



Best Practices in Intergenerational Faith Formation

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Intergenerational faith formation may seem “new” to contemporary Christian churches, but it has deep roots in our Jewish and Christian heritage. The call for one generation to share its faith and story with future generations is deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition. Moses’ instruction to the parents and grandparents of his day makes this clear:

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 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 6:1–9)

From the first century onward, Christian faith communities have been intergenerational communities. Allan G. Harkness writes, “Ever since the development of Christian faith communities in the post-Pentecost era of Christianity, there has been a consciousness that such communities need to encourage and embody a genuine intergenerationalism” (Harkness 1998, 431). From its Jewish roots, the early Christian church maintained its intergenerational identity with all ages considered to be integral parts of it. “The church is all generations. From the newly baptized infant to the homebound, aged widow—all are members of the faith community. None are potential members; none are ex-members. Though some congregations may have no younger members (and a few no elderly), most have all five generations. And all are members of the Body” (Koehler, 10).

Intergenerational faith formation was an integral element of the Christian church from the very first days. The Israelites and the first Christian communities may not have used the term “intergenerational faith formation” to describe the transmission of the faith story and way of life to the next generation, but it most certainly was.

Harkness provides a helpful, contemporary understanding of intergenerational faith formation when he writes, “Intentional IG (intergenerational) strategies are those in which an integral part of the process of faith communities encourages interpersonal interaction across generational boundaries, and in which a sense of mutuality and equality is encouraged between the participants” (Harkness 2000, 52-53). Drawing on theology, education, and social sciences he makes a strong case that intergenerational learning “can contribute to the achievement of the normative educational goals of faith communities, which (for Christian communities at least) integrate the gaining of knowledge, holistic growth to maturity of individual believers, and the development of the corporate Christian community for its mission” (52-53). Harkness identifies four major areas in which specifically IG educational strategies may enhance the achievement of these goals:

1. by providing the foundation of consistency between the theology of the community and its educational strategies;
2. by embodying the essence of appropriate and authentic education in faith communities;
3. by enhancing the potential for faith development in the individual members of the communities; and
4. by encouraging the corporate edification that enables the community as a united entity to more effectively live out its God-given vocation. (Harkness 2000, 53)

James W. White offers what has become the guiding definition of intergenerational religious education: “two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive sharing” (White, 18). White explains that an ideal IGRE program will have all four patterns of relationships: in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive sharing. The IGRE methodology can be utilized in many forms: monthly IG learning programs, weekly or bi-weekly IG small groups, IG/family summer camp programs, IG/family vacation Bible school, IG Sunday school or Bible study, IG retreats, IG workshops.

The dominant form of Christian education or faith formation in most Christian churches today is not intergenerational. For over sixty years it has been homogeneous-age education, organizing children, teens, and adults into separate learning groups or classes organized by age or grade level. In

many congregations even worship is age-segregated. Holly Catterton Allen, in her research on IG observes, “It seems that learning how to be God’s people has become less a joining in with community, and more a gathering of age-segregated groups to study about being God’s people” (Allen, 271).

Since the 1970s there have been a number of significant attempts to make intergenerational and/or family-centered learning central to Christian faith formation (see Harkness 1998). Many of the lectionary-based approaches and resources developed since the 1970s have incorporated a family and/or intergenerational learning component. Kathleen Chesto’s *FIRE (Family-centered Intergenerational Religious Education)* program, originally developed in the 1980s and revised and updated in the 1990s, is a comprehensive five-year curriculum: *Celebrating Community, Becoming Community, The Responding Community, The Living Community, The Believing Community*. Faith Inkubators (www.faithink.com) has developed *Generations in Faith Together*, intergenerational learning programs focused on Advent, Lent, and stewardship that are an integral element in their curriculum for congregations. The Center for Ministry Development and Harcourt Religion have developed the *People of Faith* curriculum, six volumes of intergenerational learning sessions on Jesus and the church year, the Creed, sacraments, morality, justice, and prayer, that can be used as the primary form of congregational faith formation for all ages.

Unfortunately there is very little scholarly writing or research on intergenerational faith formation. James White’s 1988 *Intergenerational Religious Education* is one of the only substantial books presenting the theory and practice of Christian intergenerational education.

The Challenge of Intergenerational Faith Formation

There are many forces in our society and within our congregations that make the (re)establishment of intergenerational faith formation countercultural. To these forces we now turn our attention.

The general culture in the United States is becoming increasingly age-segregated. We live in a society defined by age segregation, in which adults and children go their separate ways. Young people experience very few settings that are truly intergenerational. The architecture and design of communities and neighborhoods tend to isolate

families, and virtually every program and institution is organized to meet age-specific needs at the expense of the richness of intergenerational community.

While intergenerational communities and extended families have long been the norm in human societies all over the world, U.S. society is pulling the generations apart. Among the many factors contributing to this are: individualism, mobility, grandparents living at often great distances from their children and grandchildren, and separation of children and youth by age levels from adults in education and activities.

Age-segregation is detrimental to all generations. “This lack of intergenerational contact leads each generation to see itself as a separate subculture rather than as an integral part of an entire community, perspectives that often lead to conflict and competition rather than cooperation” (Martinson and Shallue, 4).

