

Ten Ways

TO ENCOURAGE FAITH FORMATION IN THE "THIRD THIRD" OF LIFE



The psalmist declares that the Lord's people "bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green" (Ps. 92:14, ESV). What a beautiful biblical vision! "Old age" looks different today from the way it was in the psalmist's day. At that time, few people reached the age of 60. Today, though, 60 is considered the beginning of the "third third" of life, a season when new opportunities await. Church communities are called to find fresh ways to celebrate and encourage the gifts and service of people in the third third of life—fresh ways to embody the Psalm 92 vision.

1 REFRAME RETIREMENT AS A NEW CALLING

Retirement is an opportunity to reexamine one's callings and to explore fresh opportunities for kingdom service. Christian communities can encourage their older members to rediscover how the Lord is inviting them to serve through volunteer opportunities, cultivating new discipling relationships, or even embarking on a new career.

2 INVITE OLDER MEMBERS TO SHARE THEIR FAITH STORIES

The longer we live, the more ways we see the Lord's faithfulness carry us through good times and hard times. Stories of God's faithfulness bless people of all ages. Invite older members to participate in short interview-style conversations during a worship service, among small groups of teens, in catechism classes, and more. (For additional ideas, see the Faith Storytelling toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.)

3 PROVIDE FAITH LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIRD-THIRDERS

To follow Christ is to be a lifelong learner. One congregation introduces its seniors to new spiritual disciplines. In another, teens coach the older members in using social media. Yet another congregation offered an intergenerational astronomy course that was primarily attended by its older members, who loved interacting with the younger people who were present.

4 INCORPORATE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH

The four Building Blocks of Faith ("I belong to Jesus and his community"; "I know the biblical story and my place in it"; "I have hope"; "I am called and equipped to serve") provide guidelines for assessing how our church community ministers to and with all generations. Church leaders can use this tool for strategic planning, and small groups find it useful for discussion. (For more on this topic, see the Building Blocks of Faith toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.)

5 INVITE THIRD-THIRDERS TO SERVE AS "HOLY NOTICERS"

One youth pastor found her calling to ministry at age 15 when an 80-year-old woman told her, "I've noticed that children are drawn to you as if you were a magnet. I wonder what that means for you." Children, teens, and young adults need "holy noticers" in their lives! Sometimes sharing a brief observation can help someone discern God's calling.

6 CREATE FORUMS FOR THIRD-THIRDERS TO REFLECT ON THEIR CALLINGS

Lifelong faith formation is strengthened through reflection and conversation. Form small groups to discuss books like Walter Wright's *The Third Third of Life*. We need each other's wisdom, supplemented by conversation guides, in order to discern together how the Lord is inviting us to walk with him and bless others in the new seasons of our lives.

7 PLAN A SERMON SERIES ON BEING AN INTERGENERATIONAL CHURCH

"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). Infants, children, teens, young adults, the middle-aged, healthy seniors, and seniors whose strength is diminishing are all distinct parts of the body and yet one in Christ. Consider planning a sermon series to explore this wondrous reality, creating rich opportunities for cross-generational conversations afterward.

8 INTENTIONALLY LINK THIRD-THIRDERS WITH OTHER GENERATIONS

Research has revealed that (a) the two loneliest generations are young adults and seniors, and (b) these two generations love being together. There are so many ways to link older folks with younger generations. Invite middle school students to interview senior members about their faith journey. Form reciprocal mentoring relationships between young adults and seniors. Provide opportunities for them to engage in service opportunities together.

9 INTENTIONALLY CULTIVATE A "WALKING PACE" FOR CHURCH LIFE

Life often rushes by at 80 miles per hour, but God walks with us at our walking pace. Third-thirders can help us all navigate life at God's pace. John Swinton writes, "God's time is gentle time. . . . When we slow down and pay attention to the slowness of God's time, we encounter one another differently. . . ." (*Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*). Studies consistently tell us that folks of all ages have deep longings for richer relationships and meaningful conversations. Our "third-third" communities can lead the way as our congregations give them opportunities to do so.

10 HONOR THE THIRD THIRD IN WORSHIP SERVICES AND OTHER GATHERINGS

Invite older adults to offer prayers of blessing or words of encouragement at baptisms, weddings, professions of faith, and other significant moments in younger people's lives, such as graduations. Hold an annual celebration of milestones experienced by older members, such as a brief liturgical recognition of all who have retired in the past year or all who recently lost a spouse. Introduce a hymn by briefly noting the significance it has in the life of an older member.

Faith Formation Ministries encourages and equips local Christian Reformed ministry leaders in their calling to shape intentional, lifelong faith in their context. For more on faith formation in the third third of life, see our Intergenerational Church toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

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