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Intergenerational Youth Ministry

by

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Introduction

While most churches have multiple generations bumping into each other in the hallways, very few intentionally teach and support people connecting across the age barriers. Church has become more and more fragmented, along with our society. Age segregation in the church is causing relational wounds and ignoring the benefits of intergenerational relationships, resulting in stunted discipleship. How can the local church, particularly its youth ministry, bring multiple generations together for relational healing, mutual learning, and growth together in Christ?

My thesis: When the local church, particularly its youth ministry leadership, takes steps to become intergenerational, they do so on biblical and psychological grounds and despite the barriers they face, the benefits are that people of all ages experience relational healing and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. In this paper, I will discuss the basis, barriers, and benefits of intergenerational youth ministry, and then describe how to become intergenerational.

Basis

The Bible provides a solid basis for intergenerational ministry. Biblical writers describe what positive interaction between the generations looks like[1] and place value on both the young and the old in ways that may be surprising to us.[2] As a book that is fully aware of the human condition, Scripture addresses the reality of intergenerational brokenness.[3] Thankfully, this is

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[1] One generation will praise God to another (Ps. 145:4). Parents are told to teach their children all that God has commanded and done in the past (Deut. 6:6-7, 9). People of all different ages are to treat each other with respect, acknowledging the value of varying viewpoints and perspectives (1 Pet 5:1-7; Tit 2:4-5; 1 Tim 5:1,2).

[2] The young have an important role to play in the church community (1 John 2:12-13) and should not be despised (1 Tim. 4:12) but live out their faith as an example to all. In God's restored kingdom, a child is described as leading the people (Isaiah 11:6). At the same time, old men and women should receive honor (Lev. 19:32). Gray hair is their beauty, just as the glory of young men is strength (Prov. 20:29). It is a crown of glory, provided they have walked in the way of righteousness (Prov. 16:31). The fact that in today's society we attempt to hide gray hair betrays the meanings we have associated with aging.

[3] Intergenerational connection is not always seen as positive but could actually result in a cycle of iniquity (Exo. 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deut. 5:9). These texts that emphasize the guilt of fathers being passed down to the third and fourth generations remind us that we are inseparably linked, even if we attempt segregation. A result of turning away from God is described as a child behaving proudly against the ancient (Isaiah 3:5). Jesus' words in

not the end of the story. The Scriptures also provide hope through the promise of intergenerational healing.[4]

Encounters between generations impact the New Testament theme of discipleship. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means responding to God's call with commitment and being daily transformed into the likeness of God's Son, thereby changing the world. Too often we expect youth to grow as disciples in a vacuum. How will young people learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ if they are not mentored by at least one other person[5] who has been further along in the journey? Also, if teens do not learn to share their faith in meaningful ways with those they have the greatest sphere of influence over, particularly their younger brothers and sisters,[6] where will they start?

In the process of discipling teens, resistance should be expected. Eugene Peterson writes, "Resistance to the church is not the first step to atheism—it is more likely to be a natural development in discipleship. If parents will not permit the possibility of dissent they also

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Mark 3:25 can apply to the situation we see today between generations in our churches. "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."

[4] In Malachi 4:6, God tells humanity that God will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. In the last days, which began to be experienced at Pentecost, old men will dream dreams and young men will see visions together (Joel 2:28). Because we are all part of the one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), we need each other to be part of God's movement in the world. We are all sons and daughters of God, regardless of age, and joint heirs together with Christ (Rom 8:14-17a).

[5] Our society has become so fragmented that many, even in Christian families, do not have the parental guidance to provide a relational context for discipleship. Carroll writes, "In 1970, 40 percent of Americans lived in a nuclear family with children present under the age of eighteen. By 1990, the percentage had fallen to barely one-fourth of all families" (Carroll, 30). The family is the ideal starting group for discipleship development. The church family comes into teen's lives in this context and can enlarge discipleship training or may have to step-in for teens that could not experience this at home.

