

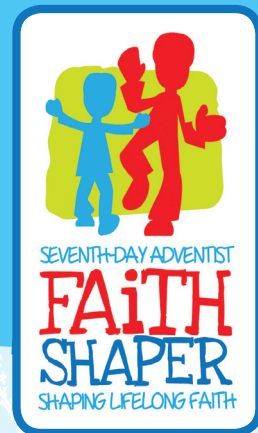
The faith shaper guide to

INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS & PARTICIPATION

Shaping Lifelong Faith Through: **Intergenerational Connections**
children.adventist.org.au/faith-shaper



7 Essential Faith Experiences



For Home,
Church and School

- S** Service and Mission
- H** Homes Empowered
- A** Authentic Relationships
- P** Participation
- I** Intergenerational Connections
- N** Noteworthy Memory Events
- G** God Encounters

children.adventist.org.au/faith-shaper

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18, NIV)



INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS & PARTICIPATION INTRODUCTION

Can the church be in worship to our God, if children are not present?

Welcome to a collection of articles on Intergenerational Connections and Participation. Research confirms that faith formation is strongest and most enduring when all ages in the church community work together to grow each other up into Christ. May you feel challenged, but also motivated to ensure that in your church, all generations feel valued, welcomed and included. The blessings to all generations is huge, but in particular, young people need the lifelong faith that develops because of intergenerational connections.

Enjoy

The Discipleship Ministry Team

South Pacific Division Seventh-day Adventist Church

"Frequent and regular cross-generational opportunities for worship, learning, outreach, service and fellowship offer distinctive spiritual benefits and blessings."

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross.

Intergenerational Christian Formation. p.47



INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS

WHAT'S BEING SAID

Compiled by Julie Weslake

"Intergenerational Christian settings are authentic, complex learning environments, made up of individuals at various ages in the faith journeys, teaching some and learning from others as they participate in their community of believers."

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross.

Intergenerational Christian Formation. p.118

"While many churches are multigenerational and seemingly healthy on the surface, in reality, the generations act like ships in the night that pass by one another but rarely have meaningful contact and interaction. This lack of significant communication and relations between generations must be addressed if churches are to thrive – not merely to survive – now and in the future."

Peter Menconi

Cited in Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross.

Intergenerational Christian Formation.p.19

"A church program can't spiritually form a child, but a family living in an intergenerational community of faith can."

Ivy Beckwith

Postmodern Children's Ministry. p.14

"Forming relationships with children is the responsibility of all members of the community, not just those who work with them in educational programs."

Ivy Beckwith

Postmodern Children's Ministry. p.66



ALL-AGE WORSHIP

WHY INCLUDING LITTLE ONES IS GOOD FOR THE BIG ONES TOO

Beth Barnett

I often find myself wondering, “How did we come to make this practice of gathering for worship so difficult?”

The Hebrew Bible records generations of family communities worshipping and ‘faith-ing’ together. The early followers of Jesus adapted this pattern in their new gospel communities as they spread around the Roman Empire. Their approach can be summarised in simple two-word catch phrases: **‘word and table’** or **‘food and faith’**. For most of history, even most cultures, it seemed that worship and faith seemed to be self-evidently and straightforwardly an all-ages activity.

How have we come to make a simple “all-in” feast of food and faith the exception, rather than the norm? Is this an advancement; a refining of religious practise as the result of some kind of “progress”, or have we lost something fundamental?

Out of Practice, out of Theology

In Protestant churches, we have gotten out of the habit and lost many of the basic skills of being together. We have also lost our theological and philosophical assumption that gathering together is healthy.

Many people respond to all-age worship with concerns that adults need different kinds of spiritual nurture from children, or that children enjoy going out of the worship space to their own ‘special’ programme. On one level I agree – children and adults do need different things in worship. Adults need to have children around them. They need humbling and connecting to sensory, emotional and symbolic elements. They need help with play and questions and

wholeheartedness.

Children need the companionship and supervision of adults, models and mentors, relationships and connectedness. Children need exposure to ideas that will stretch them and feed their curiosity. They need to hear adults talking about things they don't quite understand.

While we are at it, teenagers need to be given responsibility and room for their radicalism to stir the sediment of reality, to exercise their important calling in allowing their idealism and energy for change to make the middle-aged feel healthily uncomfortable.

The very old – what is it they need? Sometimes it is able bodied assistance, but more deeply it is to see that the young are taking the torch and carrying on what the very old have spent a lifetime championing. Some need a new supply of travelling companions for the last lap of life, as many of their long-term friends have already gone before them. They need allies in a changing world of technology.

Contributors or Consumers

More than just having different needs, different generations bring different contributions which meet a diversity of needs in one another, far more effectively than in homogeneous groups of consumers.

This is where fruitfulness in all-age worship can be found: rather than exploring how we can endure or consume the worship experiences, we explore how together, using all our various contributions, we can construct it.

“We have let division become our default setting, rather than unity.”

Changing the Script

- “We are going to open the Bible and listen for God together”.
- “This is a time for nourishing, encouraging, serving and challenging one-another – to ensure we all are blessed and all are a blessing to one another.”
- “This is a community of faith. We will share –no one goes without.”

Establishing a New “Ordinary” – UNSENSATIONAL

The large-scale, super-sensational family worship events of the past need to be shelved. Multisensory, multiple intelligence, multi-modal, multi-vocal gatherings don't have to be complicated, huge extravaganzas. Think of the iconic pot-luck supper. Everyone brings what they

can. There is plenty. It's a little quirky, but we learn about each other's culture and ways of doing life. Remember for Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, James and Philip, church was faith and food, word and table.

