

# Intergenerational Worship: Why It's Worth It!

*While many churches have opted for segregating worshippers into age groups (children's worship, youth worship, college worship, etc.), what are the long-term costs? Why is it worth it to worship intergenerationally? How do we lead our congregation toward this important goal? This session will explore these questions and offer suggestions for moving forward.*



## **Why have this conversation?**

- Many churches are segregated into age-grouped worship gatherings.
- Within cities, churches often cater to an age group and are seen as niche churches.
- Within some congregations, there are multiple age-group mini congregations that function independently in terms of spiritual nurture and formation.
- By those who want to grow numerically, niche worship is often viewed positively.

## **How did we get here?**

- The obsession with “me” and mine.
- Segregation is rampant in our culture.
- Marketing – targets specific age groups.
- Living arrangements – retirement homes, gated communities.
- Perceived educational benefits – learn best with others who share your needs.
- Affluence and choice – we have been able to afford choice.
- Specialization -- hiring others to do that for which we are unskilled.
- Freedom to abdicate responsibilities.
- Retirement as an expected life cycle.
- Institutional day care and elder care.
- The “graded-everything” movement.
- Obsession with youth culture – youth camps and youth music.

## **What are the implications?**

- The church is adept at action but short on reflection.
- No longer a church for your needs – you graduate out of church.
- Smaller communities cannot be relevant – too many needs, too few resources.
- A lack of broad-based faith – a faith to grow into.
- Failure to pass along the stories of other generations.
- Spiritual/theological amnesia.
- Shortage of empathy and understanding.
- Lost generations.
- Everyone misses out on the broader view of the gospel.

## **What about the Bible?**

### The Unity of the Church: “There is one body and one spirit”

“So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5)

Other verses: John 17:22-23, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:3

### The Pattern of Worship: “Let all worship the Lord”

“Young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord” (Psalm 148:12-13)

Other Verses: Exodus 12:26 & 13:14, 2 Chron. 20:13, Nehemiah 8:3

## A Covenant Community: “All generations are a part of God’s covenant”

“Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28)

Other Verses: Gen 17 (God cares for all generations), Matthew 21:15-16, Mark 10:13-16

## Formation of Character: “Passing on our faith to the next generation”

“What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told is. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord” (Psalm 78:3-4)

Other Verses: Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Colossians 3:16, 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Titus 2:1-15

### **Why advocate for intergenerational worship?**

- Theologically and biblically – what does the Bible say?
- What is the larger framework of God’s overall plan for God’s people?
- What are our personal and congregational goals for children, teenagers, young adults, median adults, and older adults regarding faith development? How do we reach them? How do the generations foster these goals?
- We need each other (even if we don’t always want each other).
- Our culture’s lack of preparation for the next stage – depression, substance abuse.

### **What practical steps can we take?**

- Keep the challenge in front of others – advocate.
- Set an example yourself.
- Facilitate intergenerational discussion and dialogue – examples?
- Know who you are within a generational model. Understanding how others view us is a good start toward modeling intergenerational ministry.
- Make intergenerational plans for your own life.
- Model intergenerational worship – enlist a balanced group of worship leaders (offering collection, Scripture reading, prayer leaders, and singers). Choose songs to represent different generations.
- Consider all the chapters of life’s journey to be equally valuable

- Avoid age stereotypes
- Worship planning should be age inclusive
- Encourage activities that prepare worshipers to interact with other age groups before the service.
- Make sure that each age group has a respected part in the leadership and service of the church
- Program intergenerational exchange in your own congregation – music groups, Lifegroups, Sunday School groupings, and mentoring.
- Use your influence positively.
- Find ways to tell the intergenerational story – testimony in worship, church-wide sharing, small group sharing within worship.
- Set up a system for assisting parents with young children.
- Unaccompanied children who attend your church must have church mentors who are committed both at church and at other times.
- Consider a system for pairing younger families with older families.

### **What hopeful signs are there for the future?**

- Younger people are eager to develop friendships with older adults.
- Some grandparents are moving to live closer to family.
- Older people are living longer and avoiding intentional isolation.
- Retirement is shifting as a cultural norm, socially, economically, etc.
- Some older people are seeing the benefits of staying in the middle of normal life instead of opting for isolated communities.

### **An Intergenerational Choir model that works.**

- Accommodates stretched leadership.
- Too little time for more ensembles and meetings – parents and children overly committed.
- Size of the choir needed everyone.
- Expectations of everyone involved is high – musically talented people of all ages.

### **For further study:**

- ❖ *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, Thomas Bergler, Eerdmans, 2012.
- ❖ *Desegregating Worship*, Randall Bradley, MorningStar, Forthcoming.
- ❖ *The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge*, Gilbert R. Rendle, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001.
- ❖ *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations*, Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, Jossey-Bass, 2002.