**Engaging the Generations**

**Theology**

*Intergenerational activities are social engagements and interactions, bringing together younger and older generations for a common purpose. They build on the strengths that different generations have to offer, nurture understanding and mutual respect, and challenge ageism. Both parties have the opportunity to give as well as receive, and to feel a sense of ownership and achievement. And it aims to put a smile on everyone’s face.* – Monica Trust

* **Inclusive intergenerational Christian community** 
  + “…to the elect lady and her children…” *2 John :1*
  + “…Treat the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger as your sisters, in all purity.” *1 Timothy 5:2*
  + “...and all of them, with wives and children, escorted us outside the city. There we knelt down and prayed…” *Acts 21:5*
* **Inclusive intergenerational worship** 
  + You will rejoice in the presence of the Lord your God with your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who live in your settlements… *Deuteronomy 12:12*
  + Young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord. *Psalm 148:12*
* **The Gifts of all Generations** 
  + “…I will pour out my spirit on all flesh: your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” *Joel 2:28*
  + “…Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” *Matthew 18:3*
* **The Continuity of the Faith Community**
  + “…which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so that the next generation would know them, even the children not yet born, and they in turn would tell their children…” *Psalm 78:5-6*

**What’s the Reality in our Churches?**

We say we believe in intergen but the reality and practice often falls short.

Research by Dr. Sarah Holmes (Liverpool Hope Uni) during the pandemic concluded that relationship is key. Beyond our programmes and our church tradition, we need to be investing in relationships first and foremost. The churches that have grown during the pandemic have all prioritised relationships, many of which are intergenerational.

There needs to be a sense of authentic connection in communities. It’s a long process, to change the status quo. It can feel awkward but providing prompts can allow it to become much more natural. Children need role models to see how faith could work in their own life and children bring a freedom and sense of awe that, as adults, we could do with a lot more of! Kalevi Tamminen’s research back in 1991 found that 60 per cent of eleven-year-olds and 80 per cent of seven-year-olds mentioned times of being aware of God’s presence. By comparison, only about 30 percent of adults are aware of similar experiences. (1991). Children are much more in tune with the spiritual realm than we are. We need what they bring for our own spiritual growth.

You may already be doing some all-age worship. Sometimes it’s about being more intentional with what you’re already doing, not necessarily starting afresh. Don’t forget to consider the safeguarding implications.

**Starting to do some reimagining/thinking**

* During Communion – there are liturgies available for all age scenarios. If your church uses liturgy, could you adopt those as your general use ones? Where can all ages be included? You might like to consider communion before confirmation or taking steps to put young people through the training to administer the cup, or to be the ones who organise people moving forward to receive communion. How can the roles be shared out? Can you have mentors to guide younger members in various roles? Communion can sometimes be a practice that children are not invited into, particularly as they’re often not allowed to take the bread and the wine. Think about how your context can make children feel more welcome at the Lord’s Table.
* Generous connections – Perhaps you could link up your young families with older congregation members and encourage both to pray for the other and to check in with how they’re doing. Having an older person light up because their designated family comes to say hello and having a child excited to share their life with an older congregation member works both ways!
* ‘Getting to know you’ exercises and discussions around common life experiences will help people bond more quickly. Include personal stories, experiences and testimonies in appropriate depth – but don’t get *too* personal.
* Make sure there’s equality and co-operation; a joint development of activities, shared outcomes and goals and shared discussions about how activities will benefit all age groups involved. Young people particularly value contributing to decisions about topics and activities.
* Discussion questions – You might wish to use something like Table Talk to encourage conversation. We love the Messy Moments one which is for all ages. Or you might offer one suggested question for people to ask others about.
* Celebrating milestones – use events and celebrations as an opportunity to build community – think intentionally about activities that will draw people together.
* Wondering – In Godly Play we use wondering questions to help those present to think more deeply about the story in relation to their own life and faith. Using these sorts of questions in intergenerational settings could encourage listening to each other and learning together from the youngest to the oldest. Children ask pertinent questions and they notice things that adults often take for granted.
* Special services designated to children and young people leading are not a terrible idea, by any means, but are they being given space in general to be involved no matter what kind of service is happening?
* Adults/children? - Activities offered as part of the Sunday service are often suggested as being for all ages but some of the activities tend to be geared towards children or adults particularly. Consider how to connect people during those times to allow older and younger generations to discover things from a different perspective. For example, in an all-age service I was in recently, children were invited to create hand prayers, but the adults weren’t. Everyone could be welcomed to do it rather than attributing certain activities just to one group or another.
* Plan activities that people are passionate about and/or
* Partner with other people or organisations from the wider community.

