



Introduction

Remembering God's Story

O my people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
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.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.
They would not be like their forefathers—
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
whose hearts were not loyal to God,
whose spirits were not faithful to him.

—Psalm 78:1-8 NIV

New Life Church, where my family and I are members, is very different from the church in which I grew up and where I later worked. New Life has a membership of about 750 and counting. The membership of my home church when I was a kid was probably around 450; when I worked there as director of Christian education in the 1990s, it was down by a hundred or so. At New Life, it is not unusual for a children's ministry family event to draw three to four hundred people, the total membership of my childhood church when I was working there!

When it comes to size, my childhood church is not alone. The National Congregations Study (<http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/index.html>) conducted in 1998 and updated in 2006/2007 revealed that 56 percent of American churches have 500 or fewer regular attendees, including children; 23 percent of American churches have between 100 and 249 regular attendees, including children. The primary question I found myself facing in the 1990s is the same one that more than half of American churches are wrestling with now: *How do we build congregational community and address faith education needs for the whole church with shrinking age-grouped class sizes and volunteer pools?* Yet the deeper foundational question buried under immediate surface-level needs echoes the words of Psalm 78: *How do we continue God's story and pass it on to the next generation and the next and the next so that even our as-yet unborn children will be assured of being active participants in God's collective story, our story?*

The answers, I think, lie in returning to our roots. From the moment God created people, God also gave us families as the basic social structure of our lives. For good or bad, our first learning as children comes from those who raise us—our parents and our parents' parents, our siblings, aunts, uncles, and close family friends, all sharing knowledge and skills across generations. Scripture also calls us God's children, brothers and sisters of Christ, adopted members of the family of God. What better way to learn faith than to put God's story in the framework of shared family history and see the story come alive again and again, just as our Bible ancestors did!

Sharing God's Story

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is called the *Shema* (*shay'-mah*), or "the hear," in Judaism. I believe it provides the model for intergenerational programming. Filled with action words, the Shema gave God's people strategies for learning his word, strategies we can continue to utilize thousands of years later. God's story is the same, and the end goal is the same: connecting us to God. Why not draw on that same active learning paradigm that our Master Teacher created?

"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."
(NRSV, emphasis added)

Hear. Love. Keep. Recite. Talk. Bind. Fix. Write. Action! And action is at the heart of experiential education, which forms the framework for the intergenerational programs in this book. Experiential education is a teaching method and philosophy that involves learners in direct experience and intentional reflection in order to increase comprehension and understanding, develop skills, and shape values (The Association for Experiential Education, www.aee.org). There's an old Chinese proverb which says, "Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand." That's experiential education in a nutshell, and that's what this book's intergenerational programs seek to do . . . actively involve learners of all ages in connecting with the Word of God. Imagine how transformed the world would be if churches could teach God's people in a holistic and relevant manner so that they would continue to increase their knowledge of God, develop skills for living from a biblical worldview, and shape their values according to God's Word. Amen. Let it be! The goal, therefore, of the intergenerational programming in this book is that it will provide opportunities for such transformational experiences. Consider now the following benefits of intergenerational programming.

There's Something for Everyone

The intergenerational programming in this book reaches out to all learners by incorporating insights from Dr. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Very simply put, Dr. Gardner's research observes that there are seven intelligences:

1. linguistic-verbal (learning through words)
2. logical-mathematical (learning through numbers and patterns)
3. visual-spatial (learning through shapes and graphic concepts)
4. bodily-kinesthetic (learning through using one's body and hands)
5. musical (learning through music and musical patterns)
6. interpersonal-relational (learning through interacting with others)
7. intrapersonal-introspective (learning through self-awareness or self-knowledge)

These intelligences are present in all of us in varying degrees. None works alone; rather, they work in harmony with one another. However, Gardner says that each individual will prefer one or more intelligences over the other. For educators, the application is that different learners need different teaching approaches to fully connect with the material. Some learners learn best by seeing, reading, and writing. Others need to move around and get their hands on the subject matter. Still others learn best when the content is connected to music or involves drawing or creating.

While any program's content and instructional method will not connect with every single learner all of the time, the Faith Education Station Rotation model in this book maximizes diverse learning opportunities. Hands-on experiences use a variety of approaches and techniques, so that the subject matter is explored in multiple ways in multiple settings, benefiting all of the learners some of the time, i.e. there's something for everyone.

