



Moving your church – Culture Change **by Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly, Presbyterian Church** **of Aotearoa New Zealand.**

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A six-year-old boy was sitting at the kitchen table writing his birthday party list. His dad noted when leaning over his shoulder that almost the entire list was made up of church friends and there were as many adults as kids.

"At that moment I knew that our church was finally getting somewhere on our intergenerational journey," said dad Brad Griffen, associate director of the Fuller Youth Institute in America and co-author of Sticky Faith.

And becoming an intergenerational church is a journey.

Intergenerational is not a programme. Intergenerational is a practise. And like any practise it does take a long time to perfect and embed it as an ethos into the congregational culture.

Today I've been invited to explore with you how to move your church from "here" to "there". We're going to create a metaphorical map for introducing and ultimately embedding an intergenerational ethos in your church.

But before we head off on that journey we probably need to identify where here is and then consider why we would want to go there!

The terms cross-generational, multigenerational and intergenerational are bandied about quite a bit. So is there a difference between these three or is it just semantics? Well I think for the purpose of this message, it may be helpful to clarify the terms as I see them and use them.

Many functional and growing churches are **cross generational** with anything up to six generations gathering under the same roof on one day. In fact we could go as far as saying the church is one of the few cross generational communities in Western society today. The rest of society has been segregated institutionally, socially and even spatially. Schools are segregated, clubs are segregated, even living is segregated. While the church has this unique claim to cross-generationalism, most have bowed to societal conventions and segregated their congregations ignoring the biblical mandate to be the whole body of Christ!

So what does a cross generational church look like?

- While **cross generational churches** may pride themselves on having many generations in their midst, they choose to separate these generations in everything they do from worship to learning to mission to play.
- In a functional cross generational church all the generations are considered and provided for, but as Rudyard Kipling says: “never the twain shall meet!”

- In a cross-generational church generations may be compared and contrasted with each other and some may even be deemed to be superior to others.
- Differences between the generations may be understood and acknowledged, but there is no desire to be transformed by each other (or even a belief that that is possible).

Your church may be more **multigenerational** where several generations are in proximity with each other, but not necessarily engaged in meaningful relationships.

- The way this may play out in your (and my) church is that many generations worship alongside each other for some time. Hopefully some effort is made to try to “accommodate” all ages during this time and then the generations separate for their own time of worship and learning.
- Usually in a multigenerational congregation the different generations don’t really get to know or appreciate each other, but rather tolerate each other.
- People may celebrate each other’s presence but their interactions are generally superficial and polite.
- And quite importantly, like the inhabitants of George Orwell’s “*Animal Farm*”, in a multigenerational church “*some are more equal (or powerful) than others!*”

So if we're trying to move our church from "here" to "there" then it may be helpful to define what "there" looks like.

In an **intergenerational church**:

- Relationships across the generations are prioritised and fostered.
- All ages worship together, learn together, pray together, serve together and play together.
- For these churches "intergenerational" is a way of being. It is integral to their culture. It is who they are. And they recognise that to be truly INTERGENERATIONAL most definitely requires INTENTION!



Take some time to chat to your neighbour about how you'd define the church you minister in. It may be a mix.

Cross	Multi	Inter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many generations exist but are separated for worship, learning, prayer, mission etc. • All generations are considered but "never the learn shall meet" • Some generations may be deemed to be superior to others. • No desire to be transformed by each other (or believe that is possible) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generations worship alongside each other, sometimes in the same place for different reasons, but separately. • Generations are separate but interact for their own worship and learning. • Generations don't talk, know or report on each other, but rather tolerate each other. • People may celebrate each other's presence but their needs are not generally supported and valued. • Some are more equal powerful than others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships across the generations are prioritised and fostered. • All ages worship together, learn together, pray together, serve together and play together. • "Intergenerational" is a way of being. It is integral to their culture. It is who they are. • INTERGENERATIONAL IS INTENTIONAL!

So you may ask:

How does one become INTENTIONALLY INTERGENERATIONAL?

When I started the Kids Friendly ministry 13 years ago for the PCANZ I was given the task of teaching our churches how to be "Kids Friendly". Research had revealed that NZers in their 30's didn't feel that churches were Kids Friendly (amongst other things which you can read more about on our Kids Friendly website under "Our Story".) My job was to help churches more effectively welcome and serve the children and families of their communities. However within days of starting the role I realised

that before I could teach any church leader **how** to be Kids Friendly I had to convince them **why** being Kids Friendly is important. We call it “having a Kids Friendly heart” and we discovered that if our churches are to develop a “heart” for children, we have to help them identify and name the things that break their heart.

Because to bring about change in a church, organisation or individual you need three things:

1. Dissatisfaction with the status quo – if your church is satisfied with the status quo (whether that be worshipping, learning, serving and growing separately or having no children in their church) there can be no possibility for change!
2. Vision – of a preferred future
3. A Plan – and passion, energy, resources and support for effecting that plan.

So WHY SHOULD OUR CHURCHES BE INTERGENERATIONAL?