Religious congregations are among the very few settings where three or more generations gather for intentional activities. Yet even in churches, young people are segregated by age from the rest of the community for most of their activities. In a typical church today a child can be involved in Christian education programs from first grade through high school and never have the opportunity to meet and learn with other generations in the faith community—to the detriment of the individual and the other generations. In some congregations they are even separated for worship.

Intergenerational Contact

The 2000 research study, *Grading Grown-Ups: American Adults Report on their Real Relationships with Kids* found “there is clear evidence that young people benefit from multiple, sustained relationships outside their immediate family. For example, Search Institute research has found that the more adults a young person reports that he or she can turn to, the better off that young person is. Yet just 22 percent of the youth surveyed reported having strong relationships with five or more adults other than their parents” (Scales, et al., 5).

To grow up healthy, young people need to be surrounded, supported, and guided within a sustained network of adults, in addition to their parents, who choose to know, name, support, affirm, acknowledge, guide, and include children and adolescents in their lives. Yet, the *Grading Grown-Ups* study found that most young people lacked this sense of “connectedness” to other generations.

The *Grading Grown-Ups* study revealed that youth and adults have shared priorities for intergenerational relationships. However, there was

also general agreement that these relationship-building actions are not happening often enough. There appears to be a gap between what adults believe and what they do. Of the 18 actions studied, only the top three—encouraging school success, teaching respect for cultural differences, and teaching shared values—are reported to be happening with any regularity. Some very important actions that adults could exercise in their relationships are not being practiced: passing down traditions, having meaningful conversations, being engaged in giving and serving to help the needy, modeling giving and serving to make life fair and equal, discussing religious beliefs, and discussing personal values.

What is clear from the study is that “forming meaningful relationships across generations needs to become an expected part of everyday life. All adults need to see being engaged with kids as part of their responsibility, as part of their community and this society. Children and youth need to be able to count on adults for support, guidance, and modeling” (Scales, et al. xi).

In the *Effective Christian Education Study (The Teaching Church, 1993)* the Search Institute found only 20 percent of congregations adequately promoted intergenerational contact. And just 39 percent of youth say their churches do a good or excellent job of helping them get to know adults in the church.

In October 2003, the Search Institute conducted a field test survey in 15 U.S. congregations of their instrument, *Building Assets, Strengthening Faith: An Intergenerational Survey for Congregations*. While only a limited survey, it does provide a glimpse of the state of intergenerational programming in congregations. The adult and youth respondents rated their congregation as doing very or extremely well in the following intergenerational opportunities (note the low score for intergenerational relationship building and learning opportunities):

- 52%: having worship or prayer services that are spiritually uplifting for people of all ages;
- 42%: providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to serve others together;
- 40%: helping people of all ages feel their gifts and talents are valued;
- 29%: having children and youth in leadership roles for the whole congregation;
- 29%: providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to get to know each other;
- 29%: providing opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn and study together.

Eugene Roehlkepartain, the report’s author, emphasizes the need for intergenerational

relationships and learning. “Nurturing faith and building assets involves more than what the congregation does specifically for children, youth, and families. Faith and assets are strengthened through intergenerational relationships, programs, and activities, including the ones examined in this section of the survey. Together, these items help congregations understand the ways they are, truly, an intergenerational community. The invitation for congregations is to discover a balance between age-specific opportunities and intergenerational opportunities in a time when generations are, too often, isolated from each other” (Roehlkepartain, 11).

Intergenerational – Age-Specific Tension

One of the major congregational issues is the tension between intergenerational and homogenous-age education. The recent history of Christian education has been dominated by age-specific (and age-segregated) learning. There are obviously age-related differences in development and age-related learning needs that make age-specific education important. However, as Allan Harkness observes, “Open to debate is the extent to which these differences provide a valid rationale for restricting education in faith communities to contexts in which homogeneous-age groups can function, as in the traditional age-graded divisions of congregations” (Harkness 2000, 54). He goes on to say that there are legitimate reasons for age-group educational settings, but “What is not justifiable is when these reasons are presented as a rationale for exclusively homogeneous-age group settings” (55).

Harkness concludes that intergenerational and homogenous-age group educational strategies in faith communities should be considered complementary, but with an intergenerational approach taking primacy over the age-segregated approach.

For contemporary faith communities, especially those which seek to model themselves on the New Testament churches, application of these criteria, when based on broad foundations from theology, education, and the social sciences, will demonstrate that the preferred educational strategies will integrate both IG and homogeneous age strategies. In terms of the priority to be given the two strategies, however, accumulated evidence from the same broad foundations strongly endorses the perspective that we “must learn to do only those things in

separate groups which we cannot in all conscience do together.

If faith communities are to increase effectiveness in fulfilling their mandate to equip people for life and relevant mission, no longer can the widely used homogeneous-age group methodology go unquestioned. An IG component must be conceived as normative. (Harkness 2000, 63)

The Process of Intergenerational Faith Formation

James White identified four patterns of relationships that shape the four components of an IGRE learning experience. Briefly summarized, these patterns are:

- **In-Common Experiences.** Intergenerational religious education begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together. In-common experiences of generations are usually less verbal and more observatory than in the other three elements. In this pattern there is something “out there” or “over there” for us to see or do, something that equalizes the ages. Thus, at the same time and place and in a similar manner, different-aged people listen to music or sing, make an art project, watch a video, hear a story, participate in a ritual, pray together, and so on. In-common experiences for the most part remain at what Jean Piaget calls the “concrete operational” level, where all can learn together.