Alongside-ing and Modelling.

Against the prevailing culture of standoffishness, let's not leave parents to flounder, feeling vulnerable and judged. We can raise our children as a community, without disempowering parents, by planning and preparing spaces that are hospitable, advocating and inviting diversity in participation, and reminding everyone present that everything that occurs, from the loud sneeze to the pacing father settling the baby up and down the aisle, is the beautiful work of the people.

Our role is not abandoning one another. The work of all-age worship is in strategically connecting people, engineering interaction and ensuring alongside-ing. We need to articulate what this means. Whatever is modelled in leading will strongly shape the culture. The facilitator who stands at the front of the congregation and tells them to talk to the person next to them, or engage in an activity with a few nearby, and then stands back to watch, will be very disappointed by the result.

Less and More

- Less practicing of songs
- Less drama scripts
- Less asking people to stand up front and do things
- More identifying confident friend makers
- More inviters to lead from the middle

The future of all-age worship gathers us into this ancient-new model of mutual stewardship, whoever we are in the story of faith . . . all will minister to one another with their words and actions and emotions and presence under the great grace of God.

Summarised from 2014 December Premier Children's work www.premierchildrenswork.com

About the Author Beth Barnett

Beth is a child theology author and children's and families ministry resource writer. She is currently working on a Doctoral thesis in New Testament studies, examining Paul's use of childhood terms in relation to the constructs of spiritual maturity.



INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP TIPS

FOR PASTORS

Julie Weslake

Tips for Pastors:

- Welcome and show respect to children of all ages.
- Model love and care to children as part of the worshipping community.
- Take the needs of children and their families into consideration when you prepare your worship and sermon.
- Children learn through their senses, so plan to use as many senses as possible – seeing, hearing, moving, touching, tasting.

“Tell me and I’ll forget, Show me and I may remember, Involve me and I’ll understand.”

- Rethink the value of the cognitive, word laden long sermon. Make it relevant by giving age appropriate examples throughout..
- Ensure the sermon has a strong everyday application.
- Welcome the children and ensure that they feel you care about them.
- Invite children to use their gifts. Involve them and their families in the worship:
 - To be worship leaders
 - To give the welcome
 - To pray
 - To sing
 - To play an instruments
 - To give scripture readings
 - To collect the offering
 - To help with an object lesson
 - To dramatize a sermon illustration
 - To tell stories
 - To share experiences
 - To give testimonies
 - To produce artwork for sermon illustrations
 - To preach
 - Include children in altar calls
 - To be sound, data projector and IT helpers

- Consider the time of your worship. Sometimes swapping Sabbath School and church is more suitable for families.
- Make worship bags for the young children to take into church. Use: Puzzles, Felts, pictures, Pencils, Paper, Books, Plastic animals, Stickers, Colouring pictures
- Make children's bulletins and activity pages based on the sermon for the older children.
- Give the children a simple word list with pictures and definitions. Encourage them to listen for the words during the sermon.
- Provide children with Bibles and encourage them to look up scripture.
- Encourage parents to help children participate in singing, prayer and offering.
- Organise parent partners who will sit in church with a young family to help them.
- Provide attractive places in your church for feeding babies and changing nappies.
- Provide booster seats for toddlers so that they can see above the people in front of them.
- Celebrate children's milestones as church family events and invite family and children's participation in these special events.
 - Baby dedication
 - Starting school
 - Making a commitment to Jesus
 - Baptism
 - Starting High School
 - Leaving School
- Organise family friendly programs for special days such as :
 - Mother's day, father's day, spring festival, easter, Christmas
- Prepare older children for the understanding of, and participation in, the communion service. Where possible organise a family service where children and parents can remember Jesus sacrifice together, and grow spiritually as a family.
- Prepare "Takeaway" questions for families to discuss at home as follow up from the sermon and put these in the church bulletin.
 - What was the key point of the sermon?
 - Why do you think he preached on this topic?
 - What is one lesson that you learned?
 - What difference is this going to make in your life?
- Visit children and their family at home to build relationships and trust.

"Jesus intended for us to bring children into this celebration. Being a part of the community of faith is the basis of us being able to live a Christian life, and children are a part of the community."

Myra Arnold



INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP TIPS

FOR FAMILIES

Julie Weslake

Be Prepared:

- Understand that you do not just go to church but that you go to worship God. Yes, you can worship with children and teach them to worship with you.
- Look forward to going to church because your children will pick up your attitude.
- Talk about Sabbath and church throughout the week.
- Play pretend church at home. Let your young child be the preacher or song leader.
- Have regular family worship and prayer at home.
- Sing church songs at family worship and throughout the day at home.
- Prepare for Sabbath on Friday, making sure that children's clothes are organised and offering money has been set aside.
- Begin Sabbath on Friday night with a special dinner. Set the table differently, and light candles. A candle could be lit for each family member. Have a special welcome Sabbath prayer.
- On Friday night play some Christian board games and have a longer more interactive family worship.
- Organise that your children wake up on Sabbath morning to the sound of Sabbath music playing.
- Have a special but simple breakfast that includes food not normally eaten during the week.
- Talk about the things that you are looking forward to doing and people you are looking forward to seeing at church.
- Pray for God's blessing on His special day.
- Talk through behaviour expectations.

