



HELPING  
YOUR CHURCH  
BECOME MORE

*intergenerational*

The background of the page features a close-up of two hands, one adult and one child, gently holding a large, light-colored house-shaped object. The house shape is decorated with intricate, golden-brown scrollwork patterns. The hands are positioned as if supporting the base and sides of the house, symbolizing care and protection. The overall tone is warm and nurturing.

## Waharoa

The role of Baptist Children & Family Ministries (BCFM) is to inspire, equip and support our Baptist churches as they seek to grow lifelong disciples of Christ. This includes both a ministry and a mission focus. Our emphasis in this process is to support our churches as they nurture faith in children, and equip and resource the home to be the primary place of that spiritual nurture.

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**F**irst, I need to be clear that this is not an overnight journey or a quick fix! Working in a typical mid-sized, silo-ministry Baptist church in the 2000s, I was keen for our church to become more intergenerational. As a youth pastor I had turned a failing youth group around in a year. I made all the calls and things happened. It was like zipping round in a speedboat! The journey to becoming more intergenerational as a whole church is like steering an ocean liner. In order to bring the whole congregation along and break down silos you need to make small, incremental changes. It is a long journey but so worthwhile. May God bless you and encourage you on your journey!

**Raewyn Moodie**  
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# WHAT IS inter- generational?

In order to become more intergenerational it is important to have a definition of what this means.

Christina Embree, from Refocus Ministries, notes that intergenerational is a 'suitcase word' (a word that may be loaded with multiple meanings) and we need to unpack what it means. She uses this definition to unpack what being intergenerational means:

***“A gathered group of multiple generations in meaningful relationships with one another where all have the opportunity to teach and to learn from others.”***

The words gathered, multiple, meaningful relationships, and teach and learn, are key to this definition.

Holly Catterton Allen defines intergenerational ministry (in her book with Christine Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*) as occurring when “a congregation *intentionally* combines the generations together in mutual serving, sharing or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the body of Christ to each other and the greater community” (p17).\*

Churches are usually multi-generational, meaning that the church honours all generations and has programming for all ages, but this doesn't mean the church is actually *uniting across generations* for intentional intergenerational faith formation. It is important to realise that it is not primarily for the benefit of the children and youth but *it is of benefit to all generations!*

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\* All page numbers refer to *Intergenerational Christian Formation* by Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Ross, Intervarsity Press, 2012.



# Why

## INTERGENERATIONAL?

**Firstly**, it is Biblical. The concept of splitting the generations up for teaching is relatively new (mid 20th century). When we look at the worship and daily life of the Old Testament Israelite nation, and the New Testament church, we see people of all ages engaged in teaching and learning together. Scripture presents coming to know God, as both a family and community-based process. God's directives for his people in the Old Testament clearly identify the Israelites as a relational community—children were not just included, they were drawn in and assimilated into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging. The directives for feasts and celebrations illustrate this point best. All of Israel participated, from the youngest to the oldest. The purpose was to remind them of who they were, who God was, and what God had done for 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 (See Deuteronomy).

The early church was also a multigenerational entity. All generations met together, worshipping, breaking bread, praying, and ministering to one

another in the context of the home (Acts 2,4,16). The Ephesians are an example of people who engaged their children in the life of the faith community (Ephesians 6:1-3).

**Secondly**, being intentionally intergenerational is optimal for faith formation. Search Institute has conducted research on spiritual development. They note that “one fundamental aspect is interconnecting. ...The best way for the most people to link to the narratives, communities, mentors, traditions and practices of their faith communities, is to participate actively in intentionally age-integrated experiences with others in those faith communities, where all are welcomed into a safe but challenging place to be formed into the image of Christ” (p63).

*However, it is important to note that **becoming an intergenerational church is not the ultimate goal—spiritual maturity is!***



# HOW DO WE BECOME truly INTER- GENERATIONAL?

The first step to becoming more intergenerational as a church, is to have a fully vested leadership team. “Successfully transitioning to an intergenerational paradigm lives (or dies) with the leadership” (p180).

The leadership team need to read and discuss texts together which help them understand how the church can become intergenerational (*Intergenerational Christian Formation* would be a good choice.) They also need to connect this information with the heart they have for those within their congregation. Discussing questions such as “Why does this faith community exist? What is the hope for each person who is part of this community—for the children, the teenagers, the young adults, the middle adults and the oldest adults?” (p182).

Andy Stanley, in his book *Making Vision Stick* says, “A leader points the way to a solution and gives a compelling reason why something must be done now.” What does your community stand to lose if you don’t begin to make this change now? As a leadership team, be prepared to articulate the answers to these questions.

Establish intergenerational community as a core value with your whole congregation—slowly raise their consciousness to its importance. Be careful in your use of language. Leadership need to develop a culture (and lead by example) where people seek to get to know those of different generations.

Continue to balance intergenerational values with age-sensitive ministries. Remember, it is both/and not either/or!

*We need both intergenerational relationships and age sensitive ministries for faith to flourish.*

Christina Embree offers four areas to evaluate from the definition mentioned at the start of this booklet:

“A gathered group of multiple generations in meaningful relationships with one another where all have the opportunity to teach and to learn from others.”



