

Top Ten Tuesday Ways of doing Intergenerational Church by REV. MINDI on OCTOBER 18, 2011

Intergenerational, to me, means the whole family of God. All generations. It's how I grew up going to a small church in a small town in Alaska—we were always together. For a while, we had separate Sunday School classes, but they would always end up fizzling out after a while—families would move, children had other activities (we met on Sunday evenings) and once I was a teen I was just included in the adult discussions (most of the time). I shared with my pastor about my call by God when I was thirteen and so as a teen, I was asked to preach on occasion. I was asked to read Scriptures and do special music and light candles and share Communion. There was no barrier to age in the participation of worship that I can remember, and that is how I like to do church.

At the last two churches I served, I tried to implement intergenerational worship and church life as much as possible. It didn't always work, and it wasn't always received so well. But I learned as I grew in my pastoral ministry that intergenerational wasn't just about including the kids and the youth—but about including the seniors, the home-bound, the middle-aged, the empty-nesters—it was about including everyone. And it meant that more than the pastor and youth minister had to be involved in the planning and leading worship—it had to be inclusive.

Here are my Top Ten Ways of doing Intergenerational Church:

1. Start out small. Don't try to change everything at once because it rarely works (though occasionally it does!) If you're a solo pastor used to doing everything in worship, or if you have a lay worship leader, break up some of those responsibilities to include places for others to participate. Invite children and youth to read Scripture. Invite a senior to give the invitation to communion. Invite a child to do the Welcome. Invite a parent or grandparent to share a prayer.

2. Practice. Whatever you do, the first few times at least I suggest having a "practice" session before worship. Especially with scripture readers—no matter the age, there are hard words to pronounce at times. Invite these new leaders to get comfortable with the microphone, the pulpit, and sharing in front of others.

You don't have to change your worship service yet—or at all—by inviting others to take part. It may seem different because people bring their different gifts to the table, but the bulletin can even still be the same.

3. Include the children. This means not just for the first part of worship, not just giving them a Children's Message—but include them as Christ included and welcomed them. Sure, at times the sermon will be above their heads—it's pretty easy to print out coloring and activity pages from the web based on the scriptures you are preaching from and to use Children's Bulletins. Most complaints about children in worship is that they are disruptive. In my eight years of pastoral ministry, I don't recall a child ever being disruptive (except maybe my own, because I was listening for him) but I recall several times hearing an adult loudly say "Shh!" or "Be quiet!" or make grumbles and grunts during the worship service. Not the kids.

4. Welcome and include your seniors. If you have a drafty/cold worship space, provide lap blankets. Make sure your space is accessible for wheelchairs and/or walkers. At my last church, a couple of guys from the board one Sunday sawed off the ends of a couple of pews so that walkers and/or wheelchairs could sit—two spaces were closer to the back and two spaces were closer to the front. Provide large-print Bibles and hymnals.

5. Project your prayers and music. I last served a church with a traditional worship service. We used hymns and we loved our hymnal and our organ (when it worked). However, we also started using projection. We projected the words to the Call to Worship, the Lord's Prayer, the scriptures and all

the hymns up on the screen. It was easy to read and see, but also allowed those that still wanted to use their hymnals and bulletins to participate in a traditional way. As we got used to projection, we also projected our announcements during the prelude and postlude (saved time in worship service) and we also projected images at times that related to the sermon and/or Scriptures.

6. Include adults in the children's events, such as Christmas pageants. Cast adults in some of the roles. Combine the children's choir and adult choir on occasion, and let the children choose the music. Basically, integrate the traditionally segregated adult and child activities that happen during worship.

7. Bring children and youth to visit the homebound (along with some of the other adults—I have found in my churches that it is often the elderly visiting the elderly because they were part of the same group at church in their younger years, and fewer empty-nesters and parents will go on visits). One of my favorite events was caroling to the homebound with a multi-generational group from our congregation at my last church. Another was the youth group making a Thanksgiving dinner for one of our homebound folks.

8. Mentoring. In the church that I grew up in, I got to ask two adults to stand alongside my parents at my baptism, and then they were asked to lay their hands on me as I came out of the water and knelt. It's not something done in every church, but I love that the Laying On of Hands was done at my baptism and that I had two adults who took part of it that were not part of my immediate family, and people I could turn to in the church. Mentoring doesn't just have to be an adult with a youth—it can be a older child with a younger child when a new family comes to church. It can be a senior paired with an empty-nester. It can be one family paired with another. Mentoring is a great way to become integrated into church life, but also to have someone you know you can turn to for prayer and support. I think it's huge for youth to have an adult mentor, but it's no less important for other adults to have mentors as well within the congregational life.

9. Bible Study. It can be done! I did an intergenerational Bible study on Genesis in my first church. Provide food. Provide markers and paper. Provide questions that can be answered by a child as well as an adult. Read from an easy-to-understand translation such as the CEV. Invite everyone to respond to questions not just with thought-out answers, but with art, music, or drama (invite everyone to re-create the flood story—that's pretty fun!)

10. Social Justice. There is so much that you can do together—volunteering at a soup kitchen, preparing flood kits, learning about the homeless situation in your area or what you can do to improve education—and all ages can participate together. We became involved with the Interfaith Hospitality Network and supported a host congregation in another town—we brought our children to play with the children who happened to be homeless and celebrated birthdays for the homeless children together. We brought our children and youth to downtown Boston to worship with the homeless and provide lunch. There are many ways you can both act out in justice and learn together about issues across the generations.

These are just a few ways or tips of doing Intergenerational Church. Church life is beyond the one hour of worship on Sunday mornings, and our church family is more than just our families with small children, or our youth group, or our Seniors—church is all of us, and we need to continue to work towards mirroring God's family in our church life by including all generations.