[6] "A 1999 study of Christians in America by George Barna made the following assertions of the time in which people are most likely to accept Jesus Christ: between the ages of 5-13, 32%; between the ages of 14-18, 4%; and between the ages of 19-death, 6%" (Flowers, iii).

prevent the possibility of a free yes."[7] Learning how to make one's own decisions, in response to God's call, is a vital part of discipleship training.[8]

Not only must youth be given room for active, experiential learning, becoming disciples of Jesus Christ can only happen in the context of relationships.[9] Harder writes, "As important as it is for children (or anyone else) to memorize Bible verses or study maps of Bible countries, it is far more important for them to learn of God through people who themselves know God intimately. For faith is a relationship, not merely an assent to a creed or a set of doctrines."[10] James White, a contemporary champion of intergenerational learning, defines Intergenerational Religious Education as "two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common-experience, parallel-learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive-sharing."[11] This is discipleship training.

Not only are there biblical grounds for intergenerational ministry, there are also crucial psychological factors. Teens and adults are generally at different developmental maturity levels.[12] A fairly recent study of Adventist youth, called *Valuegenesis*, "identified 12 important congregational factors that promote faith maturity and denominational loyalty. Two of these: children and teens frequently experience support and concern from adults, and support and concern from peers."[13] Adult-teen connections are necessary for faith maturity to develop.

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[7] Eugene H. Peterson, *Growing Up in Christ: A Guide for Families with Adolescents* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1976), 32.

[8] "Adolescents, almost by definition, are people experimenting with choices—flexing their will power and finding out what it means to say yes to this and no to that, feeling what it is like to do their own choosing" (Peterson, 82).

[9] Bertha Harder and Marlene Kropf, *Intergenerational Learning in the Church* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 18.

[10] Harder, 9.

[11] James W. White, *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988), 18.

[12] See James G. Friesen, E. James Wilder, Anne M. Bierling, Rich Koepcke, and Maribeth Poole, *Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You: The Essentials of Christian Living* (Pasadena, CA: 2004).

[13] Karen Flowers and Ron Flowers, *Discipling Children & Teens for Christ* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2002), 10.

Chap Clark writes, "Adolescents have been cut off for far too long from the adults who have the power and experience to escort them into the greater society. Adolescents have been abandoned."[14] He concludes that each teen, by the time they reach mid-adolescence, "needs to know that at least one adult knows him or her well and will do whatever it takes to bring him or her into the community of healthy adulthood."[15] In fact, a community of adults is needed.[16]

Not only is intergenerational interaction necessary for teens to develop faith maturity, these encounters bring different generations together to learn from each other's life experiences.[17] Rendle writes, "Generations, like children in a family, find their place in the sun by identifying and standing against the limitations seen in the ones that went before."[18] This often results in generation cohorts speaking poorly of each other and needing help to see positives in their differences. Yet, "Each generation worships God and lives out its faith with a distinct spirituality, and the church is renewed because of the turning of the generations."[19]

Barriers

Recent surveys have shown that the present relational situation between youth and adults in both society and church is quite dire. Csikzentmihalyi and Larson "found that adolescents spent only 4.8 percent of their time with their parents and only 2 percent with adults who were not their parents."[20] "According to a survey of 10-17 year olds by the National Commission on Children, only 16% of youth indicated they had an adult friend or neighbor who "really cares

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[14] Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 21.

[15] Clark, 175.

[16] "Each adult must attempt to add to the cumulative message of protection, nurture, warmth, and affection. It takes several if not dozens of consistently supportive and encouraging messages to counteract the effects of systemic abandonment" (Clark, 183).

[17] "Wise parents guard and celebrate generational differences. They know they have gifts to share—and are sure that there are gifts among the youth they will receive with benefit. They are open to the exchange of old men's dreams and young men's visions which are featured in every new movement of the Holy Spirit and often have their origin in a conversation" (Peterson, 47).

[18] Gil Rendle, *The Multigenerational Congregation* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 110.

[19] Carl G. Eeman, *Generations of Faith: A Congregational Atlas* (Alban Institute, 2002), 172.

[20] Clark, 53.

about me." 41% of youth reported experiencing other adult relationships while only 20% of youth felt their community values youth.[21]

The church is not much better. In the Search Institute's study of youth workers, "only one in four (25 percent) say they do very well at helping youth build caring relationships with adults in the congregation."[22] The percentage of youth who answered true to the following statements of three or more adults in the congregation: give you lots of encouragement (59%), talk with you at least once a month (54%), look forward to spending time with (44%), you would go to for advice about a concern (19%).[23] Too often, young generations avoid church because they are made to feel like secondary members, without leadership opportunities, in a place where the ministries are geared towards a different generation. At the same time, older adults feel threatened when their opinions are dismissed or deeply valued traditions labeled out-dated.[24]

Stereotypes from all sides worsen the situation. In a recent survey, two-thirds of adults described teenagers using "adjectives such as 'rude,' 'wild,' and 'irresponsible.'"[25] On the other hand, "43% of the youth (ages 15-23) feel like outsiders in relation to the church family in which they have grown up. Over one-half (52%) are convinced that older people are suspicious of them."[26] The old are thought of as slow, inflexible, judgmental, out-of touch, boring, restrictive, and closed, while the young are considered irresponsible, stubborn, relativistic, and careless.

