

# Re-Generating our Faith Communities

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The focus of my talk this morning is upon the place and importance of cross-generational interaction and ministry in the life of the Christian congregation. It seems strange to have to do so. After all, I am upholding something which is hardly novel. It was an assumed part of Christian community for most of the church's history. And perhaps that is the problem. When something is assumed or taken for granted, then we are most vulnerable to losing it – and because we have assumed it, we won't realise its significance until it is gone.

In thinking back on my personal journey as a Christian public leader, I am reminded of Jesus' healing of the blind man of Bethsaida, as recorded in Mark 8. The man received the gift of sight in stages. My passion in ministry has been the faith nurture of children and young people. I began in youth ministry focussing on individuals. Then gradually I came to realise the power and significance of the family system for forming faith in youth and children. I began to focus then on children, youth *and families*. Then I came to realise that, in order to fulfil its calling to nurture faith, the Christian family and its members need support from and vital engagement with the cross-generational community of faith. I have grown to think of children, youth, families *and generations together*. That is the church God has given us – individuals, families and generations – all together. Adopted into God's family through baptism, we are called to explore and realise the connections we have with one another through the water and the word. God has given us to each other – as individuals, families and generations – for the purposes of mutual learning, growth, support and encouragement. His design is that we rub shoulders with each other – young and old, single or married, family or familyless – for as we do, He, who is alive in each of us, “rubs off” on us.

The theme of this Leader's Day is “Generations in faith together” – GIFT for short. The image of gift is a helpful one. What we will be seeking to do today is open up and explore with one another the gift of cross-generational community, recognising that is God-given and full of his blessings and wonders.

In my presentation today I will use both terms *intergenerational* and *cross-generational*. “Intergenerational” means, of course: *between or among generations*. It is a word that comes from the world at large and refers to any involvement between persons from different generations. When I use it, I do so in that general sense. But when I speak of generational interaction within the church, I prefer to use the word *cross-generational*. In the Christian church, the cross makes all the difference. It is in the light of the cross that we accept and embrace one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of age or life stage. It is in the light of the cross that we become willing to go beyond generational differences to celebrate the unity we have in Christ. It is in the light of the cross that we expect to see Christ in one another, and receive his ministry through one another – seniors from children, marrieds from singles, youth from children, and so on, and so on. In Christ our differences become opportunities to learn from and serve one another. In Christ we are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:22)!

## **Generations in Modern Society**

For centuries, intergenerational families and communities were the norm. Parents, children and grandparents lived in close proximity and gave support and counsel to each other. Grandparents shared their memories and experiences; parents provided economic, emotional and moral support; and

children offered their energy and enthusiasm, as at least three generations participated together in family and community life. But in modern times these familial networks, which once knit people together into close networks of sharing and learning, have been disrupted by a range of economic and social forces. Moreover, generations in the wider society have become more and more segregated from each other.

- It is rare for persons of more than two generations to share the same household.
- Extended family members – uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins – often live far away from the family unit.
- From an early age, children spend large amounts of time in peer settings for childcare and education, with limited interaction with adults.
- In many families, both parents work outside of the home, limiting the time that is spent with children and young people.
- Increasing numbers of families rarely share meals together.
- The physical environment of the modern home separates generations from each other.
- Individualised entertainment options diminish intergenerational communication.

In our rapidly changing world, there is no longer any guarantee that a child will be reared with the direct influence of two or more other generations. Nor is there any guarantee that a child or young person will grow up having meaningful, significant relationships with adults beyond his or immediate family. Nor is there any guarantee that a young adult or a person in the last third of life will have a significant relationship with a child.

