

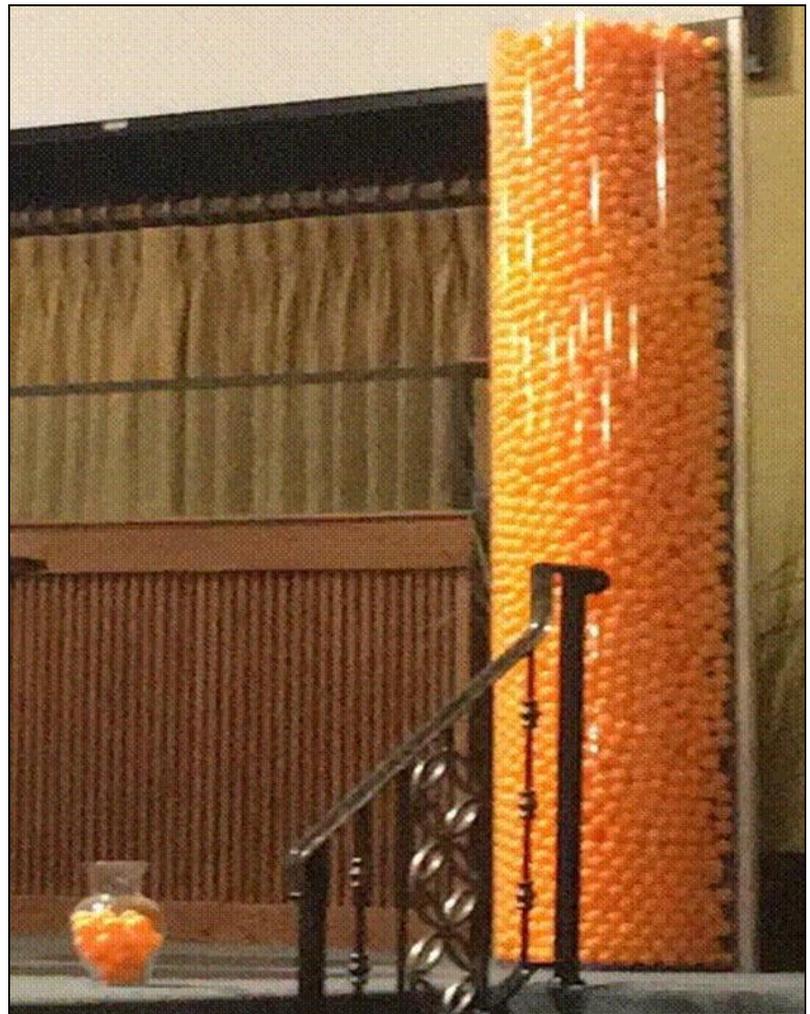
Putting the **WHY** for **InterGenerational** Church

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Parents have over 3000 hours a year (represented by the BIG tower of ping pong balls) to teach their kids about Christ. The Church on the other hand has about 40 hours a year (represented by the small vase of ping pong balls) with a child to teach them about Jesus.

Parents - we can't rely on Church to be the only place they learn about God.

Church - that's why **InterGenerational Church** is the way forward.



Every church can become intentionally intergenerational!
Most churches are intergenerational or multi-generational by membership. Some churches are intentionally intergenerational. They make their intergenerational character a defining feature of their community life, ministries, and programming.
These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, and storytelling; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages, and to engage all generations in learning together. For these churches, being intergenerational is a way of life. It is an integral element of their culture. It is who they are!

I think the main hindrance has been the lack of understanding that intergenerational relationships are **crucial to spiritual growth and maturation**. If leaders understood how important intergenerational experiences are for growth and development, they would pour enormous amounts of energy into creating these experiences.

B. Snailum: *Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry Within Existing Evangelical Church Congregations: What Have We Learned?* (Christian Education Journal, Series 3, Vol. 9, No.1, 2012).

Young people interviewed who have left church, consistently said, they felt little or no connection with adults in the church when they were children and had often felt judged by them...

When children only feel wanted and accepted when they behave in ways that do not disturb the adult members, it can add to their feeling of being **disconnected to the church**.

D. Goodwin: *Lost in Transition – or Not?: Addressing the Problem of Children Leaving the Church as they Make the Transition from Childhood to Youth* (North Richmond: Kidsreach Inc. 2013) p. 24

The opening paragraph from Holly Catterton Allen's book *InterGenerate* is:

Community churches, emerging churches, evangelical churches, main-line churches, missional churches, charismatic churches, Catholic churches - all types of Christian communities - are lamenting the silos created by age-segregated ministries. Leaders are now asking, "How can we bring the generations back together?" This renewed interest in inter-generational ministry is also grounded in a growing body of research that supports the idea that intergenerational experiences contribute uniquely to **sustainable, long-term faith formation across all ages.**¹

¹ Authors, thinkers, and researchers who are highlighting the importance of intergenerational connections to sustain faithful discipleship include David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto, *Generations Together: Caring, Praying, Learning, Celebrating, & Serving Faithfully* (Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith Associates, 2014); and Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Beyond the North American context, movements like Here2Stay (here2stay.org.au) in Australia and Faithfull Generation (faithfullgeneration.com) in the United Kingdom are also identifying - and responding to - similar conclusions.

The second paragraph from Holly Catterton Allen's book *InterGenerate* gives the following definitions:

Defining Multigenerational, Cross-Generational, and Intergenerational

In general, we will define *intergenerational ministry* in this text as Christine Ross and I (Holly) did in our 2012 book, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together for Ministry, Community and Worship*:

Intergenerational ministry occurs when a congregation intentionally combines the generations together in mutual serving, sharing, or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the body of Christ to each other and the greater community.

