. Family-Intergenerational Activity (30 minutes)

### Monday Evening Program for Families with Children of Any Age

- Two rooms: one for families with children grade 6 and younger, and one for 54 families with children grade 7 & up (even if they also have younger children)
- Meets 12 times between October and March from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm with dinner
- Format consistent although order may change
  1. Meal (30 minutes)
  2. Age-Specific: Grade level classes for children and teens, and a program for adults at the same time (60 minutes)
  3. Family-Intergenerational Activity (30 minutes)

### 2008-2009 Theme “The Gifts of Being Catholic”

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We will explore the gifts, the practices and wisdom of our faith, which help us to transform our lives, in order to follow Christ more closely. Here are examples of the activities for the family-intergenerational element of the Family Program.

### **October 5 & 6: Gifts to Transform Us**

At our first session we noticed how popcorn is transformed from hard little kernels into something that tastes good and nourishes us. Families thought about what they know that helps them change for the better, transforming their lives to Christ. We shared these ideas and every family received some popped popcorn from our gift box, to remind them of the theme for this year.

### **October 19 & 20: What Makes Our Family Catholic?**

At our second session families created a jar to place on the family dinner table. We pulled un-popped popcorn out of the gift box, and families went home with directions for how to use the jar, and the popcorn kernels to make themselves aware of all the times we use the gifts of our faith, and all the ways we are already growing closer to Christ. This jar will stay on the family table all year.

### **November 2 & 3: The Gift of The Communion of Saints**

We celebrated the gift of the Saints! Each family had researched one saint, and shared that information at their table. We also enjoyed a visit from a few of our favorite Saints. Younger families created a "Saint Wheel."

### **November 16 & 17: The Gift of Service**

This week we thought about the gifts of tradition and service as we continued our tradition of packing Thanksgiving food boxes for the House of Peace.

### **December 7 & 8: The Gift of Mary**

Since our program fell on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Catholic Gift had to do with Mary. First, adults heard a presentation on Mary, then for the family activity we pulled the gift of rosary kits out of our big silver box! We not only learned about the rosary, we also made and prayed the rosary.

### **January 11 & 12: The Gift of the Bible**

The Bible is definitely one of those things that help us grow closer to Christ. We reviewed a few of the basics about the Bible. After the review we spent a little time using the Bible to look up answers for a game. (Bingo in Fellowship Hall and Holy Word Squares in the gym.)

### **January 18 & 19: The Gift of Catholic Social Teaching**

One of the gifts of our faith is Catholic social teaching. The cross, which is the sign of our faith,

has two parts to it. One part is vertical, we can think of that as a reminder that our faith includes our personal relationship with God, with Christ. One part of the cross is horizontal, that part can remind us that our faith also includes reaching out to others. At this session, in addition to reviewing the seven principles of Catholic social teaching we took time to listen to the experience of families who have participated in the Faith Works program. Some served at Repairer's of the Breach, some at House of Peace, some at Parent's Place. We closed the program with a prayer and a song celebrating the way we can use our hands to be Christ for each other.

### **February 1 & 2: The Gift of Music**

The Catholic Church has a rich heritage of using music through the ages. It is a gift that brings prayer to life. Beautiful music can bring our mind, our attention, to God. It holds an invisible power; it is all around us and can echo inside us. God is also everywhere around us and within us. Religious music can also connect us to one another. When we sing or make music together it can make us feel a part of something much bigger than we would ever dream of being individually. We spent time during this program hearing examples of music our church has used through the ages: Gregorian chant, hymns, chanted psalms, folk music, contemporary music. Then we enjoyed making music with the St. Anthony Family Program Band!

### **February 15 & 16: The Gift of Sacramentals**

As Catholics, we can benefit from understanding and embracing the sacred symbolic actions, blessings and objects called sacramentals. As Catholics we believe these tangible objects and actions can draw God to us and us to God. Sacramentals can also help us to respect the holiness in all aspects of life. They can enrich the practice of our faith and bring God more visibly into our homes. We celebrated the gift of sacramentals with a prayer experience using twelve different sacramentals.

# Profile: Our Lady of Fatima, Delanson, NY

At Our Lady of Fatima, everyone gathers once a month to learn and grow together in faith, and to serve others as disciples of Jesus. We call our faith formation GIFT (Growing In Faith Together). It is based on the Generations of Faith three-fold model:

- *GIFT is intergenerational.* All ages, from 3-103, gather in community to share faith, learn from each other, teach each other and Grow In Faith Together. This is accomplished in a variety of ways, through music and song, scripture and prayer, rituals, skits, audio-visual presentations, small group sharing, guest speakers, hands-on activities and much more!
- *GIFT is event-centered.* The curriculum is the Church. It comes from Scripture, Liturgy, Prayer, Tradition, Church Teachings, Feasts and Seasons. Following a 6-year spiral that includes: Sacraments, Church Year, Prayer, Morality, Justice & Service, and Creed, we are immersed in our faith and the life of the Church.
- *GIFT is lifelong.* As human beings, we continue to learn throughout our lives. Forming our Faith is no exception. At each stage in our life, we understand and experience things in different ways. This is also true of the way we understand and experience our faith. The church year is cyclical, but no two experiences in the life of the church are ever the same, because we are constantly growing and changing.