Shared experiences are absolutely critical for building IGRE. They are the stuff by which other patterns of relationships are built. To the point, Fred Rogers, of television’s *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, makes the case for what is prescribed here when he asks rhetorically, “How can older and younger people respond to each other if they have no experiences together?”

- **Parallel Learning.** Parallel learning is the second major IG relational pattern. With it the generations are separated in order to work on the same topic or project, but in different ways at a “best fit” development, interest, or skill level. Some of the developmental levels we are talking about are cognitive, psychological, physical, moral,

valuational, and so on—all the ways that make people different and special.

Though age groups may be separated, each one is focusing on the same learning task or topic. One of the major criticisms of IGRE is “the tendency to view equality or persons across the age spectrum with uniformity of experience,” with that experience only from the vantage point of the child. By engaging in parallel learning, however, this IGRE shortcoming is avoided.

- **Contributive-Occasions.** The third pattern of learning is that of contributive-occasions. These occasions are often the step after parallel learning. What is involved is a coming together of different age groups or classes for the purpose of sharing what has been learned or created previously. The joining or rejoining becomes a contributive-occasion where separated pieces to a whole are added together for everyone’s benefit.

Contributive-occasions are more participatory than the other three patterns. If the contributions come from a previous period of parallel learning, the last part of that parallel learning would have been concerned with how to communicate acquired insights or behaviors to other age groups. By engaging “in mutual contribution” to one another, IG learners discover that the educational whole is great than the sum of its parts.

- **Interactive Sharing.** Interactive sharing is the fourth major pattern in IGRE relationships. It is a distinctive style or way of learning. Here persons are provided with an opportunity for interpersonal exchange, which may involve experiences or thoughts or feelings or actions. At its best, interactive sharing facilitates a “crossing over” to hear and respond to another’s perspective.

In an ideal IGRE program or event, all four of the patterns of relationships will be enacted. People come together and have an in-common experience. Then they break to separately investigate the common subject at a level appropriate for their highest learning abilities. They come back together to present their insights and work in a shared program. Finally, different generations interact with one another, giving and receiving in the exchanges. In the latter case the participants are sharing, reflecting, debating, and

dreaming from the side of the other but for their own edification. (White, 26-30)

With my colleagues at the Center for Ministry Development (Mariette Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber), we developed a model of intergenerational learning based on White’s four patterns, which is being used by Catholic parishes in the Generations of Faith Project and in the intergenerational sessions for the *People of Faith* series (Harcourt Religion). In this model IG is designed around a four movement learning process.

Welcome, community building and opening prayer

1. **An All-Ages Learning Experience** for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
2. **In-Depth Learning Experiences** that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format:* learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format:* learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format:* learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
3. **An All-Ages Contributive Learning Experience** in which each generation teaches the other generations.
4. **Reflection** on the learning experience and interactive group sharing.

Closing prayer

Best Practices in Lifelong Faith Formation

As we have noted there is very little research on intergenerational faith formation. The best practice findings rely primarily on the *Generations of Faith Research Study* conducted in the Spring of 2005 by the Center for Ministry Development. The Center staff conducted a qualitative research study, using focus groups and in-depth interviews, of almost 100 parishes in eight dioceses across the U.S. who were participating in the Generations of Faith Project. Each parish in the study was conducting

intergenerational learning programs monthly or seasonally.

The findings from this study were then used to develop a quantitative survey involving over 400 parishes across the U.S. and Canada who were participating in the Generations of Faith Project. (A summary report of the findings is available online at www.lifelongfaith.com.)

Best Practice I. Intergenerational faith formation strengthens and creates new relationships and increases participation in church life.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* (qualitative and quantitative research) found that the practice of intergenerational learning promotes relationship building and participation in church life. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational relationships are created as people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together.
- Intergenerational learning strengthens the faith community through relationship building and participation in church life; people take time to talk and share with each other.
- Participation in intergenerational learning leads to greater involvement in church life, including Sunday liturgy, church events, and church ministries.

The survey of 434 Catholic parishes asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Families benefit from intergenerational learning through opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families are growing in ways that they share faith.	4.06
Intergenerational learning strengthens the parish community through relationship building and participation in parish life; people take time to talk and share with each other.	4.0
Our parish is reaching new audiences, such as adults and whole families, through intergenerational learning.	3.76
Intergenerational relationships are created through intergenerational learning, as people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together.	3.73

Participation in GOF learning programs leads to greater involvement of participants in parish life, including Sunday Mass, sacraments, service projects, and in the ministries of the parish.	3.69
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Holly Catterton Allen's research on an intergenerational small group model reinforces this finding. She writes,

Children who regularly participate in IG small groups have special opportunities for spiritual development. In a sense, they gain an extended family that is otherwise unavailable to most children today; they gain spiritual "aunts" and "uncles," "grandparents," and "cousins." They also see other role models for parenting. More importantly they participate in the spiritual lives of their parents. They learn the spiritual disciplines by watching and doing. They learn to share as they see their parents and others share their lives. They see others minister to one another and they begin to minister. They see their parents and others pray for concerns in their lives and they too begin to pray. (Allen, 270)

James White also reinforces this finding when he reports on the reflections of leaders from a church that had conducted intergenerational learning for ten years. He writes,

With the group of IG educators at All Saints, whom I called together for a ten-year evaluation, there was a strong sense among these people that the *church had indeed become more of a community with wholeness*. Several felt the IG programs over the years had "shot the magic bullet" which made us one across the ages. (White, 239)

The *Effective Christian Education Study* (*The Teaching Church*, 1993) also found that intergenerational contact helps young people grow in their faith. The study suggests several reasons for this:

- First, contact with older adults is more likely to give young people mentors with mature faith. This maturity can have a positive influence on teenagers' growth in faith.
- Second, it builds for young people a sense of community in the congregation. As young people get to know people of all ages, they feel more comfortable in the church and more like part of the family of God.

