

Ten Ways

TO BE A MORE INTERGENERATIONAL CHURCH



Age-segregated ministries such as Sunday school, youth group, and adult education hold strong places in our communities. But these separate groups are bound together in a larger community of all generations, and the stronger the whole is, the stronger each of the component parts will be.

Use these 10 ideas as a springboard for strengthening intergenerational learning, worship, and service in your unique context. For more ideas, see our Intergenerational Church toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

1. SHARE FAITH STORIES TOGETHER

Provide opportunities for people to share faith stories naturally with each other. For example, one church's Sunday worship includes a "psalm of the month," a three-minute moment in which a member reads a psalm and briefly describes the shaping effect it has had on his or her life. You can find dozens of other ideas for creating storytelling opportunities in our Faith Storytelling toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

2. PLAN WORSHIP WITH ALL GENERATIONS IN MIND

Worship happens within intergenerational community. Questions like these and others can help worship better include members of all ages: k In what ways does our preaching and liturgy reach out to both the 10-year-old and the 90-year-old? k How can we use the visual arts to complement and enhance the audible dimensions of worship? k In what ways can people of all ages help lead the congregation in worship? For more on this, see [10 Ways to Strengthen Intergenerational Worship](#) from Faith Formation Ministries.

3. HONOR FAITH IN ALL ITS VARIETY

One of the most common faith paralyzers is shame rooted in false comparisons. We ask ourselves, Why can't I pray like she does? or Why can't I serve like he does? But we can walk with God in ways that fit the way he has created us and the season of life we are in. As faith formation leaders in our communities, we can bless others by building capacity for this kind of glorious freedom.

4. CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

To encourage leadership development in young and old, intentionally do two things: (1) recognize character traits that provide a foundation for leadership, such as courage, integrity, and hope; and (2) help people to discern their Godgiven gifts and provide opportunities for those gifts to be developed and publicly exercised.

5. TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER

"What do you wish had been emphasized more in youth group?" The Fuller Youth Institute asked 500 high school seniors a question like this, and the number-one response was "More time for deep conversations." Consider offering guided small-group discussions, intergenerational prayer partnerships, cross-generational interview projects, and so on, to set the stage for deep conversations.

6. EXPLORE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH

Our Building Blocks of Faith toolkit (crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits) identifies four statements that should be true of people of all ages in your church:

- I belong
- I know and understand
- I have hope
- I am called and equipped

Our online toolkit offers tools to help you assess and strengthen the health of these building blocks in your church. For example, you may discover that church members ages 30-60 have a strong sense of belonging to the body, while those younger and older do not. An assessment like that can provide invaluable insight for understanding and developing the intergenerational character of your congregation.

7. MODEL AN INTERGENERATIONAL HEART

A group of 12-year-olds was asked what they liked best about their church, and one young man said, "My pastor knows my name!" Intergenerationality must be embodied within the church's leadership. As pastors, elders, deacons, and other leaders visibly interact with folks of all ages after worship services, take all ages into account in their decision-making processes, and cultivate a servant-like leadership heart, intergenerational ministry can flourish.

8. SERVE TOGETHER

At an open-invitation classis meeting on intergenerationality, people were asked to describe their favorite intergenerational experience. Two teens immediately raised their hands and described a weekend they spent with two 70-year-olds from their congregation on a disaster relief team working in a flood zone. "We'd seen these guys in church our entire lives," they said, "but we didn't know that they were such warm, loving, fun-to-be-with men." Service activities bring out the best in people, and working with one's hands helps conversation flow freely as you pour blessings into the community you are serving.

9. EXPERIMENT WISELY

Most steps you will take to strengthen intergenerationality will involve an experiment of some kind. Before you plan an intergenerational experiment, ask questions like these:

- Who will monitor the experiment and make adjustments as circumstances require?
- How will we discern what the Lord is teaching us when an experiment goes awry, and in what ways will we encourage one another to persevere?
- How will we communicate the progress of the experiment to the congregation in ways that are transparent and uplifting?

For coaching on planning successful intergenerational experiments, contact one of our Regional Connectors (crcna.org/FaithFormation/coaching).

10. APPOINT AN ADVOCATE

Ministry values that we hold dear require strong advocates. If we want to make intergenerationality a priority, we must delegate the authority and the support structure to help this priority shine. Who are the gifted advocates among you in this area (think about elders, members of a faith formation team, staff members). How can you equip and empower them?

This resource has been developed by Thrive. If you have questions or would like support in ministry, please email thrive@crcna.org.