In 2008-09 we are in the second year of our two-year theme: *We are called...* We combined the themes of Catholic social teaching, justice, service and morality into the two-year theme, coinciding with the Diocese of Albany's "Called to BE Church" initiative which concluded in January 2009.

Our GIFT team meets weekly for about 2-4 hours to plan each session, and we have eleven people on the team. Our Saturday pot-luck suppers are growing in attendance. People seem to enjoy the food and company, and it is easier to bring a dish to share, enjoy a great selection of entrees, and not have to clean up after (unless it's your time to serve on kitchen clean-up). This has also helped the GIFT team by relying on everyone to provide the meal.

We have had two guest speakers in 2008-09, and are expecting to have two more before the end

of the year. Kathleen Gallagher from the New York State Catholic Conference spoke on Faithful Citizenship. Sr. Marianne Comfort from Catholic Charities spoke about their refugee resettlement program and how we could help. We are expecting Sr. Monica Murphy to speak about Morality, and two registered nurses to speak on Human Sexuality (one for the adults, one for the teens).

One of the best sessions so far this year was in January on Christian Unity. After an introduction to the history of Christianity and world religions, we divided everyone into groups and they planned the prayer service for the celebration of Christian Unity. One group came up with an opening prayer, another chose scripture, another group wrote the prayer petitions, and the teen group came up with a ritual. Even the children contributed, with their closing prayer. We put it all together, went over to the church and experienced the prayer service.

## 2008-2009 Theme "We Are Called..."

- October: ...to be Faithful Citizenship
- October: ...to Feed The Hungry
- November: ...to Serve the Poor
- January: ...to Respect Other Faiths
- January: ...to Live a Moral Life
- February: ...to Be One With the World
- March: ...to follow Jesus-WWJD?
- April: ...to Respect the Dignity of all Workers
- May: "New Beginnings" Parish Picnic

Each monthly GIFT session (except the first October which is being held on a Sunday) is held on Saturday after the 5:00 pm Mass, following a potluck supper, and Sunday after the 9:00 am Mass, following a continental breakfast.

### Corresponding GIFT Events

- October: Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF
- November: Ten Thousand Villages Festival Sale
- December: Angel Tree (gifts for the poor)
- January: Ecumenical Prayer Service
- Lent: Operation Rice Bowl; Friday Stations of the Cross
- April: Palm Sunday—Following Jesus
- May: St. Joseph the Worker and Clean-Up Saturday

# Profile: St. John the Baptist Parish, Mankato, MN

(<http://stjohnscatholicchurch.com/genoffaith.php>)

Generations of Faith is our primary education program at St. John's. Centered in Christ and based on the teaching mission of the church, GOF offers an integrated plan for lifelong learning to all in our parish family.

The Generations of Faith approach equips the parish to become a community of learners by creating life long faith formation that is based on the events of Church life and embraces all ages and generations. Generations of Faith promotes faith growth at home, through parish preparation programs, and, most importantly, through participation in Church life.

The Church is both the curriculum and teacher, and we are all teachers and learners. The Generations of Faith Curriculum systematically and comprehensively presents the Gospel Message and Catholic tradition through six major content areas: 1) Church Year Feasts and Seasons, 2) Sacraments, 3) Justice and Service, 4) Morality, 5) Prayer and Spirituality, and 6) the Creed. Each time a content area is revisited, it is presented from a different theological perspective, and guides learners to deeper understanding and fuller participation in the life of the church.

It is different from youth-only programming in that all generations attend, and there is learning across age levels. Parents' presence sends an immediate message of the importance of growing in faith throughout life. Older adults and young adults presence enriches our learning and sharing. Thus learners of all ages continue to grow in their faith, build community within the parish, and develop patterns of learning and praying at home that last throughout their lives.

## 2008-2009 Theme

### **"Christ Leads Us to a Moral Life"**

This is our seventh year of Generations of Faith, and our last year in the curriculum plan. The focus of 2008-09 is "Living the Moral Life." We base each session on one or more of the Ten Commandments. We are using the intergenerational sessions in *Living the Moral Life* from the *People of Faith* series from Harcourt Religion, guided by Joan Chittister's book, *Laws of the Heart*, and current events. For instance, we studied the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment through lens of faithful citizenship to help people prepare for

the election. For this session we used curriculum materials from the USCCB web site and the U.S. Catholic Bishops document, *Faithful Citizenship*.

We have the Ten Commandments tablet (a most impressive marble one) on the altar the weekend before our intergenerational gatherings. We also sing our "song of the year" at all the Masses.

We meet monthly for gathered sessions on the second week of month. We gather on Wednesday from 5:30 pm – 8:15 pm and Thursday from 4:30 pm – 7:15 pm. Both gatherings begin with dinner.

- September: Laws of Reflection and Respect (Commandments 1 & 2)
- October: Faithful Citizenship (Commandment 5)
- November: Laws of Sharing, Speech and Assurance (Commandments 7, 8, & 10)
- December: Mercy and Forgiveness (includes Sacrament of Reconciliation)
- January: Laws of Remembrance and Caring (Commandments 3 & 4)
- February: Laws of Commitment and Self-Control (Commandments 6 & 9)
- March: Special Theme: The Living Church – God's Building
- April: Moral Decision Making in the 21st Century

# Profile: St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, Acton, MA

([www.seoh.org/generations.htm](http://www.seoh.org/generations.htm))

Based upon the Gospel and the call of Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessors for a new evangelization and stronger catechetical effort, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish uses a liturgy-centered, lifelong, and intergenerational approach to Catholic faith formation. The goal is to help and support everyone who wishes to become a better disciple by integrating faith, worship, and life in light of the Gospel. Since this is an ongoing, lifelong task, everyone in the parish is invited to participate.