Benefits

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[21] Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1998), 36.
[22] Roehlkepartain, 37.
[23] Roehlkepartain, 87.
[24] Whitesel, 25.
[25] Roehlkepartain, 10. But, in reality: "U.S. Department of Justice: Young people commit about one in five of all crimes (19 percent). So 80 percent of crime is committed by adults over age 18. In addition, only 6 percent of all youth are arrested for a crime in a give year. That means that 94 percent of youth are not" (Roehlkepartain, 10).
[26] Merton P. Strommen, *Bridging the Gap: Youth and Adults in the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), 58.

The benefits of positive intergenerational encounters happen at the communal, as well as the individual level. Whitesel describes a healthy growing church with the potential for long-term sustenance as a "Tri-Generational Church."[27] He writes, "Every congregation is in a generational relay and must prepare for an eventual passing of the baton of leadership to a successive generation."[28] A church dominated by one generation is doomed to eventually die.[29] Margaret Mead says, "It is true that the continuity of all cultures depends on the living presence of at least three generations."[30] "People in multigenerational and bimodal congregations have fundamentally positive feelings toward each other, enjoy being with each other, and often seek each other out," writes Rendle, "Each of these groups consciously or intuitively understands that the other part of the congregation holds some value or offers a difference that contributes to a completeness that they cannot supply themselves."[31]

The individual benefits to youth are huge. Several of the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets, positive experiences and qualities that young people need for healthy maturity, relate directly to support and empowerment from adults in the community. "Research shows that the single most positive influence in a young person's life is regular time spent with a caring adult."[32] In the 1960s, Evans wrote: "The great need in work with young people today is for communication or genuine encounter or meeting between teenagers and adults, which is at a

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[27] "The Tri-Generational Church is a holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully coexisting under one roof, one name, and one leadership core" (Whitesel, 28).

[28] Whitesel, 41.

[29] "True community necessitates the presence and interaction of three generations. Too often the church… sets the generations apart. Remember that the third generation is the generation of memory, and without its presence the other two generations are locked into the existential present. While the first generation is potentially the generation of vision, it is not possible to have visions without a memory, and memory is supplied by the third generation. The second generation is the generation fo the present. When it is combined with the generations of memory and vision, it functions to confront the community with reality, but left to itself and the present, life becomes intolerable and meaningless. Without interaction between and among the generations, each making its own contribution, Christian community is difficult to maintain." Westerhoff III, 53)

[30] Bob Whitesel and Kent T. Hunter. *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 51. Quote from Margaret Mead.

[31] Rendle, 78.

[32] Roehlkepartain, 9.

deep rather than a superficial level, and which respects rather than violates the emerging of self-respect of the adolescent."[33]

Adolescents are not the only individuals who benefit. When people share their faith across generational lines, all parties are enriched.[34] Youth need the wisdom and experience of elders, while elders need the hopes and dreams of youth. "Bringing the two groups together for across-the-generations thinking and commitment will enhance the witness of the Christian community."[35] Benefits include: renewed interest in growth, new perspectives, new discoveries, families growing closer together, children and youth challenging adult faith to deepen, the faith of adults supporting youth as they question, everyone becoming involved, and congregational worship being a more meaningful experience across the board.[36] Most important of all, people experience relational healing, growing in their closeness to Christ and one another.

Becoming Intergenerational

The church is the community of believers who have been saved, are experiencing God's salvation now, and will be saved when Christ comes again. We ought to be at the forefront of relational healing, including intergenerational healing. Too often, age segregation from society prevails and we miss the benefits of intergenerational engagement.

In order for the church community to become intergenerational, change is needed at both the communal/structural and the individual level. The best-situated initiators of this change are

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[33] David M. Evans, *Shaping the Church's Ministry with Youth* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1965), 109. Evans emphasizes that we should not see the tension as an "adolescent problem" but an "adult-adolescent relational problem." Adults need to do self-examination as well.