- **Scripture decrees it:**

Deuteronomy 6: 5-9

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These **commandments** that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.”* These commandments were given to the whole community; to the “mish paw kaw”, not just to the nuclear family as is so often interpreted today.

Matthew 19:14 “Let the children come and **do not** hinder them....”

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 - The Body of Christ that starts with:

"Now the body is not made up of one part but of many."

And ends: *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

- **The early church intended it and modelled it**
- **Because children learn best by being with, observing and imitating adults**

Gretchen Pritchard-Wolff in her book "Offering the Gospel to Children" says: *The nurture of children in church is much more than Christian education. Children learn by watching and imitating adults and by projecting themselves into imaginary worlds. Clergy and worship committees must give serious thought to making the Sunday worship truly accessible to children and educating parents and other parishioners to see children as fellow-worshippers, not as intruders who have to be hushed or distracted so that adults are left free to pray!"*

Or as the ancient Chinese proverb says *"I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand."*

Christianity is a practise and if children are to grow into lifelong disciples of Christ they must be given the opportunity to practise faith alongside Christians of all ages and stages.



I wonder what this little boy's passion will be as he grows up?

(Video of father and boy playing guitar)

Intergenerational communities value all ages equally and recognise the importance of inviting all to contribute to and shape the community's activities. So another reason for why we should consider being more intergenerational in our churches is this:

- **The era we find ourselves in demands it**

We've entered a new era. According to Rich Melheim of Faith Inkubators, 2005 was a watershed year in the history of human technology, yet it came and went without making a blip on the radar screen of the church. This was the year teenagers in much of the developed world started spending more time on the internet than on television. Why is this so important? It's important because children and teens of this post television generation have a different attention span, learning style and media consumption. Their world is what Dr Leonard Sweet calls

EPIC:



- Experiential
- Participatory
- Image driven
- Connected and Conversational

For the last 500 years – since the widespread use of the Gutenberg press – we've been living in a one-way information flow world. We responded to one way radio, television, lectures, sermons and more. We were satisfied to just listen and consume the content professionals produced for us. And we as the audience had no bearing on what was being brought or taught to us. Audiences, viewers, students and parishioners were treated mostly as spectators in someone else's show. And this naturally gave rise to what Rich Melheim describes as the **The Television Era church!**

In the television era church, the desired product is a polished, professional performance and a great and engaging show. “They entertain and we watch” is the unspoken rubric. In the television era church participants are told what to say, when to say it, what to sing, when to sing, when to stand, when to sit, when to shake hands and when to kneel. And while television era church works for many of us, the one-way producer/consumer social contract is null and void to everyone under the age of 25.

If our worship models, educational methods, youth ministries, family ministries and every encounter at church are built as “television era” offerings, we will be less and less effective with more and more people from here on out. If the audience isn’t more than an audience, if their questions, knowledge, cares and experiences aren’t drawn into the core of the worship, if what we design does not engage this post television era people in an experience they help shape, we will be teaching, reaching and preaching to a smaller and smaller crowd every year.

Well hopefully that’s given you enough reason to want to embark on this intergenerational journey.

So, how do we get “there”?

How do we move our cross-generational and multigenerational churches towards being more intergenerational?

My allocated time for this session does not allow us to explore practical ideas for **caring, worshiping, celebrating, praying and serving together**. Fortunately there are now copious books, websites, blogs and workshops (including some today) that will offer you ideas for

nurturing the faith of all in your church and equipping them to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

So I'm going to devote the last 10 minutes of our time together to giving you a map with some critical signposts that will help you get from "here" to "there" and better connect the children you love to the rest of the church community.

The most important thing to we need to remember as we embark on this journey is that we need to establish our Intergenerational Community as a **Core Value**.

Intergenerational is not something churches *do*—it's something they *become*. Becoming intergenerational requires a paradigm shift, and the whole church must value intergenerational relationships and community.

This shift requires that all of the leaders of the church (not just the children or youth leaders) buy into the value of intergenerational ministry and commit to changing the culture of the church over the long haul.

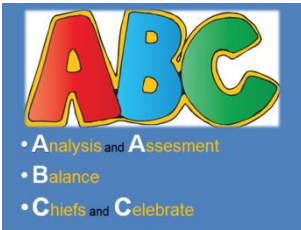
Intergenerational is a way of life. Making such a shift requires overcoming the individualistic mindset that is so strong in our culture and developing a community mentality in which all generations and ministry departments are valued and involved with each other in significant ways throughout the church body. Valuing all ages must become part of the congregation's collective story.

Becoming an intergenerational community of faith is a journey not a destination. And the journey begins where you currently are.

In the words of Maria in The Sound of Music:

"Let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start.

"When you read you begin with ABC...."



So here are the ABC's of introducing "intergenerationalism".

A = ANALYSIS/ASSESSMENT

Before you introduce anything new it's helpful to analyse or assess your current situation. The **SWOT ANALYSIS** – is a helpful tool to help you in this process. **SWOT** stands for **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.**

STRENGTHS – what are you currently doing well in terms of intergenerationalism? When do all ages come together and really enjoy being together? Is it at your church camp or picnic or the annual fete? What makes it such a positive experience for all? How can you build on or even replicate some of your successes in other contexts such as outreach events, service projects, mission trips or worship?