Generations of Faith is an innovative approach to faith formation that equips the parish to become a community of lifelong learning. Faith formation is centered in the events of church life, embraces all ages and generations, and promotes faith growth at home. Through worship, learning, service, and community, GOF offers whole community catechesis to support everyone's Christian journey no matter one's age or stage. A program of lifelong, intergenerational formation, GOF has three basic components, all of which are essential:

- The first and *most important* component of faith formation is regular and active participation at Sunday Mass.
- The second is the monthly intergenerational learning session.
- The third is a personal, daily effort to live as a good Christian, and to increase in faith, hope, and charity. This is how a faithful people makes its way back to God.

The key is to bring these three activities together such that each one supports and is supported by the other two. Faith formation requires us to bring faith, worship, and life together, and respond to the power and insight that emerges when we do that. The goal of faith formation is to know, love, and serve the Lord ever better and more fruitfully.

## The Structure

The Generations program offers three means of catechesis. Each component is critical to the overall effectiveness of this method of faith development.

**First of all, each month's formation theme will come from selected Sunday readings.** The

scriptures provide the foundation for liturgical catechesis around each theme which will be developed through the music, homily, and prayers during Mass. Experiencing church life, events, and seasons through the liturgies is the source for the Generations formation approach. As formation sessions are designed to prepare and reflect on the readings from Mass, it is important to attend Sunday liturgies.

**The second part of the Generations program is attending the monthly formation session.** Formation sessions include comprehensive faith formation including the following:

1. Knowledge of the faith
2. Liturgical life
3. Moral formation
4. Prayer
5. Belonging to a community
6. Missionary spirit

Formation sessions provide activities and content consistent with the readings and experiences in the selected Mass. Sessions include a meal, large group activities, reflection, prayers, and instruction, and breakout sessions based on developmental levels. All households have been assigned to a particular formation session.

**Finally, the third component of the Generations of Faith model is the home kit.** The Catholic Church sees the family as "the domestic church," integrating home and parish into a comprehensive model of faith formation. The home kits are designed to help extend and expand the learning from the formation sessions and Masses. The goal is to create a pattern of family faith sharing that is integral to family life and woven into the fabric of daily life. Home kits will include materials to enable the following:

- Celebrating traditions and rituals
- Learning the Catholic faith story
- Praying together
- Serving others and working for justice
- Enriching relationships and daily life

# Generations of Faith 2008-2009

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## The Curriculum

- September: 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time
- October: Crop Walk
- October: 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time
- November: Christ the King
- December: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent
- January: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time
- February: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent
- March: 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent
- April: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter
- May: 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

## Monthly Program Schedule

1. Wednesday 5:30—8:00 p.m.
2. Saturday 6:15—8:45 p.m.  
(kindergarten session offered)
3. Sunday-1 12:00—2:30 p.m.  
(kindergarten session offered)
4. Sunday-2 5:00—7:30 p.m.

## Intergenerational Program Model: Age Appropriate Learning Groups

The breakouts are subgroups that participate in developmentally-appropriate activities and instruction during the intergenerational learning program. They are designed to enhance parents' participation in their children's faith formation, build community among participants of similar age and experience, and promote the formational process in general. Most of the monthly sessions include breakout sessions.

### 1. Primary Level (Grades K-4) & Parents

Parents and children work together under the direction of trained leaders and facilitators to explore each month's focus area. Large group, small group, and individual instruction are provided, but the parent serves as the primary catechist for each child. This level is designed for children in K – Grade 4. Younger children are welcome to come to be with their family, but there will not be specific catechesis for them. Additionally Kindergarten sessions will be only offered during the Saturday evening and the Sunday afternoon sessions. Grade 5 students and parents who are more comfortable working in this setting for part or all of the year are welcome to stay with their family. (All children preparing for First Eucharist register

for both Generations of Faith and First Eucharist.)

### 2. Middle or Intermediate Level (Grades 5-8)

Middle grade children gather with group leaders to explore each month's lesson in a developmentally appropriate way. This may include reading, discussion, drama, hands-on activities, and/or service work. This level is designed for younger adolescents in grades 5-8. Parents are welcome to attend all or part of this session with their children or they may attend the adult session. It is required that a parent be on site during the entire GOF session.

### 3. Senior Level (Grades 9-12)

High school students gather under the leadership of the parish youth ministry coordinator and group leaders to explore the month's theme at a deeper and more personal level. The goals of this session include using the focus area as a call to spiritual development and service to others. Parents and/or Confirmation sponsors are most welcome to attend these sessions with their teens. This level is designed for older adolescents in grades 9-12. (All Confirmation candidates must register for both Generations of Faith and Confirmation preparation.)