Church With Younger Children:

- Make them feel like they are an important part of the church community.
- Ensure that your child gets welcomed at the door.
- Encourage your child to be involved in the service.
 - Holding the Bible and or hymn book
 - Looking up scripture verses
 - Putting money in the offering bag
 - Participating in the children's story by going up to the front
 - kneeling for prayer
 - Participating in the singing
- As a family sit near to the front of the church so that your child can see what is happening.
- Talk quietly to your child if they need help understanding what is being said.
- Be realistic. No young child will sit quietly for an hour.
 - Bring quiet time activities, puzzles and books for them to look at.
 - Have a notebook for them and encourage them to illustrate the sermon or record how many times the preacher has said a chosen word
 - Keep activities in a special bag (or backpack) that is used only for church
 - Include a small snack if needed
- Sit with an older person who is prepared to help you with your children.

Church With Older Children:

- Older children should be encouraged to participate and listen in church.
- Encourage your children to sit with you.
- Church bulletins and worksheets based on the sermon topic can help them keep focused.
- Provide your older child a notebook for recording sermon notes and keeping a sermon journal. Use it as a communication tool by writing your comments and questions on it too.
- Support your children as they use their gifts to minister to the congregation. They can give the welcome, pray, sing, play instruments, read scripture, collect the offering, help with story- telling, object lessons and dramas, share experiences and give testimonies, preach sermonettes, be sound technicians and operate data projectors.

Take Home:

- Talk to your child after church and ask questions about what was taught. Discuss how as a family you will apply what was taught in the sermon.
- Follow through by sharing the message with someone else and serving as a family in your

- Make the Sabbath day special by inviting your children's friends on a picnic or home for lunch.
- Invite the pastor to visit your home, so that your children can build a friendship with him/her.
- Invite your friends and their children to come with you next week.

"Sure they squirm, giggle, talk, and wiggle, but including children in the worship service is worth the distraction."

Michelle Leise

"The church is the body of Christ, the presence of the kingdom of God in the world. What a privilege to invite our friends and their children to worship the King!"

Robbie Castleman , Parenting in the Pew

"One of the simplest and most profound ways to nurture a child's soul is to make room in the pew. The starting place for helping children to worship consciously and joyously is to just bring them along . . . children experience a sense of belong-ing that no curriculum can replicate."

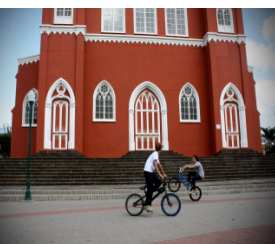
Timothy Jones

"In many churches the young belong only to their peer group, and when they graduate from youth group, they graduate from the church. With their peers they go off... Leaving behind the congregation to which they never belonged."

Scottie May, et al., Children Matter

"To be Christian in the full, robust, Biblical sense of the word, we cannot go it alone. We must participate in the life of the church: we must become members of a concrete community of faith."

Richard Rice, Believing, Behaving, Belonging



BECOMING INTERGENERATIONAL - MODELS & STRATEGIES

John Roberto

Every church can become “Intentionally intergenerational” – making intergenerational a priority and a defining feature of community life, ministries and programming.

- Foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, story telling
- Incorporate all generations in worship
- Service projects that involve all ages
- All generations learning together

Benefits and Blessings

- Reclaims God’s intent for faith to be shared in Community and across generations
- Affirms each person’s value in the total community (regardless of age)
- Fosters a foundation of support of each other’s concerns, interests and activities
- Provides “up close and personal” faith formation as children, teens young adults, middle aged adults, and older adults engage in sharing faith, teaching, learning and praying for one another.
- Teaches us to care for one another
- Provides role models for children and youth
- Teaches us to value older people
- Allows us to pass on the traditions of family and faith
- Enhances people’s identification with their congregations and integration within the community
- Encourages faith in all generations
- Creates special relationships between adults and youth
- Fosters leadership regardless of age or stature

- Utilizes the strengths (the wisdom, experience, and knowledge) of one generation to meet the needs of another generation.
- Promotes understanding of shared values and respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life
- Utilizes the creative talents of younger and older generations to provide service to the church and community
- Overcomes the age-segregated nature of our society, taking a pro-active, counter cultural stance in the face of the countless ways society pigeon holes into age-specific groups.

Where to Begin?

Focus on Community Life

- Examine ALL church activities to determine if they are welcoming to everyone
- Explore how present activities can build relationships across generations
- Build community by intentionally introducing people to help people to get to know each other
- Have one generation providing hospitality for another generation
- Have the whole community praying for all generations
- Offer simple opportunities for all ages to get to know each other and to get all generations to plan and participate in these events.
- Encourage adults of all ages to share their faith journey, beliefs and values with young people.
- Link people of different generations in the church who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful. e.g. younger people helping older people with internet; Older people helping younger people with money management.
- Urge all adults in the church to form meaningful relationships with young people in all areas of their life.

Infuse Intergenerational Relationship Building and Programming into Existing Programs and Activities.

- Redesign programs to include other generations.
- Develop mentoring relationships across generations in activities such as prayer and service.

Incorporate All Generations into Ministries and Leadership Roles

- Break down “adult only” mentality by identifying specific roles for younger generations.
- ‘Intergenerationalise” Church committees.

- Organise ministry apprenticeships.
- Create new leadership roles to suit younger generations.

Create New Models of Intergenerational Programming

- Intergenerational social events
- Intergenerational mentoring
- Intergenerational storytelling
- Intergenerational service
- Intergenerational Learning

Summarised from article in Lifelong Faith – Spring 2009

About the Author

John Roberto is the editor of Lifelong Faith and founder of LifelongFaith Associates. He is an author, teacher and trainer, and consultant in lifelong faith formation.



JESUS PROPHETIC REACH: DRAWING CHILDREN TO THE CENTRE OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Tim Coltvet

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.