Note: While some people may not appear to participate actively in every activity, don't count them out. Sometimes the quietest listener is the deepest thinker who may be providing support for the learning process in other ways and who will share his or her

knowledge in smaller group settings or in the other situations where he or she feels more comfortable.

From Generation to Generation

Secondly, the intergenerational programming in this book allows for the exchange of knowledge across generations. Situations that mix older adults who have lots of life experience and perspective with youth who have fresh vision and new questions offer major faith development potential for all learners. In particular, youth will often ask questions that adults are too afraid to raise, yet the learning that happens because of those questions is invaluable for all ages.

Case in point: one time early on in my tenure as director of Christian education when I was telling the story of the birth of the church, a child interrupted me and asked, "So was Jesus a Christian?"

"Well, of course he was," was the answer that was about to roll off my tongue when I realized that was not accurate. Jesus was Jewish, but we're Christian. Okay, how does that work? Apparently no one had covered that particular topic in all my years of Sunday school and youth group, or maybe I'd been taking a nap when the subject had been addressed. I desperately glanced around at the other adult leaders in the room; they looked as confused as I felt.

"You know what, I'm not exactly sure how to answer that question," I told my inquisitive student. "Let me research that and get back to you next week." And so I did my homework and reported back, a little humbler and a little wiser. Just because adults are older doesn't always mean we know it all. Sometimes we have the most to learn, so why not put us in with the people who will ask the best and brightest questions without reservation—our children? The wonderful thing about intergenerational programming is that it allows for mentoring and discipling across generations. The planning team for each intergenerational event should be intentional about maximizing opportunities for community building across age groups. When dividing groups for the station rotations, mix older adults and singles in with family groups. In specific activities, facilitators can continue to pair individual families with singles and older adults so that the former has extra sets of eyes, ears, and hands and the latter feels connected

and useful within the family of God. Family groups may also be split and regrouped with singles and older adults as needed.

Chameleon Christian Education

Last but not least, intergenerational ministry can encompass much more than actual events and programs. This resource book deals strictly with programs that can be run as individual events outside of the normal Sunday school time. However, don't let that stop you from adapting these lessons for your intergenerational Sunday school hour (see suggestions on page xv) or starting up an intergenerational ministry with new-mom to grand-mom mentoring pairs or an all-ages mission project. Trust that when you purposefully provide opportunities to share God's story (which is our story) across age groups, God will be at work transforming lives, from the youngest learner to the oldest. The chameleon may be a different color, but he's still a chameleon!

While these programs were created for the smaller church setting, that does not mean larger churches can't do intergenerational ministry. They certainly can and do! Churches anticipating crowds of more than 150 might consider other scheduling options, such as:

- a common fellowship time with an early and late station rotation; create a worship component on either side and provide advance sign-up for the desired time slot
- a second set of all three stations running simultaneously to accommodate a larger number of participants (assuming your facility has the space to do this)
- the full program offered on two different days or an afternoon and evening time option with advance registration.

The Format

Church Programs and Celebrations for All Generations uses what I call the Faith Education Station Rotation plan, which is similar to the Workshop Rotation Model of Christian education. (For more information on the Workshop Rotation Model, visit <http://www.childrensministries.org>.) Each program in

this book includes a time of worship, a time of faith development and a time of fellowship. The time of faith development involves the entire larger group being divided into three smaller groups, which then rotate through three stations. The station activities relate to the overall theme of the event yet approach the content differently, appealing to different learning styles and intelligences, and connecting the participants through experiential learning. A station host is present in each station, serving either as the storyteller or the facilitator for that activity. A planning team should be in place to handle the overall organization, publicity, registration, and facilitation of the program with additional volunteers recruited as needed.

Most programs also include a "Next Step" action to engage participants in putting their new knowledge to work. A Next Step is simply one new action that a person of any age can commit to taking to deepen his or her friendship with the Lord.

A sample intergenerational event schedule might look like this:

Registration and gathering time (15 minutes)

Opening worship (15 minutes)

Station rotations (3 stations stops of 30 minutes each with 5 minutes for making group transitions between stations) (1 hour, 45 minutes)

Meal and fellowship time (1 hour, 15 minutes)

When it comes to scheduling, do what works for your congregation. Additional songs or a short meditation can always be added to your time of worship. Fellowship time may be shortened if you are serving only refreshments and not a full meal. On matters of menu, if your church is on a tight budget, the planning team may wish to charge a small fee per household for the meal and any needed supplies (paper products, plasticware, etc.). Alternatively, consider having potluck suppers, which work best with an advance sign-up for participants.