### 4. Adult Level

Parents, couples, single adults, and retired adults gather to explore the focus area using techniques and processes that have proven effective for adult learners. Confirmed teens in grades 11 and 12, and/or young adults living at home are welcome to participate in the adult breakout session. (GOF registration is free for seniors 65 and older.)

# Profile: Church of the Sacred Heart, Wauseca, MN

([www.sacredheartwaseca.org/FaithForm.htm](http://www.sacredheartwaseca.org/FaithForm.htm))

The thrust of our parish education programs are intergenerational. It is essential that our families stay together and learn about the Catholic faith. We count on the family to keep the young people involved in the Church. The goal is discipleship, which equips people to participate meaningfully in the life of the Church, and empowers them to live their baptismal promise at home and in the world. Generations of Faith flows to and from the Eucharistic to help all generations continue their faith formation within the Catholic tradition.

Why is it important to continue to educate all households (families) in our Catholic faith? Research shows that families are more effective and stronger when they have the support and encouragement of those around them. The whole family needs to be actively participating in their faith throughout their lives, then children will come to understand their faith not as a childhood affair, but as a lifelong learning process. By virtue of our Baptism it is our responsibility that we continue to grow in faith and pass the faith from generation to generation. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith as Generations of Faith is the anchor in our parish faith development.

## 2008-2009 Theme “Responding in Prayer”

God is our firm foothold on the mountainside of life, the “stone that has been tested ... as a sure foundation” (Isaiah 28:16). Like all relationships, faith is primarily an affair of the heart. We come to realize this heartfelt relationship through worship and prayer, praise and adoration, thanksgiving and repentance, petition and commitment. Our relationship with God both shapes and is shaped by the quality of our relationship with other people. This is truly reflected in the communal nature of our Catholic identity. Prayer nurtures our faith and our relationship with God.

This year we have a wealth of intergenerational learning opportunities and more. We gather for intergenerational learning on Sunday immediately following the 10 am Mass (including brunch) or on Wednesday at 6 pm (including dinner).

- **October: Prayer in the Family / Feast of the Rosary** (Intergenerational Learning Program)
- **November: Catholic Prayers and Devotions** (Intergenerational Learning Program)
- **November: Christian Concert**  
Jesse Manibusan & Sarah Hart
- **December: Festival of the Family**  
Activities: outside live nativity, holiday social, music, trees of ministry, Christmas stories and activities, and children’s Christmas drama
- **January: Parish Mission—Praying with Christ**  
Themes: praying with Christ through the Christmas season, praying with Christ in his ministry, and praying with Christ as a presence in our lives
- **February: The Lord’s Prayer** (Intergenerational Learning Program)
- **March: Lenten Retreats**
  - young adult/adult retreat
  - Confirmation retreat
  - senior high retreat
  - junior high retreat
  - 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade retreat
- **April: Seder Meal**
- **April: Praying through Music** (Intergenerational Learning Program)

### Special Intergenerational Program

- **Praying through the Bible: “Great Bible Adventure: Gospel of Matthew”**  
Making sense of the people, places and events in the Bible can be a daunting task. This 24-week study helps people see the big picture of the Bible story and helps them understand how the books of the Bible fit together. The Great Adventure Bible Timeline provides the foundation needed for all the other Bible studies.

# Profile: St. Noel Catholic Church, Willoughby Hills, OH

([www.stnoel.org/ae/index.html](http://www.stnoel.org/ae/index.html))

Generations In Faith Together (GIFT) is a spirit-filled outreach, welcoming all ages and stages of people to develop a living faith through love, prayer, worship and community. With that in mind, GIFT fosters intergenerational relationships in which everyone's spirituality can be ignited by interacting with people of all ages.

GIFT provides all members of our community with an opportunity to come together regularly, making Jesus, the ultimate teacher, present to us in each other. Growing in faith is a life-long process, and so adults young and old, teens, and children are invited to GIFT. We learn together, as well as from one another. We grow in our relationship with God, as well as with one another. We enjoy a good meal, as well as food for thought.

Each GIFT session addresses a relevant topic derived from the *National Directory for Catechesis* (U.S. Catholic Bishops). Each session is designed to give us knowledge directed toward developing and celebrating a deeper relationship with Jesus. Fellowship, prayer, and service are also important components of each session.

## 2008-2009 GIFT Program

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GIFT sessions meet on Sunday from 12:30 pm – 3:00 pm, and Wednesday from 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm. Both sessions include a meal.

### September: Call Waiting: The Deacon's Role and Our Own

- Clarify the role of the deacon and his functions compared to those of the baptized and ordained priests, introduce and get to know our new deacon, recognize our own call to serve in sacrament, word, and charity

### October: Praying With Music: The Music Director's Role and Our Own

- Appreciate role of music in liturgical and personal prayer, introduce and get to know the new music minister, realize our call to full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy

### December: Living Simply: Beginning With Christmas

- Examine excessive consumption in our own lives and around us, discover value of giving vs.

getting, come to know the benefits living simply has on others

### January: Young and Old: Modeling Church Together

- Understand the Church's vision of youth ministry and its essential goals, introduce and get to know our new cluster coordinator for youth ministry, appreciate the shared vision of discipleship among all generations
- Adults and teens who attend will experience ways in which all generations model Church together. This topic presented by our youth minister will also provide an opportunity for interaction.