Over thirty years ago, world-renowned psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (Professor of Human Development and Family Studies and of Psychology, Cornell University) made this prophetic observation:

The phenomenon of segregation by age and its consequences for human behavior and development pose problems of the greatest magnitude for the Western world. ... If the institutions of our society continue to remove parents, other adults and older youth from active participation in the lives of children, and if the resulting vacuum is filled by the age-segregated peer group, we can anticipate increased alienation, indifference, antagonism and violence on the part of the younger generation in all segments of our society. [1973:120-121]

By the late 1990s, the predictions of Professor Bronfenbrenner were dramatically realised in American society in the horrors of gang violence and school shootings. (Australia's claim to fame is one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world!) Patricia Hersch, author of *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*, observed the generational isolation of young people at very close quarters. For three years Hersch followed eight teens living in a Washington DC suburb - attending their classes, interviewing them extensively, shadowing them to events and on outings. What she found was that America's teens have fashioned a fully defined culture that adults neither see nor imagine - a culture of unprecedented freedom and baffling complexity, a culture with rules but no structure, values but no clear morality, codes but no consistency. Resigned to the attitude that adolescents simply live in 'a tribe apart', Hersch reported that adults have pulled away, relinquishing responsibility and supervision, allowing the unhealthy behaviors of teens to flourish. Ultimately, this rift between adults and teenagers robs both generations of meaningful connections.

The most stunning change for adolescents today is their aloneness. The adolescents of the nineties are more isolated and more unsupervised than other generations... The aloneness of today's adolescents changes the essential nature of the journey... Their dramatic separation from the adult world is rarely considered as a phenomenon in its own right, yet it may be the key to that life in the shadows. It creates a milieu for growing up that adults categorically cannot understand because their absence causes it. [1998:19-20, 23].

Hersch further describes the consequences separating young people from the adult world:

It is a problem not just for families but for communities when the generations get so separated. The effects go beyond issues of rules and discipline to the idea exchanges between generations that do not occur, the conversations not held, the guidance and role modeling not taking place, the wisdom and traditions no longer filtering down inevitably. How can kids imitate and learn from adults if they never talk to them? How can they form the connections to trust adult wisdom if there is inadequate contact? How can they decide what to accept and reject from the previous generation when exposure is limited? The generational threads that used to weave their way into the fabric of growing up are missing. [1998: 20].

**Discuss:**

- *Is generational segregation a reality in your community?*
- *If so, what effects do you see?*

## **Generations in the Church**

As a community of generations in a generationally-segregated society, the Christian congregation occupies a very special. James White observes that the local church is the ‘only institution in society with people of all ages in its constituency’ [1988:22]. Similarly, Margaret Sawin writes: ‘The church is the only agency in Western civilization which has all the members of the family as part of its clientele. It is the only organized group which reaches persons through the complete life cycle from birth to death.’ [1979:22].

The church has, of course, a long history of cross-generational life. Historically, Christians of all ages lived together in close-knit hamlets, villages, towns or city boroughs and came together for worship, fellowship and learning irrespective of age or life stage. There were no child or youth programs or women’s guilds. The faith nurture of individuals took place intergenerationally in extended families. In this, the church’s life reflected the wider cultural structure, in which people worked and socialised. Because the culture was intergenerational, nothing intentional had to be devised to connect persons of different generations: these relationships occurred naturally. It can perhaps be said then that the church has always been cross-generational but not always *intentionally* so.

Today, of course, the cultural situation is very different. While our congregations contain persons of different generations, we cannot assume that they have natural opportunities to relate to one another beyond the limited opportunities of Sunday morning. Furthermore, many congregations have actually exacerbated generational disconnections by age-segregated programming! On Sunday mornings, children and youth head off to their separate activities following worship (or sometimes even during worship!). Adults meet together for various purposes during the week – often with generational peers – with little focus given to connecting with other generations.

The cultural trend towards generational segregation has had a particularly significant influence on the way congregations have approached the task of nurturing faith in children and young people. Following the educational practices of modern schooling, children’s ministry has often been reduced to placing children in classes with other peers, with the focus upon receiving and processing content. The same pattern can be seen in confirmation instruction. As for youth ministry, youth leadership in many congregations has been the domain of older youth or young adults. It is very rare for church children or youth to have regular contact with people from all living generations through their age-specific programming.

The result of these patterns in church life has been to make congregations – communities where generational differences are to be transcended, not reinforced – actually part of the bigger problem.

They have also, as we shall later see, impacted on the capacity of the church and its families to grow together in faith and to pass on Christ to the next generation.