Holly Catterton Allen goes on to say:

Though the definition is a good basic description, it is not comprehensive, and it continues to prompt clarifying questions such as:

Are the terms intergenerational and multigenerational synonymous?

Are the main benefits of intergenerational ministry for children and youth?

Must all the generations be present for an event to be called intergenerational?

How does a generationally configured church begin the process of becoming more intentionally intergenerational?

The terms multigenerational, cross-generational, and intergenerational are often used interchangeably, though they carry different connotations.

Some useful explanations:

- 1 in the **multi-generational** environment, there is tolerance living alongside superficial and polite interaction;
- 2 in the **cross-generational** environment, there is some sharing, listening, and learning, but little individual or collective transformation; and
- 3 in the **inter-generational** environment, there is comprehensive mutuality, equality, and reciprocity that makes individual or collective transformation more likely

In essence, the trajectory from **multi-** to **inter-** involves a greater depth of relationship, a change in the nature of the relationship, and an increasing openness to being changed through relationship with the “other.”



The patheos weblog gave us the title for this paper:

Putting the Why for **InterGenerational** Church

Here is what we found there in three sections:

I The Bible & Jewish/Christian History Commands and Celebrates It

Have you ever noticed how much time the Bible spends telling us to **pass this story on to the next generation**? In the Jewish faith, this is not just a requirement, it's something that you are indebted to do.

In Jewish history, **telling the next generation the story of God** is something like the discharging of debts. And the younger generation has a religious obligation to not just listen, but to place themselves in the story. To really feel like they are Abraham or Sarah or Hannah or David. They have to know this story, after all one day they've got to pass it on too.

Did you ever wonder why the Bible spends so much time on **genealogies**? With every name, they are celebrating that these are people who served the purposes of God for their generation. They passed the story of God from their parents on to their kids.

Have you ever noticed how much Jewish people have shaped and blessed the world? Sociologists have pointed out that the major contributing factor for the Jews ability to create culture and influence society is that each generation doesn't have to re-invent themselves.

They know who they are. They don't have to bear the crushing weight of constructing their own identity.

The answer is so simple, but very profound. It's that they **do generational life together**. In every festival, in their most sacred moments, the youngest child will ask the oldest man questions like "Why is this night different than all the rest?"

And they will pass the story on from one generation to the next. Think about how much time Paul spends in his letters (written

often from jail) telling the churches he planted such practical things like “Older women need to teach the younger women how to do these things...”

Growing up, the people who made the biggest difference in my life were **much older** than I was. They **taught me** how to preach, and how to be kind to one other when we disagreed, they taught me how to be married, how to be a widow(er), and how to die. I taught them how to program their VCR's. But we're not very good at this these days ... and it's starting to deeply affect us.

2 It's Vital to the Health of the Church

Another Patheos blogger, Tim Wright points out that about 40 years ago, the Baby Boomer generation started walking away from almost every institution that their parents had built. And in an effort to win them back, innovative church pastors and leaders began starting churches that, for the first time, were geared for **one specific generation**.

Sometimes we talk dismissively about “Seeker-services” or “Seeker friendly” churches, but in my experience that comes from a really good desire to be welcoming and hospitable. The problem is that these churches were targeting Boomers during their parenting years, and so in order to create Seeker friendly churches, they also created environments specifically for their kids.

At first, it was just during Bible Classes, but then they started to create entirely separate church times and gatherings for the children. Again, this was all done for noble reasons, trying to evangelize the de-churched Baby-Boomer population, and it was very effective. It only had one really big downside: We raised the largest **unchurched generation** in American history.

Here's how Tim Wright says it:

“By segregating our kids out of worship, we never assimilated them into the life of the congregation. They had **no touch points**. They had **no experience**. They had **no connection** with the main worship service - its liturgy, its music, its space, its environment, and its adults. It was a foreign place to them. And so...once they finished with the kids/or youth program, they left the church. With good intentions we attempted to raise kids to be Christians, but we didn't raise them to be *Churched Christians*. And perhaps that, in part, is why so few of them attend a church today. We've essentially “Sunday-Schooled” them out of church - because we never assimilated them into church.”

An institution exists to pass on a way of life from **generation to generation**, and one of the great tragedies of our day is that we are investing huge amounts of resources, and some of our most creative people are giving their lives to create Churches that will only last for one generation, because we've failed to think past the immediate moment.

3 The Church is the Family of God

A few months ago, Christianity Today did an article on what happened after all those Baby Boomer Christians grew up. Many of them, across all the different denominations started leaving church after their kids became adults.

And when CT started asking them why, they discovered that these Boomers had grown up with the dangerous notion that church was something that was for people with a nuclear family and after you had put in your time, and raised your kids, **it was time to move on**.

But that fails to realize this one large thing, early Christians baptized Eunuchs (Didn't see that coming did you?) Remember what a big deal the Bible makes about when they baptized Eunuchs? Remember a Eunuch was someone who couldn't have kids but a eunuch wasn't a marginalized, oppressed person.

Eunuchs were pretty big deals in the kingdom they were associated with. Because they were someone who had thrown in his lot completely (and I mean completely) with the royal dynasty. By doing what he did, he had forfeited his right to ever having a family. He was giving his future over to the kingdom he was in.

In Matthew 19, Jesus endorses celibacy by saying:

“For there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”

Live like Eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And then, do you know what the very next verse in Matthew is? Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said,

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Jesus is saying the Eunuchs are welcome into the family of God, the children are welcome into the family of God. Jesus is saying that for parents without children and for children without parents, you have each other because you both have me.

The Church isn't for families, the Church is a family.

That's the institution Jesus started, that's the **family Jesus created**. And it gives you great life, but it first requires that you lay yours down. One Generation at a time.