### February: The Ten Commandments: A Building Code for the Kingdom

- Realize that the Ten Commandments are "minimum requirements." deepen appreciation that the Old Testament is basis of Jesus' message, discover ways to live beyond the Ten Commandments

### March: Finding Peace in a Chaotic World: Quiet Prayer for the Busy Catholic

- Discover ways to strengthen our relationship with God through prayer, recognize that contemplative prayer arises out of Christian tradition and our own personal experience, compare and contrast devotional and contemplative prayer

### April: From Pilate to Paul: The Death of Jesus in the Light of History and Faith

- Understand the death of Jesus from a historical and faith perspective, see connections between systems of power in Jesus' day and our own, appreciate Paul's theology of Jesus' death

### May: Beauty As a Way To God: Awaking to the Holiness of Life

- Recognize that beauty contributes to the quality of life and faith, discover ways to add beauty to our lives, appreciate how beauty can help us in difficult moments

# Profile: Sacred Heart Church, Newton, IA

## 2008-2009 Faith Festivals Theme: “Living the Moral Life”

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All ages gather to share a meal and learn about “Living the Moral Life” as Catholic disciples. Intergenerational programs are held on Wednesdays from 6 pm – 8:30 pm and Sundays from 10:30 am – 1 pm.

### **September: Respect for All Life**

This session explores the foundational Catholic teaching on the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment and the dignity of human life and helps participants apply this moral teaching to contemporary threats on human life such as abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment.

- October-November: Weekly Age-Group Small Group Sessions for All Ages

### **November: Being Good Stewards**

This session explores the 7<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Commandments and stewardship of one’s time, talents, treasure and of creation and material goods of the world. Emphasizes the importance of the virtues of moderation in our possessions, justice in our treatment of others, respect for human dignity and solidarity with all peoples.

### **December: Mercy and Forgiveness**

This session explores the Church’s teaching on the formation of conscience. It highlights the role of compassion and forgiveness in moral living.

### **January: Living Faithfully**

This session explores the importance of respect, gratitude, and helping each other out. It stresses love, respect, gratitude, honor, obedience, and assistance as the key qualities needed in intimate lifelong relationships.

- January-February: Weekly Age-Group Small Group Sessions for All Ages

### **February: Being Truthful**

This session explores the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment and it’s implications for applying this moral teaching to daily life. It emphasizes the significance of Catholic teaching on honesty and integrity in all aspects of life.

- March-April: Weekly Age-Group Small Group Sessions for All Ages

### **April: Love of God and Neighbor**

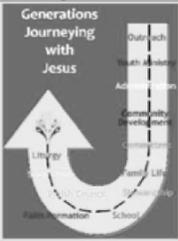
This session guides participants in understanding the Ten Commandments as our covenant response to God. It helps participants discover practical ways to live the first three commandments more fully: loving God with all our hearts, souls and minds.

- April-May: Weekly Age-Group Small Group Sessions for All Ages

# Profile: Resurrection Catholic Parish, Green Bay, WI

## 2008-2009 Theme: Generations Journeying with Jesus Calendar of Weekly Intergenerational Programming “Study It” “Pray It” “Live It” “Share It”

### September – December

September	October	November	December
 <p>2008-2009</p>	<p><b>1</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i></p> <p><b>Journeying with Jesus through the Parables</b></p> <p>Meals: \$2.00/person / \$1.00 seconds                      5:15—Meal—Walking Tacos/Dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth Session                      6:10-7:40—Adult Session                      ***Sign up for December Bell Ringing!</p>	<p><b>5</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i></p> <p><b>Journeying with Jesus in Prayer</b></p> <p><b>National Speaker: John Angotti</b></p> <p>5:15—Meal—Hotdog/PastaSalad/Dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Speaker: John Angotti</p>	<p><b>3</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i></p> <p><b>Journeying with the Messiah</b></p> <p>5:15—Meal/Spaghetti/Bread/Dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth/Adults</p>
<p><b>10</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i></p> <p><b>Journeying with Jesus</b></p> <p><b>6:00-7:30 PM</b>                      Prayer                      Our Journey begins...                      Social</p>	<p><b>8</b> Generations <i>Pray It!</i></p> <p><b>Journey to Robinsonville</b>                      Time to be determined</p> <p>Journey with us to the Robinsonville Chapel to celebrate their 40th Anniversary as we walk and pray the rosary!                      Confirmation <i>Pray It</i> Choice  <b>Sign up by October 1!</b></p>	<p><b>12</b> Generations <i>Pray It!</i></p> <p><b>Praying with St. Paul</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p> <p>How St. Paul's Letters inspire us! and  <b>**6:30-7:45 PM Sacrament Night</b>                      for First Reconciliation Families and Confirmation Youth</p>	<p><b>10</b> Generations <i>Pray It!</i></p> <p><b>Advent Reconciliation</b>                      6:30 PM</p> <p>All are welcome to celebrate this beautiful sacrament with our First Reconciliation and Confirmation families.</p>
<p><b>17</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i></p> <p><b>Okolona, MS</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p> <p><b>Hear</b> from Chris VanAlstine, chair of Resurrection's Twinning Committee <b>Live It!</b> by helping Okolona children go Back to School  <b>Admission:</b> school supplies—for further details go to <a href="http://www.gbres.org">www.gbres.org</a></p>	<p><b>15</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i></p> <p><b>The Good Samaritan</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p> <p><b>Hear</b> all about <b>Helping Hands</b> from Mary Meisinger, pastoral minister <b>Live It!</b> by being a Good Samaritan for our parishioners who need assistance!                      Confirmation <i>Live It</i> Choice</p>	<p><b>19</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i></p> <p><b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p> <p>First Reconciliation Families and Confirmation Youth</p>	<p><b>17</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i></p> <p><b>Parish Bell Ringing</b>                      December dates                      17, 18, 19, 20th                      Confirmation <i>Live It</i> Choice</p>
<p><b>24</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i></p> <p><b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p> <p>First Communion and First Reconciliation and Confirmation Families  <b>Registration is needed!</b></p>	<p><b>22</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i></p> <p><b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p> <p>First Reconciliation Families and Confirmation Youth and Sponsors</p>	<p>Generations <i>Share It!</i></p> <p><b>Thanksgiving</b>                      Nov 27</p>  <p>9:00 AM Mass                      Bring your food offerings!</p>	<p><b>24</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i></p> <p><b>Christmas Eve</b></p> <p>4:00 PM Mass                      6:30 PM Mass                      10:00 PM Mass</p> 

