

Tools & Tips for 'Home-Grown' intergenerational events

Learning together across generations

"Intergenerational religious education is 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"

—*Intergenerational Religious Education: Models, Theory, and Prescription for Interage Life and Learning in the Faith Community*, James W. White, Religious Education Press, Birmingham, AL, 1988.

B i b l i c a l f o u n d a t i o n

There are several scripture passages that remind us of God's intent for a community drawn together in a covenantal relationship with God and with one another through baptism:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.—Deuteronomy 6:6-7

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.—Psalm 145:4

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together... promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.—Ephesians 4:15-16

Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. —1 Timothy 4:12

D e f i n i t i o n s

Though subtle, there are differences in the three primary approaches to faith-sharing and learning across generations:

Intergenerational events Intergenerational events or activities in their richest expression, are marked with intentional opportunities for adults, children, and youth to engage in dialog with one another and to grow in faith by working, playing, praying and worshipping side-by-side.

Family events The definition for family has changed dramatically over the last few decades. Today, it is safe to say that family includes 'anybody who is at your table'. While this is still not an all-inclusive definition, it dispels the antiquated notion of family as father, mother and 2.5 children. It gives way to a broader understanding of family that includes single or divorced people, step-families, single-gender partnerships, foster families, single parents, and grandparents raising children. Family is still the basic unit of the congregation. Family events encourage interaction between members of a particular family in the context of the wider congregational family.

Cross-generational events Mentoring, "adopt-a-grandparent" or father-daughter events are all examples of cross-generational opportunities. While not all generations are represented, intentional planning puts at least two generations together for mutual learning, sharing, and encouragement.

B e n e f i t s , b o n u s e s a n d b l e s s i n g s

Bringing generations together provides blessings on a variety of levels including:

- reclaims God's intent for faith to be shared in community and across generations
- affirms one's value in the total community, as individuals are invited to share experiences, knowledge, gifts, and attitudes with others
- fosters a foundation of support of each other's concerns, interests, and activities
- breaks down stereotypes and barriers that stand between generations and gives new meaning to "faith family"
- provides "up close and personal" discipleship 101 as children, youth and adults engage in sharing faith, mentoring, teaching, learning, and praying for one another
- practically speaking, intergenerational events, by the nature of their format, theme, and intent provide new and innovative enhancements to any Christian education program
- fosters leadership regardless of age or stature
- takes a pro-active, counter-culture stance in the face of the countless ways society separates and pigeon-holes the family of God into age-specific groups

P l a n n i n g t i p s

- Spend time in building a planning team represented by every generation. Capture the rich wealth of gifts, creativity, experience, and passion present when those of all ages come to the planning table.
- Clearly state your goals and desired outcomes. Put all your plans to the "litmus test." Does each action or activity relate to the goals? Is each age group present in your congregation justly considered and involved?
- Plan occasional events at times when those usually unable to attend can participate. For example, why not host a gathering over Christmas break when college students are home and when relatives and friends may be visiting for the holidays?
- See the planning grid on page 15 as one way to plan and implement an event that involves a wide variety of leadership gifts, faith-sharing strategies, and learning opportunities.
- Create an event environment where each person feels welcomed, accepted, affirmed, and valued as integral contributors to the faith community and to the learning experience.
- It is usually a good idea to begin and end with a total group gathering, regardless of the format or focus of the event.
- Let the event be led by those of all ages.
- Offer options, choices, or permission for any person to opt out of a particular activity.
- Use child-friendly language in giving directions or explanations. Use simple, easy-to-read written directions, as well.

Learning together *continued*

- Involve multi-sensory activities with special attention to multiple learning styles and preferences.
- Conversation and dialog are essential. Plan intentional opportunities for participants to share thoughts, feelings, faith, personal history, fears, or dreams with someone from another generation. Build conversation points into group building, table discussions, small group activities, worship, or transition times between activities.
- Consider child care for infants or toddlers.
- Is a meal feasible? If not, plan for some sort of refreshment.

P r o m o t i o n a n d p u b l i c i t y

Promotion and publicity are critical if everyone in the congregation is to say, "Hey, there's something for me." Pull out all the stops and get creative and innovative in publicizing the event.

- Go beyond the time-honored, traditional forms of communication, such as bulletin inserts, newsletters, Sunday school announcements or flyers.
- Use language that is inclusive especially to those who often may be overlooked such as children, singles, young adults, seniors and those with learning, developmental, physical, or emotional disabilities.
- Consider today's means of communication. Create a video and have it playing before worship, Sunday school or other events. Don't forget to put information and even a sampling of activities on your congregation's Web page.
- Target special interest groups such as parenting groups, Bible studies, women's or men's organizations, choirs, congregational sports teams, youth groups, quilters, property care, social ministry volunteers, mid-week ministry participants. Let your intent convey ALL ARE WELCOME and VALUED.
- Invite "crafty" children, youth, and adults to help you make "visual" invitations or reminders of the event. Keep your theme in mind and look for inexpensive household items that will convey details of your event in whimsical, intriguing ways.



Opportunities **for intergenerational learning**

Four intergenerational modules are introduced in this packet, following this page. To download a complete set of materials for each module, go to

www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/2003CEProgramPlanner

The modules have been designed to enrich specific occasions such as Rally Day but the content of the programs are appropriate for use at any time.

All Ye, All Ye, Come Home Free! A Rally Day Emphasis

Church House Rock! A Reformation Workshop

Happy New Year! A Celebration of the Church Year

The Good Soil Garden Center! A Workshop for Sharing Faith with Others

Regardless of the style, format or intent of the various components of your educational ministry program, enhance and strengthen existing programs with intergenerational learning opportunities throughout the year. Here is a starter list to help you begin to think of the breadth and variety of opportunities to bring generations together for learning, fun, and sharing faith, hand in hand and heart to heart! Add your ideas to the list!

- in conjunction with your congregation's cherished events such as annual picnics, homecoming, founder's day, or rally day with intentional planning to help generations interact and dialog
- an event in celebration or tribute to the name of your congregation
- celebrate saints, sinners, heroes/heroines of the Bible or defenders of the faith, past and present
- explore the rich possibilities associated with global education or multicultural ministry
- 5th Sunday events. In the months where there are five Sundays on the calendar, set aside regular Sunday morning programming and offer an intergenerational event
- congregational ministry themes such as stewardship, worship, sermon series, or care giving
- discover together the spiritual aspects of science, nature, the environment, and health
- "hot topics" such as peace, justice, hunger, consumerism, the media, sexuality
- intergenerational exploration of theological themes, the Bible, catechism, or sacraments the life and times of Jesus, David, Mary, or Paul
- life skills such as communication or Christian responses to anger, hurt, or conflict
- asset building or "random acts of kindness" events
- an event based on storytelling, especially Bible stories
- plan a series of events on faith practices
- on the topic of spiritual practices, spiritual gifts, or fruits of the Spirit
- in the context of retreats, camps, and day-camps

- celebration of the arts including dance, singing, instrumental music, drama, fabric arts, sculpting, woodwork, painting, metal craft, and even baking and cooking
- as an alternative to Sunday school or mid-week ministry in the summer
- based on service projects
- events focused on outreach such as “invite a friend” or neighborhood block parties
- add a “faith-scope” to holidays, festivals, local events, or cultural opportunities

Don't forget to look at the intergenerational learning modules offered in the 2002-2003 Christian Education Planning Guide, *Stir Us To Deeper Discipleship*. Copies are available by calling Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648 and asking for Item code 6-0001-6439-4 or visit www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/2002CEProgramPlanner/