When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour. (Luke 2:41–52)

Jesus broke with the expectations of his day by inviting children into his ministry and mission—indeed, into the kingdom of God. Churches today must do the same, celebrating and including children rather than relegating them to

the fringes of their worship.

God's Prophetic Reach in Luke: Stories of Being Lost and Found

Luke's overarching theme of "lost and found" (prodigal son, lost coin, lost sheep) makes it fitting that the boy Jesus should lead the twenty first century reader in reflecting on the place and state of today's children and youth and the opportunity for the church to draw them into the mission of God.

"So, how are the children?" the rhetorical bumper sticker reads. If we watch the evening news, our daily paper, and blogs, we may come to this conclusion:

Not so well " Childhood is by nature a vulnerable time of physical, mental, and emotional development. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that children continue to suffer at the hands of more powerful and often unreliable adults.

Stories of kids and guns, child labor, and sex trafficking continue to baffle us as we read the daily headlines. **We mourn the fact that "lost" is an understatement for the lives of millions of children on this planet,** those born into situations of hunger and oppression, lack of proper care, and scenarios of negligence. In developed countries such as North America, where kids appear to be faring well (or at least better), we see children and youth being lost in their own way: lost in the shuffle of busy schedules and the constant press of time; lost in the digital emergence, an avalanche of information that is sometimes a gift and sometimes a liability;¹ lost to their tired and worn-out parent(s), who may be facing some of the greatest economic challenges of their lifetime, and trying to find quality time with their kids in the meanwhile. In this essay I invite readers to allow the "prophetic reach" of this twelve year old boy to draw them into a larger story that reclaims the place and state of children and youth in the life of the congregation and, more broadly, in the reign and kingdom of God.

Jesus Gets "Lost"

In the well known story of Jesus in the temple, we see one of the last glimpses into the life of Jesus the boy, who would one day be recognized as the crucified and risen Son of God. On the one hand, it is a text that terrifies us as parents. Who of us has not temporarily lost a child at the supermarket, or perhaps have been the lost child ourselves once upon a time? It is also a story that brings a sigh of relief and an emphatic "Of course " when Jesus is spotted at the temple, listening to, questioning, and teaching matters of faith with the religious teachers of the day. As we engage this text in today's context, I would like to offer some key markers or questions to help us see the urgency and need to think critically about drawing young

people, particularly children and youth, into the center of our worship gatherings—not only as recipients of godly teaching but also as teachers themselves and stewards of God’s grace and mercy: equal partners and servants in the *missio dei*.

Jesus is “Found”

Of course Jesus is at the center of the temple. In one of the earliest moments foreshadowing his impending glory, we find young Jesus holding court with the religious teachers of the day. Somehow, in his divine orientation, he is not lost, but rather found, **found where he “must” be, in his Father’s house**. He is so much at home, in fact, that he (Jesus) seems to have lost track of his parents with no apparent concern for where they are

I recently stumbled upon an old video production of this biblical account shown on a religious television network. Done in the genre and era of Charlton Heston’s *Ten Commandments*, Joseph and Mary are costumed for the part and clearly navigating their way around Hollywood like sets of ancient Jerusalem. The video goes to great lengths to build a plotline around Joseph and Mary’s tireless search for the young Jesus.

Taking dramatic license was no problem for this video production crew as they embellished the story line of Mary and Joseph’s search by following them through the streets of Jerusalem. They hear a rumor of his being seen with another young boy near the temple, whom Jesus is apparently teaching and with whom he is staying. But when Mary and Joseph arrive at the house, they come up empty handed. The final blow comes when Joseph and Mary are apprehended by two Roman guards late at night who charge them with breaking curfew. Pleading before the Roman authorities, they are pardoned with a slap on the wrist while being reminded that there are “kid snatchers” out there (clearly appealing to modern day parenting guilt). Finally, they are compelled to check the temple, and they are greeted by a man who assures them that Jesus can be found inside.

Now, do you remember reading these two large embellishments of the text? I don’t either. This television episode, like so many other productions, tried to do what the text does not do—add details to an already interesting account. The text tells us only that Jesus’ response to his parents when they did find him is “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49–50). This simple question marks Jesus’ first recorded words recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The verse is foundational as it relates to the incarnation story from verses prior and gives an indication of Jesus’ future all in the form of a question—a question that will point us to deeper meaning and truth.

Of course, Jesus is at the center of the room He is the Son of God, we think to ourselves. And moreover, he is a Jewish boy. Boys like Jesus were likely socialized in their early years by a mentoring and apprenticing culture that would instruct them in the Torah and verse them in the cadences and rhythms of faith. The temple, therefore, was likely Jesus' home away from home. More, Jesus speaks of this place as central to his identity and his very constitution as a human being. God made flesh was at home.

Children and Youth in the Center of Our Congregations: Will We Welcome Them?

Kendra Creasy Dean thoughtfully draws on Anna Carter Florence, who reminds us of yet another gathering of religious adults with a young person. Only in this story, the young person is not in the center of the room but is **sitting rather far off in the back window**. In Acts 20:7–13, we hear of the young man named Eutychus, who falls asleep during the Apostle Paul's sermon and falls three stories to his death (eventually, Paul has a hand in reviving him).