[34] "When people share their faith across the generations, they enrich each other too. Teenagers who are questioning their faith can be supported by the serene, confident faith of elderly people, by the lively, intellectual faith of young adults, or even the simple trust of small children. Conversely, the doubts of young people can challenge others to grow also" (Harder, 12).

[35] Evans, 42.

[36] Harder, 41-42.

those in youth ministry leadership.[37] This section suggests seven initiatives that will create a more intergenerational youth ministry: plan an Intergenerational Dialogue Event & Action (IDEA), intentionally include intergenerational themes, start intergenerational small groups, involve all in the Ministry Placement process, see the Youth Leader's role intergenerationally, assess and address attitudes, and plan encounters between youth and other generations.

First, plan an Intergenerational Dialogue Event & Action. The concept of an IDEA was developed in the world of civic engagement and community organizing. The following ideas come from the research of Terry R. Waugh, Ph.D. who utilized J.V. Gambone's IDEA guidelines to access the long-term impact of the process on participants living in two rural communities that chose to engage in intergenerational dialogue due to their declining youth populations.

The church faces similar issues today. "It has been estimated by some researchers that as many as 85 percent of the congregations in America are declining in size."[38] Whitesel writes, "The primary cause of this decline is the church's failure to assimilate younger generations to the same high degree it has successfully incorporated older generations."[39]

Gambone describes the process he has used for over fifteen years: "The Dialogue planning process and day-long event captures the unique perspectives and gifts that each generation brings to any issue or concern. During the four-month-long… process, people of all ages and backgrounds listen to each other respectfully; and then work together to create a concrete, Intergenerational Action Plan that includes roles for all generations."[40]

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[37] Youth Pastors and lay workers have developed a level of trust with the youth and most-likely best understand their spiritual and social needs. At the same time, they are adults who have influence and authority among the older generations. This places them in an ideal place for encouraging bridges of relational healing and mutual learning.

[38] Whitesel, 14.

[39] Whitesel, 17.

[40] Terry R. Waugh, Community Members' Perspectives of the Role the Intergenerational Dialogue Process Served in Changing Residents' Attitudes and Strategies for Working Together: A Multiple Case Study in Two Rural

The following guidelines[41] are used in this process: first, "agree on principles of respect, caring, and cooperation." These principles are mentioned partly because many people have not been exposed to multiple generations living or working together. "While it was not unusual to have three generations of an extended family living under the same roof in 1900, this is the exception to the rule in most of North America in the new millennium."[42]

Second, form a diverse Planning Committee made up of five generations—Civic (1901-1931), Mediating (1932-1944), Boomer (1945-1963), Diversity (1964-1981), and Millennial (1982-2007)—meeting once a month for four months. Third, "set your Dialogue goal to include between 50-75, diverse intergenerational participants." Next, find a facilitator to work with the Planning Committee to develop an authentic scenario, 3-5 questions per generational panel, a timeline, and a budget. After recruiting a team of co-planners and determining costs, choose an issue of interest to all and a real-life, relevant scenario. The Planning Committee must commit to follow up and create action recommendations. The Dialogue must be evaluated. Ask, "Did the Dialogue change my current generational perspective?" "Did it stimulate me to action?"

During the Dialogue itself, questions are asked of each generational panel[43] (with open mic responses made) and then intergenerational work groups are formed that each develop three positive solutions to the issue described in the scenario. At the end of the day, the group votes on the resolutions they would like to adopt.

Midwestern Communities (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2006), 25. From J.V. Gambone, personal communication, February 21, 2005.

[41] Waugh, 25-29.

[42] Whitesel, 100.

[43] Here is an example of the questions asked to the Mediating generational panel concerning the issue of young people leaving their rural community: If your grandchild, or a young niece or nephew asked you directly, 'Why should I live in this area and raise my own family,' what would you tell them?" How do you feel when others say, 'We like it just the way it is, why change?' What do you see as roadblocks to change in rural communities? How should we pay for these changes? If you could give a message right now, what would you say to help influence the decisions needed in this community? How can people of your generation help new residents feel more accepted? The final recommendation voted on was to build a new recreation and community facility.