- Third, intergenerational contact can build mutual respect among the generations. As older adults get to know the youth, they will be less suspicious about innovations in the youth program. And as a result, the congregation as a whole is more likely to support youth education.
- Finally, intergenerational education is another way to build shared experiences for youth and parents, which can open doors for formal and informal faith conversations at home. Discovering ways to make intergenerational interaction beneficial for all generations can have a significant impact on young people's faith maturity, as well as on the life of the church (Roehlkepartain 1993, 145-46).

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* provides further insights on Best Practice 1 through the quotes of church leaders (pastors, religious education coordinators, youth ministry coordinators, et al.) involved in the qualitative study.

Relationship Building

I found in intergenerational learning a chance to find belonging, a sense of community, a sense of value and worth in a way that I can contribute to, and then just getting to know people of all ages in my community. As a newcomer it has been a wonderful experience

The older couples, they just talk to the kids. It's like a grandparent taking them on because their own grandparents aren't close. So it's very good to see that everybody is involved. Everybody feels comfortable being involved.

One of the changes I saw from the program is the relationship that now even the youngest children in this parish have with our senior citizens, which they did not have before because they were all in their isolated groups. I think this shows great respect for who our elders are, and that's why our first program was on the role of the elders.

We are so pleased to see all ages sitting and eating and conversing with one another. Parishioners who have never met are forging friendships and looking forward to seeing each other the following month. Confirmation students are doing most of their service hours during the sessions, and the parishioners notice it. Adults seem to really be interested in the sessions.

It's faith sharing. It's building community. It's bringing people together. It's opening doors. And they don't sit there in silence. They chatter all the time and they're happy to be there.

It's been a great way for our parish family to grow closer together by learning from each other. The adults seem to enjoy the interaction with the young people in our parish. It's hard to get everyone to break away from the meal segment to start the program! They are really enjoying just being together, and that is a gift.

The biggest thing that I see is community, community, community. You can see Church happening within the group, and you can see a mentoring that is unbelievable.

I see more people talking to each other after Mass or spending time together. As staff, we recognize people and they recognize us. It's just building relationships and community within a parish.

Involvement in Church Life

There has been an increase in liturgical attendance, and more families are volunteering to do faith formation together. The marginalized in the parish feel invited, and watching them grow has been wonderful.

More people are coming to intergenerational learning who I haven't seen at Mass before. They're participating more and seeing faith as more than just Sunday morning Mass.

We have seen such an increase in participation at church events. An unbelievable number of people came to participate in the Holy Thursday service, and that carried through to this year. Extremely well-attended.

Best Practice 2. Intergenerational faith formation engages all ages and the whole family in learning together.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* found that intergenerational learning did, in fact, bring together people of all ages, including families, for learning. In particular many churches found that parents and adults began participating in faith formation because of intergenerational learning. Specifically the study found:

- There is involvement of all ages and generations in learning together: parents and children, teens, young adults, adults, older adults, and whole families.
- Intergenerational learning addresses a hunger that adults have to learn more about their faith and fill in the gaps in their formation. More middle-age and older adults are participating in faith formation.
- Families enjoy opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families are growing in the ways that they share faith. Parents are

participating in a learning program with their children, often for the first time, and are finding benefits in learning together as a family.

The survey asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Families benefit from intergenerational learning through opportunities to pray, learn, and be together. Families are growing in ways that they share faith.	4.06
Intergenerational learning addresses a hunger that adults have to learn more about their faith.	3.97
Families are growing in faith and developing ways to share their faith through intergenerational learning.	3.92
Our parish is reaching new audiences, such as adults and whole families, through intergenerational learning.	3.76
There has been an increase in the number of adults participating in faith formation because of intergenerational learning.	3.57

Quotes from church leaders involved in the *Generations of Faith Research Study* provide further insight into Best Practice 2.

All Ages

I see a great strength as bringing all age groups together to learn about their faith. That's been a real change for our people, and they are responding.

It's really helped me to appreciate the wisdom of our seniors, the energy and faithfulness and spirit of our children, the hunger of our parents, and the questioning of our young adults. We bring all that together in a community setting, and allow them to minister to each other and to help each other grow, and then bring it home with them.

Adult Involvement

I think the biggest change is that we have adults who are excited to come and learn and grow in their faith. And not just a few, but we have many adults who didn't have the opportunity before to participate and grow in their faith. That's very exciting.

We try to challenge adults—to stretch them a bit, even with the simplest things they may be ignorant of. There is a vast need for religious formation and education out there.

I think there's just a hunger for spirituality out there. I think people are looking for something and we're filling in that gap.

Family Involvement

What gives me hope is that I see families being transformed, that we're empowering people to talk about their faith in a whole different way.