Florence calls this a "text of terror." The terror is not so much Paul's preaching methods, but more so the relegation of Eutychus to the back of the room. As Dean expounds on this text for our modern day context, she aptly points out that far too many congregations have done this today in a figurative way, that is, relegating children and youth to the fringes of our worship life. When we start asking questions like, **"Where are the youth?" it is far too late.**

As an illustration of this disturbing reality, Luther Seminary Professor Roland Martinson frequently shares a parable entitled **"Peter and Penny Go Swimming."** In this parable, Peter and Penny are regularly taken by their parents, both enthusiastic swimmers, to the swimming pool in hopes they too will take to swimming. Early on, the young children are consigned to a little room beside the pool, because they might cry and "disturb the adult swimmers." Besides, they are "too young to understand." By age three, they are told stories about swimming and color pictures of people swimming. Eventually, they are allowed to splash around in the wading pool and take classes to learn more about swimming.

The story continues,

*By the time Penny and Peter were thirteen, they had studied the Swimmer's Manual in even more detail and had learned the rules of the swimming pool off by heart... They had studied great swimmers of the past, including Olympic medal winners. They had heard about Canadian swimmers who went to other countries such as Africa or India to teach swimming, and they had seen slides of groups of African or Indian swimmers standing beside their swimming pools... At last Penny and Peter finished swimming school and were allowed to accompany their parents into the swimming pool every week. They tried it a few times. **Much to the disappointment of***

*their parents, Peter and Penny had lost interest and preferred to watch television instead.*³

Sitting on the fringes, being a spectator at best, Eutychus becomes what many of our modern day congregants are now seeing as “Peters” and “Pennys.” While in kiddie pools, wave pools, and splashing in the shallow waters, sadly Peter and Penny never realized the rush of plunging into the deep, churning waters, holding the deeper wonder and mysteries of God. None of the rich and robust questions of faith will be asked by Peter, Penny, or Eutychus as they have been socialized to the margins of congregational life. And so, with this in mind, we make a shift now, from the twelve year old boy standing at the center of the temple to the God made flesh on the move far beyond the temple walls. Fueled by the *missio dei*, we now see our first glimpses of Jesus’ prophetic reach for children and youth.

Jesus’ Prophetic Reach

Later in Luke, Jesus expresses prophetic words about children through a kairoic teaching moment that beckons children forward, not to the center of the temple this time, but even more expansively to the center of God’s kingdom. Eutychus, Peter, and Penny would have a much different experience in the church that is envisioned here:

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”
(18:15–17)

This pronouncement alone should be a wake up call to us as stewards of public worship gatherings that usher in the radical hospitality of “God with us.” As we reflect on Jesus’ prophetic reach to include children in a world that was radically inhospitable towards them, we are urged to think about the congregational climate or environments we create. A good start might be to listen closely to the practices of others in our midst. Consider, for example, the efforts of Edina Community Lutheran Church in Edina, Minnesota. Pastors Eric Strand and Pam Fickenschier have made great strides in their worship gatherings by ensuring all children that they are more than welcome to wiggle and squirm in their pews on Sunday morning.

In their pew racks is a message for young families that serves also as a reminder to all adults that we take part in Jesus’ radical welcoming of the youngest among us by acknowledging their presence and encouraging their participation. The card reads:

ABC's for Adults Worshipping with (and near) Children

- A. Arrive in time to find a good place to sit. Children are short and appreciate being able to see. We encourage you to sit up front or near the musicians to allow this.
- B. Bring something quiet to occupy them in restless moments. "Busy" bags and books are available for children in the narthex.
- C. Calm them with hugs, sitting in your lap, and backrubs.
- D. Demonstrate how to sing familiar refrains, fold hands in prayer, stand for the gospel and prayers, and recite familiar parts of the service, such as the Lord's Prayer.
- E. Express joy at having children worship with you. Smile at them and their parents. Dance with them when the music is lively.
- F. Free yourself of the expectation to be perfect. None of us would be here if we were
- G. Give your child something to put in the offering, and encourage them to give from their own funds as they grow older.
- H. Help parents of small children.
- I. Invite children to sit with you so that you may assist with bottles, dropped toys, and teaching kids how to worship. If you have trouble hearing or concentrating because children near you are noisy, feel free to move to a quieter area.

The Children's Sermon—Welcome to the Center of the Room

"Sermon on the Steps" or "Spark Moment" or "Children's Sermon"—whatever you want to call it, it is one thing to gather the children up front as a comedic break or to be "cute," and it is quite another to gather children up front with an authentic, sometimes playful, sometimes serious message of proclamation and peace that is well prepared for their hearing. By "well prepared," I mean hours of reflection, not minutes before worship begins.

Preachers are sometimes advised to spend about an hour of study and writing for every minute preached or to ask the convicting question, "Did Jesus need to die in order for me to preach this message?" The preacher's task is never taken lightly and neither should be the preparation for the children's sermon.

For years, I have been a strong proponent of children's sermons in the context of cross generational worship, and I continue to be. Granted, I have cringed along with the rest of you when a children's sermon collapses into convenient little moralistic takeaways or messages that simply don't reflect the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

I once brought a busload of high school students to a church en route to a mission experience in western Montana. Along the way, we worshiped in a church where the church president

was leading a children's sermon and highlighting the power of sin in our lives. In a very unprepared and naïve manner, he invited kids to raise their hands if they had sinned that past week and invited them to share. Even our high school kids began sinking in their seats as they felt the weight of the world resting on the children up front. Sadly, it was an elder child in the group who was called out and highlighted as the example. Not even ready with caring and compassionate words such as, "Jimmy, the good news today is that God wipes the slate clean and loves you and forgives you," the leader let the didactic moment fall apart. As a last ditch attempt at communicating the gospel authentically, several of our teens sought out the boy after worship, affirming him and reminding him that God loves him. Later on, as our journey continued, the teens discussed how the boy was "set up" during the children's sermon, noting that, in their opinions, the experience was not reflective of Jesus' ministry and mission.