**Discuss:**

- *What intentional cross-generational interaction takes place in your congregation?*
- *Does your congregational programming further isolate generations or bring them together?*

## What is Cross-Generational Ministry?

At this point, it is important to define what cross-generational ministry actually is. It **takes place when persons from at least two generations intentionally gather for the same activity in the name of Christ, interacting with one another in ways which reflect mutual respect and appreciation.** It can be formal (e.g. an organised activity which brings generations together) or informal (e.g. persons of different generations sharing together over coffee). But it is more than mere mingling, and more than simply having two generations together in the one place.

## Why Cross-Generational Ministry?

### **For the Bible Tells Me So (1 Corinthians 12:12)**

#### Some Key Biblical Passages:

*1 Corinthians 12:12* The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

*Romans 12:4-5* Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

*1 John 2:12-14* I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

*Joel 2:16,28-29* Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. ... 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

*Psalms 145:4* One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.

*Psalms 78:1-4* What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us: We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

A cross-generational approach to the practice of faith in the Christian congregation has deep and biblical, theological roots. Cross-generational congregational life involves both living *within*, and living *out of* that which God has divinely created and gifted through Word and Sacrament. In the community of baptismal adoption that is the church, all are equal in Christ, irrespective of age, gender or life stage. 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 provide us with the image of the Christian *ecclesia* as the “body of Christ”, in which each person has been uniquely gifted for service within the body and to other parts of the body. Effective cross-generational programming can facilitate the mutual discovery and sharing of one another’s gifts – whatever our “age or stage” – for the building-up of the whole community of faith.

To be a Christian is, then, to be born and called into a cross-generational community of faith, in which all generations belong to one another and all have responsibility to and for one another. Cross-generational ministry is not necessary in order for us *be* God's people, but is a wondrous gift that God gives to his people in the form of each other. *Because* we are God's people we will seek to enjoy, appreciate and employ that gift to his glory!

### **To Provide an Extended “Family” for Persons of All Ages & Stages (Psalm 68:6).**

Effective cross-generational programming provides a means of ministering to those in the congregation who do not “fit” into age-specific programming, or do not have natural opportunities for cross-generational interaction (e.g. young adults, seniors, unmarrieds).

Family ministry is currently the “buzz word” in many of our congregations – and with good reason. Equipping and supporting families to passing on the Christian faith and to live faithfully with one another is vital for the church's mission and nurture. But a focus on families is not enough. A common criticism of family ministry is that it ignores, excludes or alienates those who are not part of families-with-children, or do not come from Christian homes. This criticism deserves to be taken seriously. As Eric Wallace (author of *Uniting Church and Home*) says: ‘If you don't include them, you're just creating a ‘family’ fragment with separate needs and separate relationships from the rest of the body’.

Cross-generational ministry addresses this problem in two ways. (I call it the “second level” of family ministry.) Firstly, it seeks to build the larger “family” of the congregation in which all are welcome, regardless of whether or not they have biological family connections within the congregation. Secondly, cross-generational ministry seeks to enable those without biological family connections to take up their calling to be “faith” brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers to others within the congregation. Young adults, seniors and unmarried persons can often serve as tremendous mentors and support persons to parents, youth and children.

### **To Grow in Mutual Understanding and Appreciation (Philippians 2:1-4)**

The modern societal segregation of generations has contributed to a sense of distrust or even fear between different generational groupings. Effective cross-generational congregational programming can assist in clarifying commonalities and differences, develop mutual respect and breakdown false and unhelpful stereotypes. It can also serve to equip congregational members with the skills and confidence for cross-age communication and service.

### **To Employ the “Living Curriculum” God has Given to Grow us in Faith (Philippians 4:9)**

Cross-generational involvement is, I contend, an important element for forming faith in children, youth and young adults - faith which leads into lifelong involvement in God's church. Let me explain why I believe this to be so.

Coming to faith, whether as an infant or later in life, is not the end but the beginning of a journey. A new faith is a fragile thing. It needs careful tending, or it is quickly extinguished. The parable of the Sower and the Seed (Matthew 13) speaks to us of that reality.

How does faith then grow and mature? As Lutherans, we say: “through Word and Sacrament”. That is, by hearing God’s Word and receiving his Sacraments. That then that takes us back to worship, where God’s Word is preached, where baptisms take place, and where the Lord’s Supper is distributed. Where to? Into thin air? No – into the ears, mouths, hearts and lives of people, who bear Christ out into daily life.