For the families who have participated, their lives have changed: their relationship with one another, their relationship with God, and their relationship with the church—total transformation.

I think another big change has been that we've empowered parents to pass on the faith to their children. We've done that in a way in which we are teaching them about their faith and they're learning, so that when they get into the car and drive home they can share the topic with their kids. They know what they are talking about and they feel empowered because they're able to do what they promised at Baptism; that is, to pass their faith on to the children.

With the parents there, the whole family can participate and have something to talk about based on the subject presented at the learning session.

This is what we've been looking for: bringing families together to do this and to be involved together instead of fracturing them into different components.

I know one of the things they love about it is that they get to do this as a family. They say "I liked being together with my family."

Best Practice 3. Intergenerational faith formation creates a conducive environment for all ages to learn, and utilizes a variety of learning activities to address the diversity of learning styles and developmental needs.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* found that intergenerational learning creates a learning environment—one of warmth, trust, acceptance, and care—conducive to all ages, that promotes group participation, activities, and discussion. Intergenerational learning programs incorporate a variety of experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive learning experiences to foster all-ages learning, as well address the developmental needs and abilities of the different age groups. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational learning creates an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.
- Intergenerational learning engages the participants in a variety of learning activities that are experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive. Faith sharing and personal experience are an important element of intergenerational learning.
- Intergenerational learning is exciting; the enthusiasm, joy, and energy are attractive and contagious.

The Generations of Faith survey asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Intergenerational learning engages participants in a variety of learning activities that are experiential, multi-sensory, interactive, and involve faith sharing.	4.26
Intergenerational learning provides an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.	3.98

The survey also asked parish leaders to rate the effectiveness of intergenerational learning using a rating from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

How would <u>adults</u> rate the overall quality and experience of the intergenerational learning programs?	3.95
How would <u>families with children</u> rate the overall quality and experience of the intergenerational learning programs?	3.84
How would <u>middle school and high school youth</u> rate the overall quality and experience of intergenerational learning programs?	3.06

The *Effective Christian Education Study* found that, in order for intergenerational learning to be effective, it must allow for differences in development and abilities. Experiential learning is often most appropriate since it begins with a shared experience in which all can participate. (Roehlkepartain 1993, 146)

Allan G. Harkness' (1998) review of the impact of intergenerational learning reinforces this finding when he writes about the factors that enhance intergenerational involvement. People of different

ages and temperaments learn best in a variety of ways, and identifies factors that encourage greater enjoyment and involvement by people of all ages in IG events:

- **Build in variety:** Plan for a variety of experiences to provide a means for both exploring and responding. Variety may be in the range of teaching/learning experiences used, whether people respond together or individually, the choice of music, how the Bible is used, a balance of silence and sound, cognitive and affective focus, and so on.
- **Encourage participation:** The active involvement of all participants is important, while at the same time ensuring that people are not coerced into situations in which they feel too high a level of discomfort. There will need to be a balance between activities based on cognitive/abstract thought processes on one hand and affective/"concrete" processes on the other. Plan also throughout each program for meaningful, nonthreatening interaction between people across the generational barriers. A key to enjoyable participation is providing a balance of activities, for while movement and action are especially important for some age groups, and stillness and quiet reflection provide significant learning environments for others, there is potential for all to learn by drawing on the strengths of approaches they are less familiar with.
- **Utilize as many of the five senses as possible:** Each of our senses can provide a means of experiencing the world and so encourage "whole of life" learning. Children do this with intuitive ease, but older people can be helped to reverse their conditioning and rediscover that learning consistent with the quality of life we seek to bring to spiritual growth can be enhanced if more than one of the senses is engaged; this process is often easier in a relaxed intergenerational context. Thus sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell can all be used to good effect. (Harkness 1998, 443-444)

Intergenerational learning incorporates a variety of methods and approaches that actively engage people in the learning process and respond to their different learning styles. Specifically, intergenerational learning programs:

- Incorporate real-life application of learning by engaging people in the life of the community and helping people apply their learning to daily living as Christians. During the sessions participants experience new ways to practice their faith that promote the transfer of learning from the session to their daily lives as individuals and families.
- Utilize participants' experience and prior knowledge. Participants bring relevant religious knowledge and experiences to the session. Participants need the opportunity to build on their knowledge, as well as to learn from each other.
- Respect the variety of learning styles among the participants with a diversity of learning experiences, recognizing that some people learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences, some through reflective observation, some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts, and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices. (For further information see: *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, by David Kolb. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984.)
- Recognize the multiple intelligences (linguistic, spatial, musical, logical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist) among the participants, and design learning methods and activities that address the variety of intelligences in the group. (For further information see the work of Howard Gardner and the book *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Many Intelligences*, revised edition, by Thomas Armstrong. New York: Plume Books, 1999.)

Quotes from church leaders involved in the *Generations of Faith Research Study* provide further insight into Best Practice 3.

Environment

I think adults are seeing that it's OK to continue their learning. It's OK not to know everything. This is a safe environment for them to come in and share and listen. I think this environment has made it more welcoming and comfortable for some people to continue exploring their faith.

One by one they came up and they just shared the faith in their lives in an amazing way. They just got it! That there was a sharing, there was a trust; when we broke, people weren't talking about the weather, they were talking about faith.

One of the reasons I love intergenerational learning is because it's a very non-threatening environment in which to get updated, with the result that people begin sharing faith more in their homes.