One year later, 65% of participants interviewed said they were now more able to lead and understand others' perspectives, 73% indicated they could use their knowledge of all generations to influence their community's future after attending the Dialogue, 82% felt they now have more strategies to plan for community involvement, 70% were more comfortable working with all generations."[44] The church can use this process to improve generational understanding, how the community acts together, and what changes are made for the future.[45]

Second, intentionally include intergenerational themes in the church's mission, vision, and core values, as well as its leadership structure. This initiative seeks to shift the central identity of the church to being intergenerational and may take some time. Adding intergenerational language (every age, each/every generation, people of all ages, intergenerational, young/old, child/youth/adult/elder, etc…) to the church's ministry charter is a good first step but these changes must be emphasized to all congregation members.

One way to emphasize the reality of your church's intergenerational value is to include a diversity of generations in executive leadership, such as the church board. You can include youth representatives and make sure there are young adult leaders too. Whitesel[46] suggests keeping track of generational ratios in your church and the community and then employing these ratios for your leadership board.[47] The idea is that you will better mirror the community make-up and thereby better reach the area.

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[44] Waugh, 85.

[45] Waugh, 117, 126, 131. "The findings of this research outlined changes in the participant's attitudes toward other generational perspectives and their willingness to work together that resulted from their experience of the Intergenerationl Dialogue Process" (153).

[46] Whitesel suggests that in order to be tri-generational, each generation must have its own "shepherd" (to publicly identify with during events and activities), lay-shepherding team (with oversight for their own generation and training on how to nurture them), ministries (inclusive but aimed at particular generational interests and talents), and artistic expression (in worship).

[47] Whitesel, 134.

Third, start intergenerational small groups and consider including a mix of children, youth, young adults, middle adults, and older adults. Many resources are available for conducting what has been termed an "Intergenerational Cell Group," defined by Jenkins as "a cell group that welcomes children as full members… such cell groups include the children in all their activities: prayer, praise, spiritual growth and evangelism."[48] The goal is that adults, youth, and children will learn together with one another, each benefiting from what the other brings.

Training leaders to effectively facilitate these groups is vital. Harder writes, "Intergenerational groups function best with at least two leaders who can model a supportive, cooperative relationship with each other. The respect they communicate for each other is then picked up by the group and becomes part of the group's style."[49] Having people sign commitment agreements appropriate to their ages can be helpful and some groups choose to separate into sub-groups for part of the discussion/study time.

Challenges to intergenerational education include the following: more time is required, people resist change, meeting such a wide-range of interests and understandings is difficult, different ages may not want to be together initially, and any one of the age groups could become dominant or seek the center of attention. Despite these challenges, intergenerational groups are powerful communities where discipleship is taking place.

Fourth, involve all ages in the Ministry Placement process. Connecting all ages to ministries at your church builds intergenerational ownership, provides mentoring relationships, and trains the younger generations for greater levels of service. Encourage those planning social

[48] Lorna Jenkins, *Feed My Lambs: A Handbook for Intergenerational Cell Groups* (Singapore: TOUCH Ministries International, 1995), 22.
[49] Harder, 20.

events, service projects, educational opportunities,[50] and ministries[51] to include missing generations on their teams and be intentional about intergenerational opportunities." Dewald Kritzinger (Devo), Youth Pastor at the La Sierra University Church in Riverside, California, shared how this shift has been happening in their church community.

LSUC's new Administrative pastor brought with him a strong passion for mobilizing and equipping each church member for ministry according to their gifts. The church transitioned from the traditional Nominating Committee to a new Ministry Placement Committee. Concurrently, Devo was teaching a Pathfinder class and decided to take the youth around the church building to show them where ministries happen, emphasizing the people involved. Youth were surprised to discover that it took fifty people for the worship service to happen and they got excited about being part of the ministries. Devo followed up with two Sabbath School presentations about ministries at LSUC and how to get involved.

Going to the Ministry Placement Committee, Devo emphasized the need for having at least five representatives from the 20-40 year olds on the board, as well as youth representatives. He said, "We have always talked about being a 'Next Generation' church but maybe we need to change to be a 'Now Generation' church." Back in the 1960's, Evans wrote these words: "The church's nurture must be 'now' oriented… The gathered church experience of youth must prepare them for now, encourage witness now, and be supportive of witness now… youth must be accepted as full members of the church today, not as members in training… They need to be

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[50] George E. Koehler, *Learning Together: A Guide for Intergenerational Education in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1977), 14. A setting for intergenerational education is: "A planned opportunity for nurture, discovery, or training in which a major purpose is the interaction and mutual ministry among persons of two or more generations." These are activities where we help each other to be, to know, or to do.

