



DOING CHURCH TOGETHER! CHILDREN'S MINISTRY NEWSLETTER

MINISTRY DIRECTION

Intergenerational: between, among, in the midst of or shared by different age groups

Ministry: using one's personal talents and gifts to serve other

Every Sunday night at the church I attend families gather for a shared meal before the worship celebration begins. The children eat with their family, their friends, and with other members of the congregation. When the celebration begins the elementary and middle school children hurry to get a seat on the front rows. Parents choose to sit nearby with younger children.

When worship begins children and some of the adults come to the stage to choose a rhythm instrument. A few parents even bring their toddlers to the front to play an instrument. During the celebration the moderator presents specific needs of the church family. The room grows still as individuals (children, youth and adults) pray individually for one or more of the needs that have been mentioned. Or, the congregation quickly forms small groups to pray for one another.

When it is time for the message, the minister engages the children in a variety of ways:

- Through questions. "What is something you would like to learn? Who would you like to teach you?"
- Through learning activities. "Tonight we are going to talk about 7 kingdom principles of The Lord's Prayer. I've asked a child to create a hand gesture that will help each one of us remember each of the principles." (At the introduction of each principle, the designated child comes to the front and shares his hand gesture with the audience.)
- Through storytelling. "When my mom was 8 years old, she needed a new pair of shoes..."

Then it is time to respond to the message. Posters have been placed around the room with a kingdom principle from the Lord's Prayer written on each one. After a brief explanation is given by the minister adults and children of all ages quickly move to a poster and kneel or stand in prayer. Some remain there in prayer throughout the prayer time. Others move among the posters praying through each principle.

That's just one example of intergenerational ministry—ministry that brings all ages together and allows every individual regardless of age to worship and serve the body using the unique gifts God has given him.

What are the benefits of intergenerational ministry?

- Children move from being segregated to being connected
- Children know and are known by members of the congregation
- Children use their gifts and talents to serve the body
- The inclusion of children challenges those involved in leading ministry to be more creative, flexible, and simplistic.
- Families become more aware of their role in their children's spiritual development and become more confident in fulfilling that role.

What's the key to effective intergenerational ministry?

Congregations are, for the most part, dependent on their leader. So it is vital that the leader have a passion for bringing all ages together and an uncompromising desire for children to minister and be ministered to. Leaders who lead intergenerational ministries and events are—

- Comfortable with children, youth and adults
- Spontaneous and flexible
- Relational: hospitable, good communicators, affirming and encouraging
- Willing to partner with others in program preparation and implementation
- Willing to take risks

IDEAS YOU CAN USE

How can you step out into intergenerational ministry?

- 1. Consider what each age group (children, youth and adults) need to gain from ministry.**
- 2. Begin implementing intergenerational events into seasonal activities.**

For example, Easter.

The congregation could come together to share the Passover meal with children and adults explaining different elements of the meal.

Families might come together to create Easter food baskets to give to needy families in the community.

Children, youth, and adults could work together to perform a live retelling of the Easter story.

3. Reinforce the “we are all Christ’s body” feeling.

Create opportunities for all members of the congregation to—

- Eat together
- Play together
- Learn together
- Worship together
- Serve together

4. Invite people of every age to serve.

Publicize existing service opportunities and create others so more people get a chance to use their gifts and abilities to serve.

5. Introduce your children’s worship program (if you have one) to adult worshipers.

Pattern a main worship service after the children’s worship service. Invite everyone to participate.

6. Make ministry teams intergenerational.

Include children and youth are teams that are normally adults only. Examples are—intercession, visitation, stewardship, worship, missions, greeting and ushering, janitorial.

Existing Programs—Let’s Do Them Together!

SUNDAY SCHOOL:

- For one quarter each year offer a class for kids and parents. Teach on simple Bible truths that families can live out at home—prayer, giving, obedience to authority, loving others, etc.
- Rotate teachers one Sunday. Let a preteen teach the seniors, a teen teach an adult class, an adult teach the preschoolers.

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

- Plan each segment of the worship using creative activities that allow all ages to be participants rather than observers
 - Prayer.
 - Form small prayer groups. Each one shares a prayer need and the group prays together for these needs.
 - Target prayers. Use a slide presentation, posters or banners to guide prayer.
 - Prepare children and teens as well as adults to be altar ministers.
 - Worship.

- Form intergenerational worship teams.
- Provide instruments, banners, and streamers for people of every age to use to express worship.
- Share individual and small group expressions of worship: poetry, art, instrumental solo, dance, slide or video presentation
- The Message

When explaining the concept of intergenerational ministry to our congregation, one bright young man asked, “So where does the *awkward* children’s sermon fit in?” Great question! The children’s sermon focuses on children for five minutes and then often ignores them throughout the other segments of congregational worship. That’s what makes the children’s sermon awkward and often ineffective. An intergenerational message ignores no age group but engages all generations by using good communication techniques--

- Props and visuals.
- Questions that relate truth to real life
- Brief learning activities
- Personal stories and illustrations
- Humor

- Prayer Response

In intergenerational worship the message response should be as prayerfully planned as every other segment of the worship celebration. Invitations can involve—

- An activity. For example, taking communion or writing a note of confession and bringing it to the cross.
- Movement through stations. For example, there might be areas for confession, thanksgiving, intercession (praying for others), and supplication (praying for personal needs)
- Praying for one another in a small group of two or three.
- Coming to the altar to pray or intercede. Be sure it is clear that children are invited as well as adults.

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Many congregations have small groups or “cells”. These groups provide a setting for transparency, trust, support, accountability, and leadership training. But many of our cell groups are missing the intergenerational dimension—children are not included. Usually, families find babysitters or childcare is provided.

However, children can be blessed by being a part of the small group. The small group becomes an extended family for the children. Here's a small group outline that effectively includes children--

- Greeting time--a time for everyone to reconnect. You might have a simple question everyone can ask and respond to. For example, "If you had a million dollars, how would you use it?"
- Worship time—a time to celebrate Jesus' presence. This time is like a large family gathering where we sing songs of praise and share what God has done in our lives during the past week. We pray conversationally using sentence prayers so that children feel comfortable joining in.
- Bible Study time—At this point preschool children and older separate for their own time of Bible instruction on the same Bible truth the being presented to the adults. Every adult member of the small group rotates responsibility to lead the children's Bible study.
- Fellowship time—Everyone comes back together to share refreshments