When the adults met together the sharing was phenomenal. It was people, one-on-one, just opening up and really sharing. They also expressed a desire for more.

Learning

I've seen a change in adults, from simply memorizing their faith to understanding their faith. They have a deep desire to understand more than just what is in the catechism, and they want to know "Why?": "Why are we doing this?" "Why is this so important to us?" I think people are grasping the fact that it's OK to question their faith—that, I believe, is the key to understanding it. And that's one of the things I reiterate constantly: it's all right to question.

It's experiential. People are doing something: they're singing, they're praying, they're watching an event. It's happening in their midst, around them; it's not all up on the stage. It's very interactive.

We had four people get up and give witness to their experience of having celebrated the sacrament. It was powerful and amazing, just four regular people of different generations.

It was more exciting that just being in the regular classroom, and I think the kids are a little more excited with the activities and the skits and some of the fun things we do in the beginning.

For me, it's the excitement and the energy of the people that come to intergenerational learning and the interaction we have with them. I look forward to that energy and enthusiasm.

You really experience enthusiasm that's significantly noticeable, a real positive atmosphere that was contagious, a real excitement; people are charged. I think they feel really excited about it.

Best Practice 4. Intergenerational faith formation requires a diversity of leaders who embrace a collaborative and empowering style of leadership.

The *Generations of Faith Research Study* found that the practice of intergenerational learning requires a *collaborative* and *empowering* style of leadership. This style of leadership needs to be exercised not just by the pastor or religious education coordinator but also by the entire leadership team for intergenerational learning. Teamwork and collaboration are essential for effective planning and implementation of intergenerational learning. Specifically the study found:

- Intergenerational learning requires a coordinator who fully understands the vision and can work with others to implement it.
- Intergenerational learning requires a team approach, leadership teams with a shared vision for implementation and that practice teamwork and collaboration.
- Intergenerational learning requires committed volunteer leaders who are engaged in a variety of roles in lifelong faith formation: planning, teaching, organizing, and supporting.
- Intergenerational learning requires volunteer leaders who are empowered and trusted to take responsibility for key aspects of the implementation of lifelong faith formation.
- Through their participation as leaders in intergenerational learning, leaders feel closer to God, and grow in their knowledge of the faith and their confidence in sharing it with others.

The intergenerational learning team includes people who are directly involved in the organization and facilitation of intergenerational learning, and people who will be involved in administrative and support roles. A typical intergenerational learning program will involve a variety of leaders, including:

1. An intergenerational program facilitator
2. Teachers/facilitators for age-appropriate learning groups: families with children or children only, adolescents, young adults, and adults
3. Table group facilitators for age-appropriate learning groups, where necessary
4. Assistants to help with activities
5. Prayer leaders for opening and closing prayer
6. Music leader and/or music team for prayer and activities
7. Hospitality team

8. Set-up and clean-up team
9. Food preparation team
10. Creative arts people
11. Promotion and registration staff

The survey asked parish leaders to rate the impact of intergenerational learning by indicating the parish's degree of agreement with each statement (rating: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Through their involvement in intergenerational learning, volunteer leaders grow in their knowledge of the faith and their sharing it with others.	4.21
Leadership teams share a common vision for intergenerational learning and its implementation in the parish.	4.17
Through their involvement in intergenerational learning, volunteer leaders feel closer to God.	3.92

The survey also asked parish leaders to rate the effectiveness of intergenerational learning using a rating from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

How would you rate the quality of collaboration and teamwork among the GOF leadership teams?	3.87
How would you rate your parish's efforts in equipping (training, resources) leaders for their roles in GOF and trusting them to take responsibility for GOF?	3.37
How your rate your parish's efforts in developing a variety of leaders necessary for the effective implementation of GOF?	3.10

Quotes from church leaders involved in the *Generations of Faith Research Study* provide further insight into Best Practice 4.

Coordinator

We were fortunate to have a person who spearheaded the whole thing, who coordinated everything, a person who had the vision, understood the process and what was involved, and was able to pull people together, keep them on track, and keep it moving forward. I think that was a great, great plus.

I have to say a big part of the success of the program has been the coordinator's leadership and her understanding of the curriculum. She was always there. It seemed like her whole ten years of experience kind of built her up for this, so it was really, really, helpful.

The coordinator has a lot of competency and experience. She's very personable. She deals with people first. She

has a theological background; it's nice to have someone oversee things who has a good spirit about it.

Teamwork

It's been a wonderful affirmation for me personally and professionally of collaborative ministry, and how alive and powerful that can be.

One of the things that certainly impressed me was the fact that we had a team that came together to plan for the event and the celebration. Some of these people would not have ever seen themselves as being creative or having any good ideas. All of a sudden around a table they began to think together, and we came up with some really nice ideas. There was a real spirited collaboration happening.

Committed Volunteer Leaders

I think there's a real sense of teamwork and confidence in one another.

We're getting more volunteers, people stepping forward to help. We have volunteers from the edges stepping in, people who've never offered to help. It's a different spirit than before.

I don't think we could have thought about doing this process if we weren't aware of the quality of people we have. This parish is blessed in having many talented and eager people who have had some very positive experiences and the gift of being able to share; this was there beforehand. We have some great sources to draw from.

Leaders Growing Spiritually

God is here when these people are here. You can feel his presence. It's beautiful being involved with it, and very rewarding.

