



The Church of All Ages:
Generations Worshiping Together

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First Presbyterian Church, Bryan TX
Rev. Matt Morse, Facilitator

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Elements
of Worship

- Word, Bath, Meal, Giving of Alms to the Poor (Service)
- Sacrament (or "sacramental")
- Ritual
- Tradition

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The Centrality of Worship (The Gathering)

Worship is at the center of congregational life. To 'go to church,' means, for most members of the congregation, 'to go to worship.'

Congregational worship should be integrated with the whole life of the congregation. It can serve as the 'source and summit' from which all the practices of the Christian life flow.

The 'in-breath' and the 'out-breath'

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Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations

“There is no greater privilege for Christians than worshiping God, and there is no better way to do that than as an intergenerational community in which all are important, and all encourage and nurture the faith of others.”

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Intergenerational versus Multi-generational

‘Intergenerational worship’ is worship in which people of every age are understood to be equally important.’

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“Each generation has the same significance before the face of God and in the worshipping congregation. Each and all are made in the image of God. Each and all have worth. It is only a half-truth to make statements like ‘Our children and youth are the church of the future,’ or ‘Our seniors are the church of the past.’ Each and all are the church of now.”

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Beyond the Worship Wars

- There is no one answer and certainly there is no quick ‘fix’
- It is not about ‘traditional’ versus ‘contemporary’
- There is diversity among the various generations in worship
- There is diversity *within* the various generations in worship
- This is not [it is NEVER] your ‘parents’ church’.

To envision an intergenerational culture that finds its center in worship we must acknowledge *our* unique, changed, and changing landscape, recognizing too that which connects us members of the Body of Christ.

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Thought for the Day

“When a worshipping congregation considers all ages equally important, listens to the needs of all, engages all, and brings them all into an encounter with God, it will be successfully intergenerational. That is our goal.”

– Howard Vanderwell (1937-2008)

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Questions for Reflection

1. Recall some of the attempts your congregation has made to be intergenerational? What were they? Do you consider them to have been well thought through? Were they helpful?
2. Imagine you are a stranger who steps into worship with your congregation. What things do you think you would see that give glimpses of successful intergenerational worship?
3. Which age group do you think feels most overlooked or left out of your congregation?

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Biblical Foundations (Covenant Community)

*"Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
– Deuteronomy 6: 6-9*

*"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will open sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."
– Psalm 78: 1-4*

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Biblical Foundations (Continuing Community)

*"Then the people brought their little children to Jesus so he could put his hands on them and pray for them. His followers told them to stop, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people who are like these children." After Jesus put his hands on the children, he left there."
– Matthew 19: 13-15*

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."
– Acts 2: 42-47*

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Confessional Foundations

Q. 167. How is baptism to be improved by us?

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

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Presbyterian Foundations

- The Great Ends of the Church
 - The Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind
 - The Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship of the Children of God
 - The Preservation of the Truth
 - The Maintenance of Divine Worship
 - The Promotion of Social Righteousness
 - The Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World
- “...to promote the peace, purity and unity of the Church.”

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Some Helpful Guidelines

1. Consider all the chapters of life’s journey to be equally valuable.
 - (\$\$\$ + time, flexibility, motivation) – 1 Peter 4: 7-11
2. Avoid stereotypes.
3. Worship *planning* should be age-inclusive.
4. Encourage activities that prepare worshipers to be age-inclusive.
5. Plan periodic worship events to be inclusive.

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Questions for Reflection

1. Identify two or three stereotypes that your congregation has accepted uncritically. What can you do about that?
2. Evaluate the worship of your congregation during the past 12 months:
 - Which services have been intentionally age-inclusive?
 - Which elements of your worship service illustrate the greater sensitivity to all ages?
3. If visitors were to worship at your congregation for five weeks, what conclusions do you think they would draw about your inclusion, or lack of inclusion, of all ages? What events or illustrations do you think they would cite to support their conclusions?

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“Intergenerational”: A Way of Seeing

A congregation that is successful in worshiping intergenerationally has not merely found the right formula or the correct strategies; it has developed a whole new way of seeing.



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It Starts at the Top

Leadership is Key (in arguments AND in accommodation)

- From the Staff
- From the Session
- From the Pews

Dialogue is Key

- We are all participants

Generations Study Team?

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Another Thought for the Day –

“Steady in purpose, flexible in strategy”

“Congregations too commonly mistake strategies for purpose and hold on to particular strategies as if the practice were itself holy rather than a way one might approach the Holy.”