[51] Koehler, 9. Koehler defines Intergenerational ministries as: "Planned programs of the church which engage persons of two or more generations in face-to-face interaction and mutual ministry.

given every opportunity for service—based upon gifts, not age; on conviction, not personality; on commitment, not experience."[52]

The LSUC Ministry Placement Committee bought into this philosophy and there are now at least sixty teenagers committed to be involved in various LSUC ministries. The next crucial step is training and mentoring from the adults and elders who lead in these areas. Youth and adults working together in AV ministry (twenty of the fifty volunteers are youth), hospitality, prayer ministry (where the other volunteers are eighty-year old ladies), and deacon ministry (no longer called "junior deacons") gives major opportunities each Sabbath for relationship building.

Fifth, understand the Youth Pastor or Youth Worker's role intergenerationally. I believe there is definitely place for ministries are designed for particular age-groups within the church. At the same time, these ministries must be done in the context of the entire church. Segregation on certain activities is for the sake of greater unity in Christ as a whole.

Devo spoke of the need to advocate for the youth (letting other generations know that this generation is crucial for the mission of God in the world right now), as well as advocating for the other generations (letting our youth know they are part of something bigger and fostering relationships). Roehlkepartain creates a list of the youth worker's role that includes: support/educate parents, plan congregation-wide activities involving youth, advocate for youth, educate and equip adults in building supportive relationships with youth, train adult volunteers, coordinate youth leadership opportunities, partner with other congregations for youth in the community, participate in community wide efforts for youth.[53]

Sixth, assess and address negative attitudes between generations. Before excitement can build about intentional intergenerational experiences, false negative stereotypes and fears should

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[52] Evans, 41.
[53] Roehlkepartain, 52-53.

be assessed and addressed. The easiest way to assess how the various generations feel about each other is to survey, formally or informally. Ask what comes to mind first when someone hears the word "teenager" or see an older person with gray hair. Ask youth whether it is true or false that the congregation is welcoming to youth, that they feel valued and cared about by the adults, that there are three or more adults they would go to if they had a problem or concern.[54]

Address these perceptions communally and one-on-one with biblical material, psychological information, and sociological facts. Help youth and adults embrace the fact that we are different and see the value in listening and learning from each other. Teach that intergenerational relationships can bring healing and are part of experiencing salvation now. Address the stereotypes on both sides, especially the ideas that adolescents do not want significant relationships with adults and that adults will not commit fully and cannot be trusted.[55] Have congregation members pledge to be asset builders for the children and youth.[56]

Because of human nature, negative attitudes and stereotypes are often only overcome through actual interaction. The final initiation is to plan intentional, meaningful encounters between youth and other generations, particularly younger children, adults, and elders. Strommel writes, "Rather than encourage age separation in the general routine of church activities, more should be done to bring youth and adults together in cooperative activities. When there is personal and warm interaction, adults can serve as models for the youth and youth

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[54] Roehlkepartain, 87. You can do this survey with visitors, regulars, and youth leaders.

[55] Clark, 53-54. "Contrary to what most adults may think, middle adolescents want significant relationships with adults who care about them. When asked about this in various settings—one-on-one, in informal groups, or even in a large convention setting—students confirmed this assertion, and most seemed almost eager to have an adult friend. The difficulty comes when they attempt to reconcile this need with their perception of the lack of trustworthiness in adults."

[56] Roehlkepartain, 89.

can serve as encouragers to the adults. Tension will surface at times, but this allows for healthy identification."[57]

Besides the Intergenerational Cell Groups mentioned earlier, youth can be encouraged to interact and serve children in the following ways: Vacation Bible School, Sabbath School, a monthly Children's Church. The congregation could start a big brother/big sister program or after-school tutoring program and train youth to minister to community kids as well. The summer can be a time of day-camp or summer camp activities in addition to VBS. Group baby-sitting for a date-night at church could be fun for youth as well as a ministry to parents. Youth leaders could be trained on giving bible studies to younger ones. An intentional focus could be made on what it means to be a witness for Christ to brothers and sisters.