## 1. GATHERED

She notes in her blog that, “Sociologists talk about groups that gather together in community as either primary groups (more intimate, face-to-face, long-term) or secondary groups (impersonal, task-focused, time-limited). Our goal in establishing intergenerational community is for the church to be a primary group not a secondary one. Our gathering can’t just be to fulfil the tasks involved in having a Sunday morning service, limited to an hour, and segregated by age. *If our faith community is to be a primary group which wields the most influence, we need to be together in the same space, face-to-face, in meaningful ways.*”

## 2. MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

We may think our current children’s ministry or youth ministry model is intergenerational when we have some older leaders in with the children and youth but Christina notes, “A good rule of thumb: When thinking about intergenerational community, think ‘Past, Present, Future.’” Three generations—one who represents the past (older generation), one who represents the present (middle generation), and one who represents the future (youngest generation).

## 3. MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

She says, “There must be the cultivation of meaningful relationships, a deeper meeting of spirits and a connecting to one another’s humanity.” It’s not just about being together but *knowing* each other at a personal and, where appropriate, deep level.

## 4. TO TEACH AND TO LEARN

Christina also says, “If a church finds that it is consistently having only one generation act as the ‘teaching’ generation and all others are in learning mode, lifelong learning is unlikely to be fostered.” The whole point of intergenerational faith formation is that we are teaching and learning *from each other*—whatever our age.



WHERE  
SHOULD  
WE

start?

Sunday morning may not be the best place to start, so you might want to begin by developing places where intergenerational relationships can be fostered. In his book *Body Beautiful? Recapturing a Vision for All-Age Church* (p3,4) Philip Mounstephen makes the point, “All-age worship fails because it is not a genuine expression of an all-age culture—a culture in which people of every age not only feel welcomed, but valued, in which they are not only served, but enabled to serve.

*Where there is a mismatch between the culture of a church and its worship, that worship will inevitably ring hollow.”*

This is the reason why we believe that Sunday morning may not be the best place to start.

Instead, your church may choose to plan a games or sport afternoon, a picnic or a service project. The aim is to plan times and places where different generations can rub shoulders with each other and develop relationship. To ensure that you are actually reaching this goal you might choose to have leadership and selected participants

evaluate the event afterwards.

A possible checklist can be found at the end of this booklet.

Christina Embree cautions churches to “resist the urge to ‘programmatize’ relationship. That never works out well. Instead, find ways to provide opportunities both in the church building and outside of the church building for meaningful relationships to form.”

(More ideas can be found in her blogs at [refocusministry.org](http://refocusministry.org).)

Other methods for fostering intergenerational relationships might be:

- Intercessory prayer between generations. This can help people feel strongly connected in ways that simply talking together cannot. The Pray For Me campaign highlights and encourages intergenerational prayer. Ideas on this website could be adapted to fit your context—[prayformecampaign.com](http://prayformecampaign.com)
- Intergenerational home groups or small groups. These are one of the best spaces for developing deep relationships across generations.
- Service projects and opportunities.
- Social events, family camps, Messy church, Passover dinners, picnics, soup and buns Sunday lunch.





## SOME IDEAS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL HOMEGROUPS

Children, youth and adults could stay together for half the time and participate in an icebreaker, worship, prayer and communion. Then the children could go to their own age-sensitive learning time while youth and adults study and pray together. A meal or snack could be shared before or after the group.

**ICEBREAKERS:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my favourite ice cream/food/fruit is \_\_\_\_\_. What year did you or will you graduate from high school? What are you afraid of? Through these icebreakers every week the group cumulatively gets to know each other by name and “enter each other’s lives—the funny parts, the sad parts, the hopeful parts, the fearful parts. Children see adults as whole, multidimensional people, and adults see children as complex, growing *people*” (p241).

**WORSHIP:** Get different age groups to choose the song(s) each week. A parent and child could work together. They may share why a song is meaningful for them.

**PRAYER:** Pray for each ‘family’ present. This can include a college student, a widow, empty nesters. Pray for transition times, starting school, going to college, exams. Gather round the person/people being prayed for. Group leaders can leave space for everyone to pray. Model that prayer can be just a few words.

**COMMUNION:** By children participating in the Lord’s Supper along with adults they get to hear their parents and other adults talk about their feelings and thoughts as they take the bread and cup. Small groups could re-enact the Last Supper, ask each person to say what moment of the crucifixion they think was most difficult for Jesus, ask three adults to recall a particularly meaningful communion service and tell why it affected them so much. Children also love to be part of the formality of serving the Lord’s Supper to others.



# INTERGENERATIONAL worship

The hour or two on Sunday morning when most regularly hold church services has become a very age-segregated aspect of Christian life in New Zealand. However, rather than helping children and youth in their spiritual development it seems to have caused a blockage where young people who have passed through all the age segregated ministries do not feel connected to the wider church body and many drop out of congregational life as young adults. In both the Old Testament worship and New Testament house churches, children and youth were a part of worship with their families. "As children and youth worship in intergenerational settings, they are 'assimilated...with a deep sense of belonging into the body' of Christ" (p194).