My own seminary homiletics professors once squared off on children's sermons in a Word & World Face to Face column. Michael Rogness gave a short and succinct argument in support of such sermons. He briefly highlighted the following points:

1. They give children a "place" in the worship service.
2. They are a different kind of communication which does work with children.
3. In their different form, they also communicate to the whole congregation.

Although the late Professor Sheldon Tostengard raised a word of caution with regard to diving into children's sermons too hastily (with possible ulterior motives of adding the "cute" factor), he also asserted that we should reclaim the art of telling Bible stories during the time allocated as "Children's Sermon." This sounds quite refreshing and appropriate for an increasingly biblically illiterate culture in 2013:

A Bible story well told could be a fine, if occasional, addition to our worship services.

The trick is to tell the Bible story well, with brevity, clarity, and the right addition of meaningless detail. Some have gifts for that kind of telling, and some do not; but even if it is not the pastor, someone in the congregation can surely tell such stories with energy and verve.⁵

In keeping with Tostengard's suggestion, Mount Calvary Lutheran in Excelsior, Minnesota, believes that telling Bible stories is the best curriculum for any children's sermon in worship. Not only does it serve the children well, it also is an introduction for adults who may have distanced themselves from the practice of knowing and rehearsing the biblical story—or

perhaps they have never have been exposed to biblical stories in the first place.

Our worship needs the presence of children—not because the church is aging or dwindling or losing its gusto, and not because the children are our only hope for survival. **Rather, we need children in worship because that shows that we are following the prophetic reach of Jesus Christ.** When we view Jesus' life and ministry, his signal to us regarding children and youth is to include them, to celebrate them, and to draw them into the center of the room.

The alternative will undoubtedly become a self-fulfilling prophecy of gloom and doom—Eutychuses, Peters, and Pennys who ultimately find their way to the fringes and sadly fall away from the church. With the *missio dei* as our guide, we are called to embody the radical hospitality of Jesus, inviting children and youth to the center of our life together in our preaching, our teaching, our serving, and our very being as a cross generational church. The late Peter Benson of Search Institute once stated that the church is one of the few institutions in society where up to five generations of people are encouraged to gather together under one roof. This statement alone will cause any church—large or small, rural or suburban, house church or cathedral—to recognize the contextual beauty of two or three gathering in Christ's name.

We gather as church with these “lost and found” Lukan narratives in mind: Jesus, the boy, mingling with teachers and mentors of the day in a temple that welcomes youthful presence, questions, and insights. And Jesus, the man on a mission, breaking down barriers between young and old. Faithful to these stories, we can extend Jesus' prophetic reach - for Eutychus, for Peter, for Penny, for your children and mine.

End Notes

1. A 2010 survey found that 8–18 year olds spend 7 hours and 38 minutes per day or 53 hours per week using entertainment media , according to Drew Altman, President and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation. He states, “When children are spending this much time doing anything, we need to understand how it’s affecting them—for good and bad.” See “Daily Media Use Among Children and Teens Up Dramatically From Five Years Ago,” Kaiser Family Foundation, at <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia012010nr.cfm> (accessed April 21, 2013).
2. Anna Carter Florence presents a compelling argument for how and why our current congregational life suffers from the marginalizing of children and youth in corporate worship. Florence says, “We have separated preaching and youth, both literally and figuratively, in the church and in the academy. We have separated them into distinct

ministries, and then we have not talked about it, so that our silence perpetuates the problem and maintains a mute, marginal caste of Christians in our own churches." See *OMG: A Youth Ministry Handbook*, ed. Kendra Creasy Dean (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010) 44–47.

3. Janet Metcalfe, "Peter and Penny Go Swimming," *Presbyterian Record*, vol. 122 (May 1998). For the full text of the parable, see <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Peter+and+Penny+go+swimming%3A+a+parable.@a030178746> (accessed May 21, 2013).
4. Michael Rogness, "Children's Sermons? Yes " *Word & World* 10/1 (1990) 57.
5. Sheldon Tostengard, "Children's Sermons? No " *Word & World* 10/1 (1990) 58.

This article originally appeared in *Word & World*, Volume 33, Number 3, Summer 2013. It is reprinted with permission of *Word & World* journal, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. Lifelong "Faith" Winter 2013 25"

About the Author

Tim Coltvet is the Coordinator of Contextual Learning and Coaching for the Children, Youth, and Family Ministry Master's degree at Luther Seminary and an adjunct instructor in Luther Seminary's MA Program in Children, Youth, and Family. He is a pastor who loves his call to walk alongside students as they are learning in context. He has served at two vibrant ELCA parishes in the Twin Cities and currently enjoys helping congregations shape their Children, Youth, and Family Ministries.



WE'RE MORE THAN FRIENDS, WE'RE FAMILY

Debbie Streicher

From my own experience and the many years of trial and error in planning effective programs for faith formation, I have discovered care and nurture is the essential first step in our ministries. Caring begins with hospitality and opening our doors to all ages by connecting through conversation. The value of an honest, caring conversation cannot be underestimated. Often times we can attend church week after week and sit in the same place, surrounded by the same people, and still not know very much about the person sitting next to us.

How can we build and support others beyond our own walls if we do not take the time to nurture and care for one another? Opportunities for getting to know one another should be a priority. Caring conversations are followed by caring actions.