The Word, Sacraments and people go together! As Christians we are the “people of Word and Sacrament” – or dare I say, “sacramental people”. Through Word and Sacrament, God has taken up residence in us. Christ, who took up human flesh through the Incarnation, has made us his body here on earth. As we relate to one another, as we practice our faith in home, congregation and community, Christ gets loose in the world through us. Our relationships with others become an extension of God’s Word and Sacrament work: from Sunday worship through us to others.

The simple point I’m making is this: faith nurture is not just about getting people into Sunday school or confirmation classes, or even into Sunday worship. It’s about connecting people with others in the faith community, where they can see, hear and experience God at work amongst his “sacramental people”. Faith is not an abstract set of thoughts or beliefs, but something which is realised, practiced, lived and experienced in Christian community. The meaning of faith is developed in members of our congregations out of their history with one another, through their ongoing interactions with each other, and in relation to events that take place in their lives together.

George Koehler (author of *Learning Christ: A Guide for Intergenerational Education in the Church*) says this:

God has ordained for human beings a lifelong course of growth and development, from helpless, self-centered infancy to free, whole, caring, serving maturity, even “to the whole measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13) ... Yet we know people do not reach such maturity in a vacuum, nor certainly in a hostile or indifferent environment. A nurturing community is essential. This nurture does not happen through instruction, or urging one another to try harder, or passing out awards for achievement. It happens largely through life together - through eating, praying, crying, singing, praising, running, touching, holding, challenging, and serving with one another, through giving and receiving love. Nurture is rather intangible. You can’t plan it, though you can plan for it. And it is essential. It is the basic work of the family. It is perhaps our most fundamental work as a Christian fellowship. [1977: 12]

The passing on of faith is done in community, more so than in classrooms! Emil Brunner, the famous Swiss theologian argued that the church ‘took a wrong turning when it substituted the technique of the classroom for the technique of the community in religious education’ [quoted in Harkness 1998b:10]. Similarly, Anglican priest and theologian John Westerhoff III (author of *Will Our Children Have Faith?*) contends that:

the context or place of religious education needs to be changed from an emphasis on schooling to a community of faith. No longer is it helpful or wise to emphasize schools, teachers, pupils, curricula, classrooms, equipment and supplies. Instead we need to focus our attention on the radical nature and character of the church as a faith community. [1976:51]

The language, events and real-life implications of the gospel of Christ are imbedded in people’s lives through being shared, learned and practiced in Christian community. It is not sufficient to give our young people the Catechism; we must give them living, breathing answers to Luther’s catechetical question of “what is this?”. It is not sufficient to give our children bible verses to memorise; we must give them exposure to the word alive in mature persons of faith.

We live in age where whole congregations could be suffocated the weight of the curriculum materials produced each year for church use. We are tempted to think that the next curriculum resource will contain the silver bullet we are searching for. But the truth is that we already have all the curriculum

we need: our own faith communities. The fundamental curriculum for passing on faith is the faith community itself. In the words of Lutheran educator Norma Cook Everist:

A community cannot purchase curriculum. It can study, purchase, use and review curriculum *resources*, but curriculum is essentially a communal encounter with God, and with one another around the Word. [2002: 45]

As we worship, pray, learn, care, serve and fellowship together as the people of God, our children, young people and not-so-young people learn what it means to live as people of faith. Formal faith content is unlikely to have significant traction in the lives of children and youth without frequent exposure to the practice of faith together with other Christians.

“But what does this have to do with different generations?” you might ask. Couldn’t just one generation function as a faith community and that be sufficient? John Westerhoff says “no”. Meaningful interaction between at least three generations is necessary, he argues, for a healthy and complete experience of Christian community, for each generation offers something needed by the other generations.

True community necessitates the presence and interaction of three generations. Too often the church either lacks the third generation or 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 of 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 unique contribution, Christian community is difficult to maintain. [1976: 53]

Growing in Christian faith involves learning and observing those who have walked the path before us and learning from them how our faith is to be practiced, and how it relates to daily life. In the church we wish to see people of all ages “practicing” faith together: worshipping together, studying and meditating upon God’s word together, praying together, sharing together and serving together. It is not sufficient to give people the content of faith: we must help them discover what it means to *practice* faith day in and day out. That is best done by exposing them to others who can practice that faith alongside them, sharing their own experiences and learnings. Craig Dykstra argues that learning practices from others is necessary because they are by nature historical, communal, difficult, and counter-cultural.