**2008-2009 Theme: Generations Journeying with Jesus**  
**Calendar of Weekly Intergenerational Programming**  
**“Study It” “Pray It” “Live It” “Share It”**

**January – May**

January	February	March	April	May
<p><b>7</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i>  <b>Journeying with Jesus as a Family of Believers</b>                      5:15—Meal—Pizza/Salad/Dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth Session                      6:10-7:40—Adult Session with speaker, <b>Leisa Anslinger</b>, “Here Comes Everybody”</p>	<p><b>4</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i>  <b>Journeying As Servants of God</b>                      5:15—Meal—Chili/Crackers/Dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth Session                      6:10-7:40—Adult Session</p>	<p><b>4</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i>  <b>Journeying with the Suffering Servant</b>                      5:15—Meal—Hamburger/Chip/Dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth Session                      6:10-7:40—Adult Session  <b>Mar 8,9,10—7:00 PM</b>  <b>Parish Mission—Fr. Conrad Kratz</b></p>	<p><b>1</b> Generations <i>Study It!</i>                      Journeying with the Resurrected Lord                      5:15—Meal                      Chix patty/dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth/Adults</p>	<p><b>6</b>  <b>Our Journey continues...</b>                      5:15—Meal                      Subs/chip/dessert                      6:05—Prayer                      6:10-7:40—Children/Youth/Adults</p>
<p><b>14</b> Generations <i>Pray It!</i>  <b>A Prayer Quilt Journey</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM                      Confirmation Pray It Choice</p>	<p><b>11</b> Generations <i>Pray It!</i>  <b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM                      First Communion Families and Confirmation Youth</p>	<p><b>11</b> Generations <i>Pray It!</i>  <b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM                      First Communion Families</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Generations <i>Pray It!</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Apr 9, 10, 11</b>  <b>Triduum</b></p> <div style="text-align: right;">  </div> <p>Holy Thursday—7:00 PM Mass                      Good Friday—1:00 PM Service                      Holy Saturday Vigil—8:00 PM</p>	
<p><b>21</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i>  <b>Multicultural Event</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p>	<p><b>18</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i>  <b>Take a “Virtual” Journey to Haiti</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM  <b>Sacrament Night</b>                      5:00—10:00 PM                      Confirmation Retreat  <b>Feb 21 Confirmation</b>                      Practice and Celebration</p>	<p><b>18</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i>  <b>Gifts for the Journey</b>  <b>Family Stewardship</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p>	<p><b>22</b> Generations <i>Live It!</i>  <b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM                      First Communion Practice</p>	<p><b>Apr 25/26</b>  <b>First Communion Celebration</b></p>
<p><b>28</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i>  <b>Sacrament Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM                      Confirmation Youth</p>	<p><b>25</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i>   <b>Ash Wednesday</b>                      6:30 AM Mass                      8:05 AM Mass                      6:00 PM Mass</p>	<p><b>25</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i>    <i>Spring break Green Bay/NDA</i>  <i>March 23-27</i>    <i>Spring break De Pere April 13-17</i></p>	<p><b>29</b> Generations <i>Share It!</i>  <b>Spring Fever Fun Night</b>                      6:30-7:45 PM</p>	

# Profile: St. Ladislav Catholic Church

(www.stlads.org)

## What will you learn this year?

Since the 3rd Century, the Christian community has relied upon Creeds. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are still used today in our liturgy and prayer. These creeds both **express** what we believe as well as **shape and form** what we believe.

During this year in GENERATIONS we will study the content of our Creeds...

- What are the contemporary applications of the creed to my life?
- How well can I identify the essentials of our Faith?
- Are we faithfully passing the faith to our next generation?

## Testimonials...

From our parish participants...

"I believe that GOF has had an impact on my life."

"It has given my family a strong Catholic foundation."

"I feel that I have gained a new understanding of the Catholic faith."

"It's been a good year of learning and growing."

"I feel more in touch with God."

"We look forward to attending GOF. It is enjoyable, meaningful and family focused."