A minister in NZ shared this story with me. He was called to a church and said he would only accept the call if they were open to becoming an intergenerational church. They agreed, but of course as soon as he tried to set up the church café style and have all ages worship together he started to receive criticism and experience resistance. He wondered how he could help his congregation experience the joy of being together. So he asked the congregation to commit to all age friendship groups for six months. He divided the people into groups ranging in age from 0 to 99 and told them they should meet once a month for fun and friendship. No bible study or prayer required – just pure unadulterated fun! The activities ranged from bush walks to board game evenings, picnics and days at the beach. Within months he noticed a real change in attitude

during worship. No longer were people just sitting with those they knew, inevitably of similar ages. Instead little Johnny would enter the church and see 78 year old Uncle Harry sitting at a table and run to join him. This was one of his favourite uncle's now after they had walked the bush together, learning the names of birds and seeing how many insects they could spot!

What other **STRENGTHS** can you identify?

Who are your **CHAMPIONS**? Enlist the help of key influencers in your congregation who already have an intergenerational mindset.

Where are the **OPPORTUNITIES** for introducing some intergenerational activities? The worship service is one key area of opportunity to implement intergenerational strategies. However being intergenerational doesn't just mean deciding that from next Sunday kids will stay in church. If children and youth are going to be in the main worship service then the time that they are "in" needs to be designed to include them and all generations. As Pastor Alison Sampson of the Yarra Community Baptist Church suggests: "*We need to interrogate our worship if we want to truly integrate young people.*" Start small – maybe once each quarter the entire congregation worships together and experiments with creative approaches. Or restructure the first or last "X" number of minutes in the service to include all ages before splitting out into age-level ministries.

You also need to identify your **WEAKNESSES** and **THREATS** so you can navigate your way around them. One of the greatest threats to change is people. So think about who will be most resistant and invite them into the conversations early on so they understand what you are trying to achieve and have buy-in.

B = BALANCE

Introducing change is a balancing act! You'll need to be cautious and take things slowly, but not so slowly that you lose momentum. Don't make too many sweeping changes at once.

Establishing intergenerational community does not mean eradicating all age-specific ministries. If some of your age-specific ministries are "working" well, leave them be, and explore other areas where you can promote intergenerational faith sharing. But remember that research shows that children and youth who grow up exclusively in youth ministries are less like to keep their faith into adulthood. There is however still a place for all ages to have space to grow and develop at their own pace. Everyone needs to be part of a **web of relationships** that includes their peers AND members of other generations.

C = CHIEFS

C = CELEBRATE

Win over the CHIEFS: Leadership Must Be Fully Vested

Successfully transitioning to an intergenerational paradigm lives (or dies) with the leadership. In order to make such a culture shift, the senior leadership team must get on board with the vision early and actively take the reins in leading the congregation through the transition including role modelling it. You can be as keen as you like, but if your church leadership don't "get it" and support it, it won't work.

Celebrate the little wins and tell stories of success to encourage the congregation and share the vision. A positive comment from a student about an older adult, or vice versa, is a win! An adult learning a kid's name and saying hi to them in the hall is a win!



OBSTACLES AND PITFALLS

It's helpful before you embark on a journey to be aware (as far as possible) of the obstacles that lie ahead. If there's a big hole in the road it's better to detour

around it than fall into it.

So here are a few potential pitfalls to watch out for!

Only a method or programme, not a value

If your leaders and congregation see intergenerationalism as just another programme it will not endure. Too many churches try to *do* intergenerational rather than *become* intergenerational. If a church is not committed to persisting with the “intergenerational way” it will not become part of the culture.

Uncommitted leaders

We’ve talked about the importance of winning over the chiefs already, but it’s worth saying again, if there is not buy-in from senior leadership and stakeholders, there will not be a “heart change” in your congregation.

Generations lack understanding of each other

“Age segregation can affect the well-being of a community by making people from different age groups blind to each other’s needs” says Globe magazine, and the article continues: *“age segregation leads to aegism, a form of prejudice where young people regard old people as feeble and old people dismiss the young as untrustworthy hooligans.”*

We need to help children, youth and adults be together by preparing and equipping them for the experience. An intergenerational mission trip requires a lot of framing for the adults to understand that the goals and expected outcomes are going to be different when children are involved.

The congregation lacks understanding of, or ignores the biblical emphasis on intergenerational community

Often members of the congregation are not aware of the strong biblical foundations of and mandate for intergenerational ministry. So it's important for us to remind them of what the scriptures say!

Self-centeredness is the enemy

True intergenerational community is built on genuine love for every generation beyond a consumerist "What's in it for me?" mindset.

It just seems too hard

Designing worship and events to include and engage all ages is hard – no pain without gain is probably an apt way to describe this journey - but it's worth it!

And so to end on a light note let me suggest that if it still seems too hard to move your church this way, maybe you could opt for this way instead!



(Moving your church video clip)