Because these practices are *historical* practices, we cannot make them up ourselves. We must learn them from others who have learned them before us ... Because these practices are *communal* practices we must do them with others. This requires that we know what others are doing as they do them with us; and we can only know this, really, as they tell us and explain to us what they are doing. Because these practices are *difficult* practices and involve the integration of knowledge and skill with appropriate attitude and perspective, they require training under the discipline of others who have mastered them more than we. And because they are, at least to some degree, *in conflict with the practices we learn in the larger culture*, we cannot expect that they will be learned apart from the purposeful guidance of people who have learned the difference between Christian faith and civil religion, between tempting forms of idolatrous life and the oftentimes painful rigor of life open to the redemptive activity of God. [1985: 199]

By giving our children, youth, young adults and newcomers to the faith an experience of cross-generational community we give them the opportunity to learn how this faith really works out in practice in people’s lives over the long haul.

## To Give Children and Young People “Clouds of Witnesses” (Heb. 12:1).

The segregation of generations both in the wider culture and within the life of the church has robbed young people of perhaps the most valuable vehicle for the passing on of the Christian faith: mentoring relationships with persons of other generations. Eugene Roehlkepartain, director *Search Institute*, makes this point well:

The truths, traditions, and values of faith are passed from generation to generation not primarily through programs and curricula, but through meaningful relationships, dialogue, and mentoring across generations. Children, youth, and young adults can discover more about the faith and the life of the church by knowing and learning from mentors in faith than from any formal educational experience. Thus, building intergenerational connections may be more important for the future vitality of the church than any age-specific programming. [2003]

Exposure to a variety of significant adult Christian role models and mentors is, research indicates, a vital factor for the nurturing of faith in children and youth. Effective cross-generational programming can connect children and youth with non-parent adults who serve as authentic models of the importance and relevance of faith for the whole of life.

While Sunday school and the traditional youth group serve as good “holding pens” for the young people of Christian homes during childhood and adolescence, they are generally not sufficient to grow them toward lifelong participation in the church. Mark DeVries, author of *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, refers to age-specific programs of this type as “orphaning structures”. They offer a point of connection with younger people while they are young, but usually do little to integrate them with the wider church during these years, leaving them spiritual orphans at the end of these life periods. Contemporary churches, DeVries says have been ‘much more effective in providing young people with meaningful connections to the orphaning structure of the youth group than to the lifelong structure of the church’ [1994: 117].

*I am not* saying that there are no benefits to be derived from age-specific programs. In a separate group, children and young people have a lot of freedom to express their faith. They can be creative in drawing on their own culture. They can use their own language, technology and concepts. Such groups can also function well in mission to their peers because they are far more culturally relevant. But *I am* saying that it is important to recognise their limitations, and not expect them to achieve what is beyond their scope. If children and youth’s primary experience of the church is that of the age-specific program, they do not come to learn the language and practices of the adult community, and it can be very difficult for them to find a spiritual home as they leave adolescence behind. Moreover, age segregation tends to encourage the formation of little communities in which people enjoy each other and undergo rarefied and beautiful experiences, but do not contribute responsibly to the development of Christian community as a whole, nor receive the riches of that broader community life. Young people will not learn the nature of mature faith, the issues of mature faith, nor the practices of mature faith from their peers – nor, might I suggest, from those who are just a few years older than they.

It is vital, in my view, that we take a serious “reality check” on the intent and purposes of our child and youth ministry programming. We need to take the long view. Our aim should not be to usefully occupy or entertain the younger generations in the church today, but to lay the groundwork for their participation in the church *as adults*. This means making a primary goal of child and youth ministry their appropriate assimilation into the full life of the faith community. The measure of our success in child and youth ministry should not be the numbers attending our group today, but how many of these attendees will still be involved in the life of the church at age thirty.