## A Note from the Pastor...

"I wholeheartedly invite each and every parishioner of St. Ladislav to participate in Generations of Faith. Each of us is called to grow in our relationship with God throughout our entire life. It is my prayer that St. Ladislav can become a community of learning – one generation sharing with another."



"Join me in a new year of study in this grace-filled venture."

Fr. Donald Snyder  
Pastor



## QUESTIONS ?

Please call  
440-835-2300  
Sr Johnica or Bob Hertl  
or email  
stlads@stlads.org  
Also check our parish website  
at www.stlads.org

# GENERATIONS OF FAITH



Let us together profess...

## OUR CREED

The prayer that names us and shapes us!



2008-09

## What is Generations of Faith?

Generations of Faith is a program of life-long, inter-generational learning that draws on the events of our church's teachings, liturgies and traditions in order to shape us into God's holy, faith-filled people.

All parishioners of all ages and stages of life are encouraged to participate—singles, families w/children, seniors and couples.



Our main focus for study this year will be drawn from the Creed that we recite together at every Sunday mass. More details may be found elsewhere in the section entitled:

"What will we learn?"



## Learning in a 7 Year cycle

Generations of Faith follows a cyclic pattern of topics—repeating every seven years. Each time through the cycle we "go deeper."

Year one	Liturgy & Church Year (2004-05)
Year two	Sacraments (05-06)
Year three	Catholic Social Teachings (06-07)
Year four	Prayers and Spirituality (07-08)
<b>Year five</b>	<b>Creed (08-09)</b>
Year six	Church History (09-10)
Year seven	Morality (2010-2011)

## Seven Learning Sessions

### Dates and topics...

- September 21, 22 & 25  
*Introducing the CREED*
- October 19, 20 or 23  
*We Believe... in God*
- November 20, 23 or 24  
*We Believe ... in Jesus*
- December 11, 14 or 15  
*We Believe... in the Holy Spirit.*
- January 11, 12 or 15  
*We Believe... in the Communion of Saints*
- February 15, 16 or 19  
*We Believe... in Jesus' Death & Resurrection*
- April 26, 27 or 30  
*We Believe... in the Church*



# 2008-2009 SCHEDULE

### Times for each session

Sundays 4:00–6:45 pm  
Mondays 6:00–8:45 pm  
Thursday 6:00–8:45 pm

## At each session, we...

**Gather for Meal:** The team provides a meal so you can relax, eat together and socialize with other parishioners.



**All Ages Opening Experience:** The theme for the Generation session is introduced using skits, videos, prayer. Through some engaging activity the focus topic of the study is set.



**The In-depth Learning experience** makes up the bulk of our sessions. Sometimes set in age-specific groups or in an inter-generational setting. Lectures, guest speakers, discussion and more make up the methods of learning.

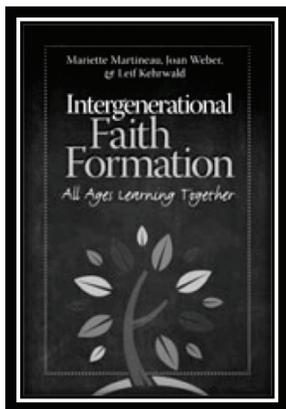
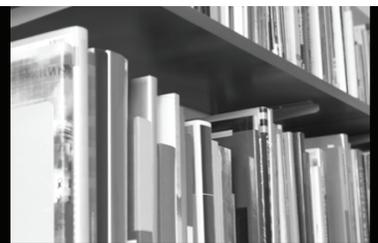
**Reporting and closing:** Before each session concludes we take a moment to share the learning experiences of each age group. The evening almost always closed with some simple experience of prayer shared together.



**Go Forth:** All of the Generations of Faith topics are connected to living our faith "beyond a classroom." In other words, our learning sessions are **event centered**, intended to lead us back into the expression of our faith, but now with greater awareness and more focused participation. The is accomplished with our "take-home" kits and parish sponsored activities.

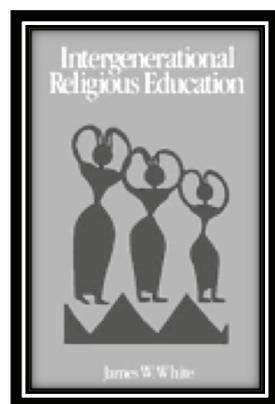
# Resources

## Intergenerational Faith Formation



**Intergenerational Faith Formation: All Ages Learning Together**  
Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008) [\$19.95]

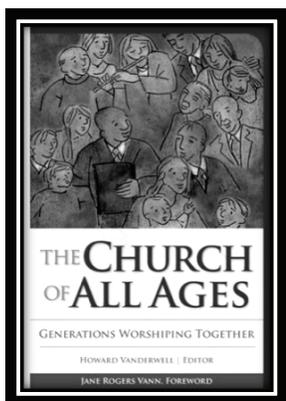
Written by the family and intergenerational faith formation team at the Center for Ministry Development, *Intergenerational Faith Formation* addresses the context and urgency for effective faith formation in the Church today, and in light of key principles for effective learning, makes a compelling case for intergenerational learning as one of the ways in which people can best learn and grow in faith. The book describes the necessary elements for multigenerational learning, and explores some of the practices of intergenerational faith formation in the church today.