I think the Holy Spirit has been a part of our parish and been involved in this program; that is really what has made it happen.

It keeps me fresh, it invigorates me, it gives me life. I love it.

It's probably helped me be stronger in my faith. I've gained a lot more knowledge about Catholicism.

I think it pushes you to develop a deeper understanding of things. When I gave a presentation, I looked at the materials and used them, but I wanted more. I wanted to give more because I wanted them to understand more.

My faith has just blossomed.

Conclusion

Intergenerational learning provides a new model of learning that produces important benefits for individuals, families, and the whole community. There is a need for more research into the best practices in intergenerational learning. This research needs to happen together with new congregational initiatives in intergenerational learning, and new resources to support congregations. There is a foundation to build upon.

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Practice Ideas

Designing Intergenerational Faith Formation

Welcoming Participants

Meal

Depending on the time of day, a meal begins the program. Use the meal time to introduce people into the theme of the learning program, build community among the participants, do table activities (especially for children) or model at-home practices, such as prayer or a table ritual.

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

Welcome people to the program, provide an overview, and lead the opening prayer service.

Part 2. All-Ages Learning Experience

Conduct an All-Ages Learning Experience to introduce the whole assembly to the theme/content of the program. Select or design learning activities that will engage all ages. Examples of all-ages learning activities include:

- ritual or extended prayer service
- dramatic presentation of a Scripture passage or real life story
- storytelling or retelling a Scripture passage with contemporary examples
- witness presentations by church members (of all ages)
- learning games or TV game show formats
- film or media presentation using art/photos and music
- table group activity and discussion in intergenerational, family and/or age-groups.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

Conduct learning activities that explore the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and developed in one of three formats.

1. **Whole Group Format:** learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room in one of two ways:
 - age-specific groupings
 - intergenerational groupings
2. **Learning Activity Center Format:** learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers targeted to specific age groups, or organized by family and/or all age:
 - age-specific learning centers
 - family-centered learning centers
 - intergenerational learning centers
3. **Age Group Format:** learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages:
 - pre-school children or parents with young children (ages 3-5)
 - parents with children (grades 1-5)
 - young adolescents (middle school)
 - older adolescents (high school)
 - young adults
 - adults

Part 4. All-Ages Contributive Learning

(Sharing Reflections and Home Application)

Determine what each participants will bring back from their In-Depth Learning Experience to share/teach the whole assembly or their small group. This can include reports from each age group, presentation of a project or skit, small group sharing, and so on.

After the presentations, engage small groups in sharing reflections on the learning experience.

Explain the home resources that will extend the learning from the session and demonstrate how people can use them in their daily lives.

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Practice Ideas

Examples: Intergenerational Programs on Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, Son of God Intergenerational Program

(From “Jesus, Son of God” in *Professing Our Faith*,
Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion, 2006)

Theme: Divinity of Christ
Format: Intergenerational Activity Centers

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Who Do You Say That I Am?

- Conduct the learning activity to help participants name who Jesus is for them.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience: Experiencing the Son of God through Gospel Stories

1. The focus of the activity centers is to discover the qualities of God by exploring a variety of Gospel stories that present the words and actions of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. Each learning activity center provides an interactive and experiential way for people to explore one aspect of Jesus’ divinity through Gospel stories.
3. Activity centers will engage participants in presentations, discussions, and activities. Several centers include dramatic presentations, while others engage participants in creative arts or prayer or a ritual activity. One center includes a film presentation. There is even one that includes eating. If the children get tired, there is a storytelling center just for them.
4. Each center is staffed by a team who guides participants through the learning activities.
5. Each center is designed for all ages, participants can select the centers that interest them the most. Families with children stay together.

Activity Centers

1. Jesus is Born (Infancy Narratives)
2. Jesus is God’s Beloved Son (Baptism of the Lord and Transfiguration)
3. Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God
4. Jesus Heals People
5. Jesus Forgives Sin
6. Jesus Raises People from the Dead
7. Jesus Feeds People
8. Stories of Jesus (Storytelling Center)

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Jesus Christ, Death and Resurrection Intergenerational Program

(From “Jesus Christ, Death and Resurrection” in
Professing Our Faith, Orlando: Harcourt Religion, 2006)

Theme: Paschal Mystery
Format: Whole Group

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

- People are organized into intergenerational table groups for the whole program

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Triduum Quiz

- Test everyone’s knowledge of the Triduum through an activity that matches symbols, ritual actions, and events from the Lectionary readings with the correct Triduum liturgy.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

A. Guided Tour of Holy Thursday

- Present the Gospel story of the Last Supper from Matthew, Mark, or Luke in word, drama, and/or visuals (artwork or the film, *Jesus of Nazareth*).
- Guide people in reflecting on the story. Provide commentary on the reading.
- Celebrate a table ritual modeled on the Last Supper.
- Present the Gospel story of the Last Supper from John in word, drama, and/or visuals.
- Guide people in reflecting on the story. Provide commentary on the reading.
- Celebrate a table ritual modeled on the washing of feet with people washing each other’s hands.

B. Guided Tour of Good Friday

- Present Gospel excerpts of the Passion of Christ in word, drama, and/or visuals.
- Guide people in reflecting on the Passion; provide commentary.
- Explain intercessory prayer and pray together intercessions modeled on the Good Friday liturgy.