One area of church life to which such thinking might be applied is confirmation ministry. How differently might we understand and approach confirmation ministry if we saw the following as some of our key desired outcomes:

- Each youth knowing and being known by 6 adults at a “faith talk” level.
- Each youth having on ongoing mentoring relationships with a person of an older generation.
- Each youth having a defined personal mission in the congregation.
- Each youth having a better relationship with their parents.
- The families of youth better understanding themselves as units of discipleship and better equipped to practice the faith together.

### **To Support Families as Units of Faith Formation (Luke 2:44)**

A basic unit of cross-generational faith sharing is, of course, the family-with-youth-or-children. Much has been said in recent times about importance of the ministry of the home, and I strongly commend that to you. But we are mistaken if we see the Christian family, in and of itself, as sufficiently outward-looking, resourceful or capable of growing children and youth as disciples of Christ. No family can or should carry that responsibility on its own – and God did not intend for it to do so. In the church, water is thicker than blood. When a person is baptised they are joined to a bigger water family that is, in God’s eyes, now their primary family. We need each other as the church – the water family – to support, nurture and strengthen us in issues of faith and life. The blood family is too small, too fragmented, and too isolated to raise disciples without the assistance of the larger water family. Each child or young person needs an extended “faith family” of significant adults that can offer external faith support to them beyond their home, and in so doing, aid that home in fulfilling its Christian calling. Cross-generational ministry can help families through facilitating and encouraging such mentoring relationships.

### **Think Perspective, not Program**

I want to stress with you that cross-generational ministry is, at its heart, not a new program but a perspective on ministry. It is a way of thinking that has the potential to reshape and **re-generate** the life, worship and witness of our congregations. Its about generations helping one another be who they are in Christ and developing the congregation as a rich, cross-age matrix.

Shortly, I will offer a range of program suggestions. I hesitate to do so, as I know what will most likely happens: some of you will feel compelled to pick one or more and rush off and do it – and then claim you are doing cross-generational ministry. Before the fact, I encourage you to slow down and allow the vision to permeate into your mind.

Let me suggest a few ways forward:

- a) Make a commitment to involve – to *really* involve - as many generations in as many aspects of existing church life as possible.
- b) Add generations, not programs! Look for ways to add a cross-generational aspect to existing programs.
- c) Ask: “Can each ministry of the congregation have at least 10% of its activities intentionally cross-generational?”

- d) Ask: “What are we already doing with one generational group that could become intergenerational?”

A Planning Resource: [www.nationalministries.org/resources/training\\_time/docs/103.doc](http://www.nationalministries.org/resources/training_time/docs/103.doc)

## **Examples of Cross-Generational Ministry**

1. Congregational small group life.
2. Cross-age mentoring (youth, confirmation).
3. Adopt-a-grandparent or Adopt-a-grandchild programs.
4. All Age Sunday School  
(check out [www.lutheransonline.com/familycrossfires](http://www.lutheransonline.com/familycrossfires))
5. Church-Year Workshops (e.g Lent, Holy Week, Advent, Pentecost)
6. Theme-based workshops  
(check out [www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners](http://www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners))
7. Cross-generational Ministry Teams for Youth and Children’s ministry
8. Cross-generational Retreats.
9. Cross-generational Mission and Service Projects.
10. Congregational Baptismal Sponsors
11. Add Cross-generational components to Sunday School and Confirmation.
12. Congregational Picnics or Sports Days
13. Think creatively! ...

### **A Case Study:**

When Ben Freudenburg joined the staff of Christ Church Lutheran (LCMS) in Phoenix, Arizona, he began examining ways he could “tweak” the existing ministries to introduce a cross-generational element. He discovered that every Advent season the church displayed larger-than-life Nativity characters made from wire framing and filled with Christmas lights. These figures were placed on the roof of a covered walkway (they placed the Wise Men to the east of the manger and moved them westward each evening). As they read the story and each character was mentioned, its rooftop figure was lit. Freudenburg asked himself, “How can I tweak this highly visible event to bring generations together?”. He invited the households of the church to bring their own Nativity scenes to the chapel. Prior to the lighting ceremony, the little manger sets were displayed for the whole community. They celebrated the variety and international diversity of the crèches. Following the lighting, Freudenburg and his wife led a devotion that included readings and exercises for families to do and discuss together. There was also a place for families to dress in costumes of the Nativity characters. While so adorned, they made photos and videos to send to distant grandmas and grandpas.

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