You will notice that some programs in this book start immediately with the station rotations and end with worship followed by fellowship. The provided order is suggested, but readers should feel free to adapt the programs so that they meet your congregation's needs. I do highly recommend building in a "Gathering Time" at the beginning of the event, opening the

doors and providing space and time (roughly 15 minutes) before the official start of the program, to give all participants a chance to arrive so that you can begin the event together. The planning team might provide theme-related board games or art supplies to keep the on-time arrivals busy.

The Intergenerational Toolbox

Intergenerational programming is fun. It is faith-based and builds community. It is also hard work. As in any ministry, the event planning team must take seriously the need to find a crew of volunteers and plug those volunteers into the right spots, based on their gifts and abilities. In addition, the planning team must be intentional about maximizing fellowship and learning opportunities across generations. They need to be purposeful about mixing up the whole group so that smaller groups represent the church family, not just a single demographic. The following is a list of useful “tools” for running effective intergenerational programs:

- *Space to move.* The station rotations will require three separate areas, one per station. Some stations need a large play area. The more you can spread out and get people up and moving, the better.
- *A storytelling room or storytelling box.* A space decorated with props to reflect a Bible landscape or scene. It may be a room set apart for the storytelling station or may just feature the storytelling box, which is a low, rectangular tub approximately 2' x 3' x 6". When filled with sand, the tub becomes the backdrop for stories told with small figures and props. (See programs for full details.)
- *Bible-time costumes.* Robes, tunics, headdresses, and belts that tie for both the storyteller and the participants.
- *Art supplies.* Although most of these programs can be run without many additional supplies, you will need a basic stock of art supplies, such as crayons, markers, construction paper, glue, fabric and fabric trim, craft paint, watercolors, paintbrushes, etc. Art is a frequent component of the stations.
- *Large writing surface for group responses.* Mural paper is great for participants to respond to content with words or drawings. Provide newsprint or a whiteboard for station hosts to write down answers from brainstorming sessions.
- *Children's picture books.* Both fiction and nonfiction children's picture books are a great way to translate themed content to lifelong learning for people of all ages. Many so-called children's stories appeal to all ages. Nonfiction picture books are also wonderful resources for topics that might be difficult for a station host to explain without prior knowledge.
- *Family-friendly DVDs.* Animated classics such as Dr. Seuss and VeggieTales DVDs and films such as *Glory Road*, *Remember the Titans*, and *Pride* can be used to address difficult themes with most ages.
- *Behind-the-scenes volunteers.* Have people sign up in advance to handle essential tasks, such as setup, take-down, food prep, and kitchen cleanup, so that the program runs smoothly.
- *Worship leader.* Also in advance, recruit someone to handle all music needs, whether in worship or in a station.
- *Station hosts.* These may be regular volunteers or “experts” recruited to match their gifts and talents with their station activities where possible. Because station hosts often double as storytellers (see below), place these volunteers carefully. Also ensure that station hosts and storytellers alike are capable of communicating ideas to children as well as to adults and avoid complex explanations or big theological or technical words.
- *Storytellers.* Seek out volunteers who have natural dramatic flair and a willingness to “get into character” for each particular Bible story. Most stories are best told in first person, so the storyteller will be bringing the Bible character to life. Give the storyteller the biblical story text at least a month in advance, including any helpful background or contextual information. The more comfortable and familiar the storyteller is with the story, the easier it will be to communicate the character's joys, concerns, problems, fears, etc., in first person. Encourage storytellers to involve the participants in the story by having them mime additional character roles.

Continuing God's Story

While each chapter in *Church Programs and Celebrations for All Generations* is set up for an extended three- to four-hour event, the individual stations can be adapted for use on a weekly basis in a Workshop Rotation Model in Sunday school classes or other existing settings. Your Christian education team would simply need to add a fourth station to round out a month of activities.

If your church adapts one of the programs in *Church Programs and Celebrations for All Generations* or if you have a success story you'd like to share and other tips or resources to pass along, please visit this book's website at www.forallgenerations.com and let Rachel know. We'll post your stories on the website with your contact information as a way of equipping and encouraging one another as we "tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" so that all of God's children "would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Psalm 78:4, 7 NIV).