Recently I met with church leaders representing Latino congregations. Our goal was to design a plan for equipping leaders in the congregation with tools to encourage and Support faith formation. As we were talking, the topic of family came up as defining where to start. It was mentioned that an emphasis on faith in the home would be a good place to begin. A conversation many of us have heard time and time again in the context of church about careful use of words and using the word Family followed. Our understanding of family in English is Mom, Dad, and the children under one roof. Extended family is also included in this description. Often times when we talk about family ministry in the congregation, we need to be clear that it is more than immediate family. We use words like household to better describe who family is, but our desire in the setting of the church is to envision all ages under our roof as family.

In today's world the family living in each household has a different look. Defining family as simply, "Mom, Dad, and the kids" is less and less the norm.

It's like we're walking on eggshells when it comes to defining family in the context of the congregation. We provide resources and materials to encourage all different ages to grow in their faith and we seek to connect generations under the umbrella of cross--generational ministry. We often include family ministry in the title for leaders in the congregation. We struggle to Help people understand that when we say family, it includes everyone and all ages.

In Spanish, the word familia, meaning family, encompasses much more than the immediate family. Using the word familia means all ages, includes the extended family, and beyond. As our group continued processing the importance of words when naming programs in the church, the word familia was one that clearly is understood in the Spanish--speaking congregation as those under this roof and is a given when describing brothers and sisters in Christ. I like using the word familia especially in the context of the church. The more we care for one another, the closer we grow to becoming familia under one roof. Familia can face the world together. Familia can go in to the world together because they have a place to return to where caring happens. Allowing time for caring conversations turns relationships in to caring ones.

Family originally comes from the Latin word familia. As I searched online for definitions of family, I found one of the meanings relevant, from my perspective, to how we do ministry in the congregation:

One of the primary functions of the family is to produce and reproduce persons, biologically and/or socially. This can occur through the sharing of material substances (such as food); the giving and receiving of care and nurture.

I'd like to change the definition to redefining family in the context of the church as:

One of the primary functions of the church family is to produce and reproduce persons, spiritually. This can occur through the sharing of conversation, scripture, and prayer (also food); the giving and receiving of care and nurture to one another results in caring relationships so that we may serve our neighbours.

What would it look like if we envisioned our primary function in the faith community to produce and reproduce spiritually? Sounds like making disciples to me. This could surely occur through the sharing of food, conversation, and prayer. The end result would be the giving and receiving of care and nurture. What better way to build caring relationships? Something to consider: Until we take the time to initiate conversations with one another and begin to care for the "familia" we have in our own congregations, the likelihood of us serving others beyond our walls is less.

Suggested Steps to Grow Caring Relationships in the Congregation

Provide Opportunities for Conversation to Happen.

Assuming that people will talk with one another does not guarantee growing relationships. Guided questions about our lives help us get to know one another more deeply. And when push comes to shove in our lives, unless someone really knows us, we cannot expect them to be there when we need them. Many actions are misunderstood for lack of knowing a person.

Be Intentional.

We can plan and implement program after program. People come and people go. But until we become more intentional about growing our families through providing first steps beginning with getting to know one another, the end result cannot be building caring relationships. Intentional means we do it on purpose and deliberately. We can't just ask nicely, do it once, and expect results. It is in the hands of the leaders to be intentional and provide a setting where caring conversations can take place. The eldest do not know the youngest in many settings because of lack of opportunity. If need be, provide child care for the very youngest so that parents and siblings can participate.

Initiate Conversations in Small Group Settings.

The likelihood of all ages and all personalities feeling comfortable and wanting to talk happens in small group settings, not large ones. Most likely there are existing small groups already meeting in your setting. What happens when they meet? Does every small group that meets begin with building caring relationships as a priority? Each time the small group meets there should be an opportunity for all to speak.

Start Simple.

If there are existing groups, ask each group to take some time before they begin to talk with one another about something that happened in their lives in the past week. Rarely do people think to do this. It is not wasted time. It is important time. If you are establishing new small groups, begin with coffee and dessert and meet in a home or comfortable setting. Make the priority getting to know one another and then support when and where this group would like to meet next. Help them grow relationships. Bible study may sound difficult to some but coffee and conversation is simple and a beginning.

1. Identify Facilitators.

When forming small groups or even in existing ones, it is important to identify someone who can keep the conversation flowing and facilitate the conversations. Gathering facilitators and helping them understand the importance of each person having a voice is

very helpful. Also knowing the goal for those asked to be facilitators is to create a caring environment can help them be at ease. You are not asking them to teach or know any specific material. Simply ask them to be there and be present. It is a good idea to decide how to address needs or concerns that may surface in advance in a group and also know that there is a time and a place for the very lowest of lows in one's life. Make sure you have a plan for those who may have special needs.

2. Role model for Facilitators.

When beginning to form groups, it is important to role model a simple setting and help facilitators understand their role is to listen and encourage everyone to talk. A simple structure is best, move from caring conversations about their week to prayer concerns and a closing prayer. Sometimes we get so caught up in wanting to disperse information that we lose sight of our goal to create a caring relationship. The best way to get facilitators on board is to role model.

3. Identify Relevant Topics Related to Scripture.

A first step after initial conversation is to choose a Scripture verse. Perhaps one that was recently read during worship. Take simple steps to ask what word jumps out at them and then reflect on this word. Help the small group to understand this process is something we call application. In other words, it relates to our lives. Often times, we do not take the time to take simpler steps in approaching Scripture. Helping people take small steps to see the relevance in their own lives deepens relationships too.

4. Serve Food and Beverages.

I always point back to the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Chart to remind us that in our role as leaders, we cannot expect that people are fed and come ready to listen and participate. The Chart indicates that one of our most basic needs is food and water. Providing this basic need in today's busy world when one carves out time to join us after work/school or in between family obligations with school and sports can be much appreciated and adds to the way we build caring relationships.