– Gil Rendle

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Questions for Reflection

“Intergenerational as a way of seeing is an act of Christian hospitality. Too many congregations limit their practice of hospitality to politeness. Intergenerational worship, programming, stewardship, decision making, and faith formation require so much more than politely allowing others to do it their way “in our church.” It is a way of seeing and being with each other that goes deeply beyond politeness to true hospitality, where we seen God in one another and shape a new community because of what we see.”



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Questions for Reflection

1. What new changes or practices have been introduced into the worship or programs of your congregation in the past few years because of the presence of new generations?
2. How have these changes enriched your lives, and deepened the faith of this church and its members?

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Intergenerational
Worship is
Counter-cultural

"The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." – William Temple, former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury

"In a culture that segregates and isolates children, preteens, and teens, and then appeals to them separately, the church is a truly countercultural community when it invites all generations to participate actively in worship. However, intergenerational worship is an essential element for the church that going to retain a character and ministry consistent with the Bible. – Darwin Glassford, CRC pastor, Grand Rapids

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The Ethos of Intergenerational Worship

LANGUAGE

PURPOSE

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"To Guide & to Nurture"

"Youth look for the church to show them something. Someone, capable of turning their lives inside out and the world upside down. Most of the time we have offered them pizza. We are painfully aware that we have sold them short." —Kenda Creasy Dean

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Is it a ministry or a program?

“Study after study in the field of youth development makes it clear that the single most important thing that can make a positive difference in the life of a young person is the presence of a caring adult....If we take the yearnings of young people seriously, then we can admit to ourselves that youth aren't interested in our answers (often given in response to questions they're not asking). They're not looking for safe activities. What they're seeking is the companionship of adults who embody a different way of being.” —Mark Yaconelli

“Youth ministry used to be about forming relationships with teens so that they would come to your programs. Today, programs are not the end goal. Instead, programs serve as open doors for building relationships.” — Hank Hilliard

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Some (Counter cultural) Questions we should be asking

What do the *Scriptures* call the church to be?

How well does our congregation understand intergenerational (not multi-generational- worship alongside) worship?

What ought to characterize a genuine intergenerational worship service?

What are the implications of the body of Christ metaphor for the local church?

How do you promote intergenerational worship in a positive manner?

How can we help people contribute their gifts to worship?

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Fostering such an ethos requires us to allow ourselves to be shaped more by the truths of Scripture and the metaphor that we are the body of Christ than by the values and pressures of our culture. It summons us to:

“Hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10: 23-25)

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Question for Reflection

Suppose that in your congregation a young mother is in need of assistance with her infant during worship.

Who – i.e., a person of what age – do you think would be most comfortable getting up to help her? Who would be more *uncomfortable* helping her? What does this answer say about the church as the body of Christ?

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Intergenerational Connectors in Worship

How do we challenge the idea of youth/children/young adults as a separate entity in our worship together, while also embracing youth "groups" "VBS" and the like as extensions of our worshipping body, community?

How do we include them in planning – or is it just "youth Sunday here" and "children's choir" there?

What is the role of parents *in* worship?

What is the role of parents *after* worship?

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Worship as a connector, not a divider

- Music
- Litanies
- Ancient/Future Expressions
- Other forms of art – drawing during the sermon, instead of taking notes?
- All Age Participation
- Back to the Basics: Word, Bath, Meal, Sending

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Questions for Reflection

- Find a recent order of worship for your congregation. Is it accessible to children and teens? How could it be rewritten so that it could be more child-friendly?
- How could your congregation set up mentoring relationships so that young people can learn to lead worship effectively?

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Epilogue

- Congregations that are ageless value old and young alike. They give nurture for the new in the faith as well as the seasoned. They know and understand that every chapter of life's journey has its own particular needs and struggles, and so they aim to provide help for all. They understand that God is equally interested in meeting a child or an adult.
- A healthy, vital congregation is one where planning intergenerational worship is not a negotiated compromise to keep everybody happy, but an expression of the new world Christ came to bring.
- It is thoughtful change grounded in biblical truth and a desire to always bring glory to God.

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A New Paradigm for Worship



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Resources

- The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, Ed. Howard Vanderwell (2008)
- The Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship of the Children of God*, Elizabeth F. Caldwell (2006)
- Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship*, Robbie Castleman (2013)
- Not Your Parents' Offering Plate: A New Vision for Financial Stewardship*, J. Clif Christopher (2008)
- Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time*, Marva Dawn (1995)
- Generation to Generation*, Edwin H. Friedman (1985)

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we are the church
TOGETHER



Additional Questions / Comments?

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