Our reasons for splitting up the generations back in the 60's were to create more developmentally appropriate worship opportunities for children and youth. The problem with this assumption however, is that "spiritual development is not fundamentally cognitive development" (p195).

In many Baptist churches the first 20 minutes is traditionally a time when the children are together with the adults. If your church is seeking to become more intentionally intergenerational, begin with tweaking the first 20 minutes to include **all ages**.

Have a planning team comprised of several generations so that ideas and insights from all can be included. This team would help curate the service, or the first 20 mins, so that it has appeal to all ages.





*As you look through your worship service, consider each element by asking: How can children, teens, young adults, middle adults and older adults be drawn in more fully?*

#### **SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS:**

- Have older and younger greeters to welcome everyone
- Verbally welcome specific age cohorts on a regular basis
- Encourage children to be part of collecting the offering and praying for it
- Foster cross-age drama
- Encourage cross-generationally led prayers

- Allow gifted artists of all ages to share the work God is giving them to do
- Look for ways the older generation can share stories of their faith journey
- Encourage groups of different ages to come together to prepare a worship station.

Utilising the above ideas your church can expand to creating whole services, perhaps beginning with once a term where children and youth remain as part of the whole worship. Remind whoever is giving the message that day to keep their talk short and include some form of visual image as part of their message. For further information on how to preach with a more intentional intergenerational focus contact the Baptist National Centre.

# NEXT steps

Our hope is that after reading this booklet you will be inspired to take action, however, we know that working out where to start can be daunting so you might like to consider these next steps:

## 1. ASSESS

Look at your church community, your ministries and your programmes and consider your current context using an 'intergenerational filter'.

E.g. Look at the generational reach of the people on your stage this coming Sunday. It's often said a speaker will relate well to someone 10 years younger or older than themselves. Also look at your current church culture and its response to generational mixing.

## 2. DISCUSS AND PRAY

Talk with your staff team as you consider the assessment. What do you see, what might need to change, what could you tweak?

E.g. Look through your worship service, consider each element by asking: How can children, teens, young adults, middle adults and older adults be drawn in more fully?

## 3. PLAN

Make a plan for where you will start—and as was mentioned earlier, you might like to start outside of Sunday morning. If you do decide to start with the morning worship service you might like to develop a planning team comprised of several generations so that ideas and insights from all can be included. This team would help curate the service, or the first 20 mins, so that it has appeal to all ages. Your first goal may be to have at least four generations represented on stage during the service.

## 4. IMPLEMENT

This is where the rubber meets the road and you start to put your plans into action! Keep in mind that this is a long-term journey and not a quick fix.

## 5. EVALUATE

As with any change it is important that you evaluate as you go. This stage will help you to refine your plans and decide if they need adapting. Try to ensure that you get feedback from multiple generations. The following checklist could be a helpful evaluation tool.



# INTERGENERATIONAL check list

Using the table below, check how well your church intergenerational event or ministry did in intentionally bringing the generations together.

You could rate each ministry out of 5 (1 = not great, 5 = good) against the criteria on the left and add up the totals below.

Criteria	Children	Teenagers	Young Adults	Adults	Seniors
A place to belong					
Experiences a welcoming environment					
A place where everyone is loved and accepted					
Opportunities to be part of something bigger than themselves					
Opportunities for everyone to experience accountability and real relationships					
Opportunities to collaborate with other generations					
Opportunities to serve and contribute					
Opportunities to mentor others in their faith journey					
Opportunities to be discipled and grow and learn from others further along in their faith journey					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

# FINAL thoughts

Continue to evaluate as you go, but keep in mind that this is not a quick fix, nor is it a destination. Rather, it's a journey—a journey that will take time. Cory Seibel, a Canadian Baptist pastor, puts it this way, "We must think in a 40-year time frame. The change we're setting out to make is 'generational change'. We must exercise the virtue of patient endurance. As Eugene Peterson once wrote, 'If we're going to learn holiness in the stuff of history, we need to develop a sense of "deep time" and think in generations.'"

Mixing the generations is about an entire community being involved in the design and offering of worship, from adults to the smallest children. More than education, it is spiritual formation. We desire to form God-connected disciples who are connected to the wider body of Christ for their whole lives! As Jesus said, "My prayer is... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:20-23.

## SUGGESTED READING LIST

All of these books can be borrowed from the Baptist National Centre

- *Intergenerational Christian Formation*—Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Ross
- *Faithfull Generation*—Children Matter
- *InterGenerate*—Holly Allen et al
- *Generations Together*—John Roberto et al
- *Shaped by God*—Robert Keeley et al

## SUGGESTED WEBSITES

- [baptistcfm.org.nz](http://baptistcfm.org.nz)
- [strandz.org.nz](http://strandz.org.nz)
- [intergenerate.com.au](http://intergenerate.com.au)
- [growministries.org.au](http://growministries.org.au)
- [intergenerationalfaith.com](http://intergenerationalfaith.com)
- [lifelongfaith.com/intergenerational-faith-formation](http://lifelongfaith.com/intergenerational-faith-formation)
- [messychurch.org.uk](http://messychurch.org.uk)





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