5. Turn Phones on Silent.

Name this time as something special. Both children and adults will thirst to return to a place where someone listens and someone cares. In today's world with social media and communications happening online, face to face talk is rare. The goal for your time together is to "be" together.

6. Follow Up.

If you begin the process of consciously viewing caring relationships as your goal in

existing small groups or begin new small groups, it is important to be accountable. Checking in with facilitators is important and providing a guideline for how many times groups will meet and some type of evaluation of what has been working or not working can be the defining point in the success of each group. Adjust accordingly. Without follow up, the tracking of growing, caring relationships can be difficult and assumptions that all is well and working may not be accurate.

As faith communities, we all struggle to provide cross--generational opportunities as an integral part of our faith formation programs. Recently, I have encountered numerous conversations about connecting all ages in the setting of our faith communities on websites, in emails, and on Facebook pages. It is a hot topic. Immediate and extended families need support, nurture, and care. There is a true need for empty nesters, singles, and seniors to home together as part of the family to serve as mentors and build relationships. Together we can help support all the generations meeting under one roof.

The reality: The congregation/faith community is the last place we have today where we actually have all the ages coming together as a family under one roof.

In one phone conversation I had with a director of Family Faith Formation, I heard her passion for creating opportunities for all ages to meet together in a cross--generational setting. I also heard disappointment when she began to describe her desire for a better understanding of family in the context of the church. She said, **“At church we should be more than friends, we should be family.”** She expressed the need for the older generations to be faith mentors for parents and children. When we are talking family, we cannot dismiss the fact that it includes all ages.

I began to think about what was said and realized the difference between family and friends is that friends are most likely to be same ages and have common interests. It's good to have friends who are like--minded and with whom we can share activities. There is a time and a place for friends to meet. But where in society do we provide places for families to meet?

Families have a variety of shapes and looks. Ages vary and even though interests are not the same, they continue to live together and love one another through thick and thin. How does one use the word family as an open invitation for all ages? It is indeed a challenge.

I like the idea of having a place to go to be with family, especially in today's transient world. Let's begin to take steps to build caring relationships where we meet and invite one another to be family. **After all, we should be more than friends. We are family!**

(Vibrant Faith Ministries, Faith Formation Learning Exchange.net)

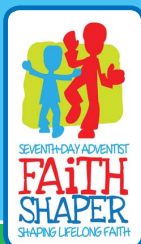


KEY REFERENCES

- Beckwith, Ivy, *Postmodern Children's Ministry*, Zondervan, 2004.
- Beckwith, Ivy, *Formational Children's Ministry*, Baker, 2010.
- Benson, Peter L. and Carolyn H. Eklin. *Effective Christian Education: A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty, and Congregational Life*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990.
- Bowdon, Boyce, *The Child – Friendly Church*, Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Brown, Carolyn, *You Can Preach To the Kids Too!* Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Catterton Allan, Holly and Lawton Ross, Christine, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, Inter-Varsity, 2012
- Csinos, David; Beckwith, Ivy. *Childrens Ministries in the Way of Jesus*, IVP books, 2013.
- Erwin, Pamela, J., *The Family Powered Church*, Group, 2000.
- Freudenberg, Ben, F., *Children and Congregational Worship*, Children's Ministry that Works! Group, 2002.
- Freudenberg, Ben, F., *The Family Friendly Church*, Group, 1998.
- Roberto, John, *Best Practices in Family Faith Formation*, Lifelong Faith, Fall/Winter, 2007, 21-35.
- Smith, Christian with Melinda Laundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Teenages*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Sawler, David, *Goodbye Generation*, Ponder Pub, 2008.
- Tetz, Myrna, Hopkins, Gary, L., *We Can Keep Them in the Church*, Pacific Press, 2004.
- Westerhoff, John, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, Moorehouse Pub, 2000

7 Essential Faith Experiences

P Participation



"To participate in the life of the faith community, children need to be a part of this community. And to be a part of the community they need to be present for its central practices. They need to rub shoulders with all sorts of folks who make up this community.... They need to be seen as active and valued members of their faith community." (Ivy Beckwith and David Casinos, Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus, 2013)

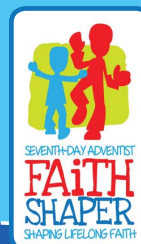
- Be intentional about allowing children to be a part of the church community.
- Welcome children into intergenerational worship.
- Ensure that they participate, use their gifts and feel that they belong.
- Give children equal opportunity to contribute and have a voice.
- Guide and mentor them to participate in meaningful ways.



When the religious leaders saw the outrageous things he was doing, and heard all the children running and shouting through the Temple, "Hosanna to David's Son!" they were up in arms and took him to task. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" Jesus said, "Yes, I hear them. And haven't you read in God's Word, 'From the mouths of children and babies I'll furnish a place of praise?'" (Matthew 21:15-16, The Message)

7 Essential Faith Experiences

I Intergenerational Connections



Children are spiritually formed when they observe their parents and other members of the faith community, practicing the worship of God. (Ivy Beckwith, 2010)

- Plan for and engage children in shared experiences with all generations and their families.
- Create opportunities for children to build relationships with all generations.
- Plan for and allow all generations to worship together.
- Provide opportunities for generations to celebrate faith milestones and spiritual anchors together.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn and serve alongside their family and other generations.



"All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God – your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel together with your children and your wives . . . You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 29:10-12)

Produced by: **The South Pacific Division Children's Ministry Department**
children.adventist.org.au