**Actual examples from churches**

* All Saints West Dulwich – posada with knitted figures. Involving a number of people in the process – knitting the figures, telling the stories, play
* St Francis’ Horley - In February our Good News Group of yr 6 plus youngsters contributed different items for a gift pack to the older members of our church. They designed the front cover of the card, contributed items for inclusion – poem, jokes, puzzle sheets. One family made the cupcakes and another paid for the chocolates. These were delivered over ‘Valentine’ weekend and were greatly appreciated.
  + *Young person response: In a discussion at one of our Good News Group meetings we all agreed Jesus wants us to be kind to one another. Last January we remembered this and decided to give something to the oldest members in church on Valentine’s Day. We all contributed something towards this to make up a card. I contributed the jokes and helped choose extra pictures. Seventeen people had a card, puzzle sheets, chocolates and a box of cupcakes. I remember one lady wrote thanking us and saying it was many years since she had received a Valentine Card!* Noah aged 12
  + *Older generation response - I just want to ask you to say a very big thank you on my behalf to the lovely children for my wonderful Valentines card cakes and chocolates it is wonderful to receive a lovely gift at this time, and to let us know that we are being thought of and prayed for. I send my Love and prayers to you all.* Joan
* All Saints Peckham - Sweet swap across the congregation – find someone to swap your sweet with on the other side of the room. Be intentional about having them swap it with someone they don’t know or are a different age to them.
* Pen pals - encourage snail mail between older generations and families
* Lunches at church to bring people back together and welcome new people. Kids playing with students and making paper planes etc
* Church family gardening day for all ages and some activities for everyone
* Stickers for adults to wear that say eg. “ask me about Noah” as a conversation starter.
* Pair youth/older generations in serving roles so that the young person learns from the older person and a relationship is built that lasts.

**The role of the oldest and youngest generations and the ladder of participation**

What does your church participation look like?

1. Hidden – Children are completely separate – being dropped off at their own activities and never get to be part of the wider community.  
   Older people are completely separate. They are ‘catered for’ in separate mid-week daytime events that don’t involve the rest of the community.
2. Visible - The children are there to be seen and not heard.  
   The older people are there in church (and often greeted politely) but don’t contribute except as a passive presence.
3. Entertained - Sometimes we have children and young people but we try to entertain them rather than properly engaging them.  
   Older people are acknowledged and offered activities that others think “they” will appreciate (e.g. bingo / sing songs / songs of praise)
4. Active involvement - Children coming to the front to pray for adults. Commissioned into school. Having a role in church and/or serving on a team.  
   Older people involved alongside others in church taking part in both up-front and back-room roles, for example, prayer ministry.
5. Shapers - Children are asked to input their own testimonies, thoughts, reflections - being involved in shaping the life of the church.  
   Older people’s distinctive contributions and perspectives are invited and valued in up-front roles and decision-making processes.

How can we invite our CYP/older generations to be actively involved in shaping how we do church, taking on board their ideas and bringing them to life?

**What could go wrong?!**

Sometimes you might find blocks to intergenerational ministry and activities. Here are some we thought of and you might be able to add others:

* **Noise versus sound** – there are always sounds in our churches…coughs, sneezes, laughter, a fan, creaky chairs, the sound of feet on the floor surface… these are often ones we ignore or consider relatively reasonable or normal. ‘Noise’ is other sounds that make it more difficult to concentrate and our attention will probably be diverted to it and we expect something to change. We also know that children make sounds…moving items around, climbing on chairs, getting their parents’ or siblings’ attention, playing with toys, asking questions. Sometimes this can be viewed as ‘noise’ instead of sounds attributed to children. We would expect a child who is having a tantrum to be taken out of where everyone else is – partly so that the child can have some space that they need, but also so that it doesn’t disrupt everyone else. That would be considered ‘noise’. But the difference between the 2 is important. If it is perceived that children always just make ‘noise’ rather than more acceptable ‘sounds’, the level of welcome available to children and families is hugely reduced. Some level of accepting the sound of children is really important in intergenerational gatherings.
* **Lack of visibility for children** – Imagine being a 5 year old’s height. What can you see? How do people engage you on your level – do they even bother? What is accessible to you? [Here’s a video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsWOruatgEQ) that shows from a child’s perspective what it could be like in some church services.
* **Different generations and cultures bring different expectations** – society has changed over the years, generations are very different, technology is far advanced, we have a huge number of different cultures represented in London. It’s important that we encourage open dialogue about experiences rather than making assumptions based on our own culture or generational experiences. How can we start to understand where someone else is seeing things from, even if we see things differently?
* **Action songs/pandering to children, services that don’t cater for the adults** – all age services are difficult to get right. Some families skip them because it’s too stressful, members of the congregation skip them because it’s too chaotic. A service aimed at children isn’t deep enough, a service aimed at adults is boring for children. Is there a happy medium? Yes! Think about the elements of your service, is there something for everyone? It is a misconception that children can’t get to grips with more difficult words and ideas. They can grow into them or you can explain them as you go, as necessary. Instead of doing ‘action songs’, could you use Makaton sign language so that songs are accessible to those with learning difficulties? Using a language means it’s much more likely that adults will join in too. When you give a sermon and want to go a bit deeper with children present, what could you use to encourage engagement from your younger members? Perhaps there are themes/titles that you could offer playdough (to everyone, not just the children!) to create something as they listen and then check in at various points to see what they’ve made and how it contributes to what you have to say. Maybe a word bingo – how many times do I say this word/phrase, or using it as a call and response. Perhaps a word search to find some of the words from the sermon, or a colouring sheet about what you’re saying, or a pew bag with items to help them follow the different parts of the service.

**Resources**

* [Welcoming CYP Toolkit](https://southwark.anglican.org/mission-ministry/mission/children-youth/welcoming-cyp-toolkit/) – written by the CYP Team
* Beyond the Children’s Corner book by Margaret Pritchard-Houston and [here’s a workshop session](https://youtu.be/tYhviAmGMUo) she ran for us in 2022 based on her book – I highly recommend it!
* A Gospel for All Ages book – David Csinos
* Worship for Everyone book – Nick & Becky Drake
* Engage All Generations book by Cory Seibel
* Pairing young people with older generations for 6 sessions over 6 months through the app: [Walk with me](http://www.walkwithmejourneys.org/) – guided conversation for roughly 45mins at a time, but completely up to the individuals involved. The idea is that they grow a lasting relationship. The app also provides some good support.
* [The All-in Thing by Big Ministries](http://www.amazon.co.uk/All-Thing-Big-Ministries/dp/1899788980) – different ages responding in worship in a way that works for them including the silent space and the smallest of children.
* [Kitchen Table's feast](https://kitchentable.org.uk/feast/free-resources/) – conversations for the dinner table
* Kitchen table is a project within [Care for the Family](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/)
* [Messy Moments Table Talk](https://uglyducklingresources.org/collections/table-talk)
* [Grandparents talking about faith moments with children](https://youtu.be/P5I1PWtaRTA) - video
* [Grandparenting blogs](http://www.afterworknet.com/home/relationships/grandparenting)
  + [5 ways to be a more courageous grandparent](file:///\\DS-DCFP01\LDrive\MissionAndEvangelism\CYPM&M\Talks%20and%20Presentations\Connecting%20Generations\o%09https:\www.afterworknet.com\could-you-be-a-more-courageous-grandparent-heres-5-ways\)
  + [5 ways to get closer to your grandchildren](file:///\\DS-DCFP01\LDrive\MissionAndEvangelism\CYPM&M\Talks%20and%20Presentations\Connecting%20Generations\o%09www.afterworknet.com\want-to-get-closer-to-your-grandchildren-try-these-5-simple-ways\)
* [St Monica Trust](http://www.stmonicatrust.org.uk/guide) – intergenerational activity ideas outside of worship times
* [Parenting for Faith](https://parentingforfaith.org/) - many ideas of how to have faith conversations between generations
* [Bible chat mats](http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-children/youth-children/resources/bible-chat-mat/) - allows CYP and adults to read the Bible and have conversation together, whether around a meal table, sitting on the sofa or wherever works best.
* Communion liturgies with all age in mind:
  + - [Messy Church Liturgy](http://www.messychurch.org.uk/tags/liturgy)
    - [Church of England – Communion with children](file:///C:\Users\BoltonK\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\UFG67MEB\%09www.churchofengland.org\prayer-and-worship\worship-texts-and-resources\common-worship\holy-communion\additional-0)
    - [Prayer 1](https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion/additional-3), [Prayer 2](https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion/additional-4)