### Intergenerational Religious Education

James W. White (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988) [\$24.94]

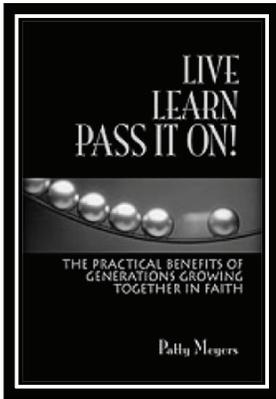
This is classic work on intergenerational faith formation. It is the most comprehensive, well-researched, and most inclusive of any book on intergenerational religious education (IGRE) published to date. It includes workable models, solid theoretical foundations, and concrete practical prescriptions for effective inter-age religious and community living and learning in the faith community. It includes a variety of viewpoints, models, programs, and methods of IGRE. The spirit of this book resonates so well with the direction of faith formation today: the whole faith community together in which persons of different age groups work interactively and productively to help each other grow religiously



### The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together

Howard Vanderwell, editor. (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008) [\$17]

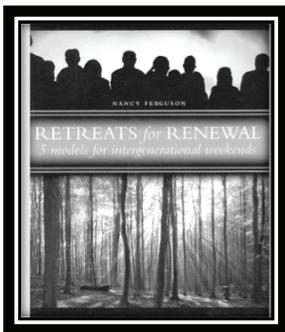
Many congregations today experience collisions between parents who want to spend time with their children and age-segregated church programming, as well as between the children worshiping in their pews and the increasing number of seniors in the same pew. Among the questions these congregations struggle to address are these: Should we try to hold the generations together when we worship? Is it even possible? Led by pastor and resource developer Howard Vanderwell, nine writers—pastors, teachers, worship planners, and others serving in specialized ministries—offer their reflections on issues congregational leaders need to address as they design their worship ministry. In addition, numerous sidebars illustrate the diversity of practices in the church today. Contributors do not propose easy answers or instant solutions. Rather, they guide readers as they craft ministries and practices that fit their own community, heritage, and history. Each chapter includes questions for reflection and group discussions, and an appendix provides guidelines for small group use. The thread that connects these varied contributions is the belief there is no greater privilege for Christians than worshiping God, and there is no better way to do that than as an intergenerational community in which all are important and all encourage and nurture the faith of the others.



## Live, Learn, Pass It On!: The Practical Benefits of Generations Growing Together in Faith

Patty Meyers (Nashville: Discipleship Resources/Upper Room Books, 2006) [\$13]

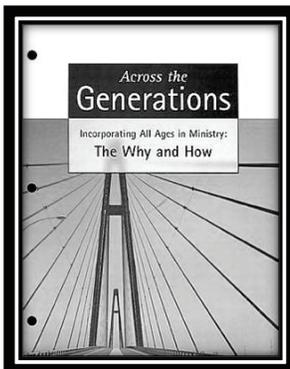
Congregations are intergenerational, but many fail to make the most of the amazing gifts of generations learning together. Instead, peers are segmented from the whole to talk about faith and help each other grow spiritually, creating an unintentional disconnect within the congregation. *Live, Learn, Pass It On!* is written to help the church build on its greatest asset, people... as they pass on understandings of faith and discipleship to the next generations. "This books attempts to honor the God-given strengths and life experiences of people of every age and encourage them to use these for the good of others and to the glory of God," writes Meyers. She provides a practical overview of multi-generational learning that includes models, stories, biblical and theological foundations on which to build an effective, holistic ministry for all in your congregation.



## Retreats for Renewal: 5 Models for Intergenerational Weekends

Nancy Ferguson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources/Upper Room Books, 2008) [\$14]

*Retreats for Renewal* presents five weekend intergenerational retreats that encourage sabbath time and deepen relationships within the whole congregation. It will offer a chance for people of all ages to praise God, find a shared story, learn about one another and discover the things that bind us together in Christ. "By carving out a sabbath time, all participants will be able to pause in the midst of their busy lives to rest and to pay attention to their relationships with God and with one another," writes Nancy Ferguson. *Retreats for Renewal* includes five complete designs and an overview for planning, including small group session details, sample worship services, song suggestions, and biblical background. The five retreat themes are: 1) Follow the Good Shepherd, 2) Come to the Waters, 3) Shine the Light, 4) Sow the Seeds of Faith, and 5) Claim Your Name.



## Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry

Resource Manual with CD (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001) [\$29.99]

*Across the Generations* integrates foundational information, practical "how to" advice, and proven plans and programs that you can use in cross-generational ministry. The first three chapters provide the foundations, while the next ten chapters provide practical ways to do cross-generational ministry—service, worship, learning, summer ministries, retreat and camping ministries, support ministry at home, drama, and media. Contributors include experts in cross-generational ministry. The CD contains reproducible program formats, planning tools, and guides for developing your own cross generational programs.



## Hands and Hearts: Intergenerational Activities throughout the Church Year

Lois Johansson (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2006) [\$10]

*Hands and Hearts* includes easy-to-follow instruction for activities, based on the liturgical year, designed to help your church family experience faith-based learning together. A source of fun and biblical learning, this interactive book is a great way to draw together a congregation of all ages for spiritual growth and learning. Programs include: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time.