- Explain the tradition of the veneration of the cross and process with the cross in the meeting room while people pray and sing.
- Guide people in making their own cross for their home.

C. Guided Tour of the Easter Vigil

- Provide a brief overview of the major elements of the Easter Vigil liturgy.
- Celebrate a Service of Light modeled on the Easter Vigil. Use the prayers from the Easter Vigil liturgy. Lead the group through the ritual and explanation of the symbols on the Easter Candle. Light individual candles and sing an appropriate song.
- Present selected Lectionary readings with accompanying prayers from the Easter Vigil liturgy, for example: Genesis 1:1—2:2, Exodus 14:15—15:1 (consider showing the crossing of the Red Sea scene from *The Prince of Egypt*), Romans 6:3-11, and the Gospel reading from the current liturgical year in word, drama, dramatic reading with visuals, or film (*Jesus of Nazareth*).
- Introduce the sacrament of Baptism as central to the Easter Vigil liturgy and to how your church initiates new members every Easter. Guide people through the initiation rite: pray a short version of the Litany of the Saints, bless the bottles of water at each table, explain the celebration of Baptism and Confirmation, renew the baptismal profession of faith, sprinkle the people with holy water, and sing an appropriate song.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Jesus Christ, Resurrection & New Life Intergenerational Program

("New Life in Christ" in *Following Jesus*, Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion, 2005)

Theme: New Life in Christ
Format: Age Group

Part I. Gathering

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Scenes from the Easter Season—Prayer Experience

- Lead a prayer service focusing on the impact of the resurrection on the disciples and their conversion and commitment to Jesus. The prayer service incorporates scenes from the

Easter Season Lectionary using a freeze-frame approach to dramatizing the scenes. Create the props for each scene and ask the actors to dress for their parts in the stories. For each Gospel reading: present the freeze-action, read the Gospel, and respond in prayer.

- Scene 1. Empty Tomb: Matthew 28:1-10
- Scene 2. Closed Doors: John 20:19-31
- Scene 3. Eating: John 21:9-17, 19
- Scene 4. Commissioning: Matthew 28:16-20

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

• Families with Children

Part 1. Read and discuss each of the four Easter Gospel stories.

Part 2. Create an Easter Banner with key Scripture verses from the Easter readings, Easter symbols, and ideas for living the Easter season.

Part 3. Decorate a Family Easter Candle for the table at home with symbols of the Easter season and short prayers for the family meal.

• Adolescents

Part 1. Adolescents explore the Gospel readings of the Easter Season and discuss theological reflections on the readings.

Part 2. Adolescents are engaged in one or more creative activities to bring the meaning of resurrection alive for them through a magazine story, a television report, a presentation, an advertisement, top ten list of reasons we know Jesus rose from the dead, and/or a debate on the importance of the resurrection.

Part 3. Learning activity on the Emmaus Story

• Adults

Part 1. Adults reflect on their own understanding of the resurrection, and explore and discuss Christian tradition and theological reflections on the significance of the resurrection for their faith.

Part 2. Adults explore the meaning of the Emmaus Story and use the story to reflect on their own relationship with Jesus.

Part 3. Adults develop ways they can live the Easter season in their lives.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

Part 5. Closing Prayer

Best Practices Resources

Intergenerational Faith Formation



Intergenerational Faith Formation—All Ages Learning Together (NEW!)

Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008)

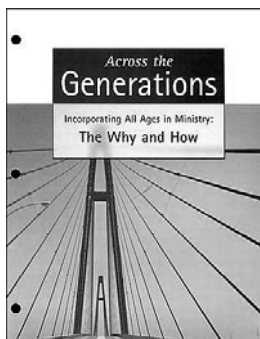
Written by the family and intergenerational faith formation team at the Center for Ministry Development, *Intergenerational Faith Formation* addresses the context and urgency for effective faith formation in the Church today, and in light of key principles for effective learning, makes a compelling case for intergenerational learning as one of the ways in which people can best learn and grow in faith. The book describes the necessary elements for multigenerational learning, and explores some of the practices of intergenerational faith formation in the church today.



Intergenerational Religious Education

James W. White (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988) [\$24.94]

This is classic work on intergenerational faith formation. It is the most comprehensive, well-researched, and most inclusive of any book on intergenerational religious education (IGRE) published to date. It includes workable models, solid theoretical foundations, and concrete practical prescriptions for effective inter-age religious and community living and learning in the faith community. It includes a variety of viewpoints, models, programs, and methods of IGRE. The spirit of this book resonates so well with the direction of faith formation today: the whole faith community together in which persons of different age groups work interactively and productively to help each other grow religiously



Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry Resource Manual with CD (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001) [\$29.99]

Across the Generations integrates foundational information, practical “how to” advice, and proven plans and programs that you can use in cross-generational ministry. The first three chapters provide the foundations, while the next ten chapters provide practical ways to do cross-generational ministry—service, worship, learning, summer ministries, retreat and camping ministries, support ministry at home, drama, and media. Contributors include experts in cross-generational ministry. The CD contains reproducible program formats, planning tools, and guides for developing your own cross generational programs.

Recommended Web Sites

- www.generationsoffaith.org – intergenerational programs and home activities (Center for Ministry Development)
- www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org – milestones ministry and family activities
- www.faithink.com – GIFT intergenerational programs and family activities (Faith Inkubators)