Connecting youth and adults can be easier because of parental involvement in the youth group. The youth leadership council can include parents and young adults. Devo has found their soon-to-be biannual youth retreat is one of the most loved events of the year. About 25 adults come and bond with the youth in small groups[58] (open facilitators) and informal interactions, putting on a banquet for them on Saturday night. Their Friday-night youth program has now moved into parents/adults leading about eight different small groups with sixty youth coming regularly. Having adult sponsors on mission trips is an excellent way to teach youth and adults what it means to have fun while serving together.

Some more ideas include family social night (teens and parents take turns planning or plan together), adults trained as mentors and/or life coaches for teens, teaching a parent-teen communication seminar (involve both with a divided flier that has to be put together to

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[57] Strommel, 82.
[58] "A discipleship and sharing group is also an excellent place to get parents involved in youth ministry… Express to parents the importance of a sharing group and the commitment involved" (Group, 9)

understand), providing a referral list of adults to call for youth experiencing various crises. Have a roles-reversal progressive dinner where the youth cook and parents rotate.

The elderly generation can be harder to include in youth ministry because they often are not in an intermediate family or living situation with those in the grand-children's generation. Yet, there are some natural connections psychologically. Youth and elderly face similar life themes: loneliness, identity crisis, meaning of life, and the independence/dependence struggle. Eeman argues that "as a rule one's grandchildren are of the same generational type as the grandparents... In the final years of a generation, this reappearance of this type can offer comfort and consolation to members of a generation."[59]

There are many ways teens can connect with the elderly to experience relational healing and grow in discipleship. Teens can show they care for the elderly through community service activities, such as Christmas caroling, musical concerts, yard-work, and visits. They can serve while doing something fun with their friends that makes a difference. Teens and seniors can get together to plan a joint social night. Music, activities, etc., could be themed in such a way as to remind the seniors what life was like when they were teenagers. Both would learn about each other's preferences and cultural contexts.

Encourage those in the elderly generation to come tell stories to the youth group about experiences of God's providence in their lives. You could have a section of Sabbath School that was story-time with Grandpa/ma or a whole evening when youth and elders can ask each other questions anonymously through a moderator. Invite a couple to share how they first fell in love. Those over seventy can share the top seven things they've learned in life or they wish someone told them as teens. Dialogue, laugh, and celebrate life together.

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[59] Eeman, 22.

Elders can tutor students, do art together, or teach classes in practical skills not as well known today, like wood-working or knitting or cooking. Set up "Taxi-time with Grandpa/ma" during the summer where youth can call church members and ask to be taken places (with permission). This is a good time to say that all adult volunteers working with youth or children should be properly screened. Safety precautions include staying in public places and driving with several youth together. Elders can mentor young people in their spiritual walk with Christ and share how they have or have not maintained their own spiritual life over the years.

When the local church, particularly its youth ministry leadership, takes steps to become intergenerational, they do so on biblical and psychological grounds and despite the barriers they face, the benefits are that people of all ages experience relational healing and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. We have examined the basis, barriers, benefits, and ways to become an intergenerational youth ministry. Taking intentional steps to draw generations together in Christ will bring greater depth to our churches and strengthen our witness in the community. May the promise of Malachi 4:6 be a reality for us: "he will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."

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Additional Resources

http://conferences.vu.edu.au/icip/default.htm
http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu/
http://jag.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/3/312
http://jir.ucsur.pitt.edu/
http://secure.cmdnet.org/index.cfm
http://www.centreforip.org.uk/
http://www.cyfm.net/
http://www.generationsoffaith.org/
http://www.gt.pitt.edu/intergenerational_sites.htm
http://www.gu.org/
http://www.intergenerationday.org/who.html
http://www.pcusa.org/family/
http://www.search-institute.org/assets/
http://www.teenhealthconnection.org/edparents.htm
http://www.templecil.org/
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Intergenerational is becoming a new catch word in youth ministry talk, but many wonder what it actually looks like in practice. This research brief summarizes insights from a leadership panel on both theory and practice of intergenerational ministry. "I knew we were starting to get somewhere when my six-year-old son was rattling off who he wanted at his birthday party. There were as many adults as kids on that list." When we consider youth ministry alongside intergenerational ministry we are promoting encouragement. The long-term perspective of the older saints encourages the younger generation to continue in faithfulness and service. Older saints are invigorated in their faith as they see the energy and enthusiasm of those in whom they are investing. When we consider intergenerational ministry we are promoting encouragement. The long-term perspective of the older saints encourages the younger generation.