

FOR ALL AGES: INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY





DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

The United Methodist Church

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WHY INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY

“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Ephesians 4:16

God creates, calls, and equips all people for work in the Kingdom. Intergenerational Ministry (IGM) is the church’s faithful response to God’s call for participation in the transformation of the world, using God-given gifts to offer hope to a hurting world and make disciples of Christ.

Intergenerational Ministry is an intrinsic part of our identity and calling. It is a holistic approach that affirms all people, no matter their age, are created, called, and equipped for ministry. God calls people of all ages to show up, live, and work in the world.

Scripture reminds us of our identity (who God created us to be) and our call (what God asks us to do). In Genesis we learn that we are created (we are very good!) and given a responsibility as stewards in creation. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection affirms and models the great commandment to “make disciples of all nations.” We are meant to live that calling together - “I am with you always.” (Matthew 28:19-20) God breathed life into us and calls us to live- loving God and neighbor; making disciples of all peoples.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 reminds us of the importance of each part (member) of the body. We are one kingdom-building body with many gifts, and all gifts come from God. When all of God’s children join together and contribute their gifts, then the body grows and builds “itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16). Ministry is strengthened when all people use their gifts and participate. The body of Christ is made stronger by the presence of all.

In the United Methodist Church, we affirm the importance of every person - no matter their age, or origin. Every person is a child of God; called, equipped, and sent forth for the work of the kingdom. The Sacrament of baptism proclaims: "We are all one in Christ Jesus - with joy and thanksgiving we welcome you as members of the family of Christ." This baptismal covenant affirms our doctrinal and theological understanding of Prevenient Grace, the belief that God is actively present in the lives of all people. IGM affirms this and proclaims that when someone is missing from the community, some of God's gifts and God's presence are missing too.

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs (2012 Book of Discipline, Paragraph 120).

This universal call summarizes the why of any ministry in the UMC. The Book of Discipline does not limit disciple-making to persons 35 and older, or people of like minds, backgrounds, or developmental levels. The mission of the United Methodist Church is inherently intergenerational. *God's grace is active everywhere, at all times, carrying out this purpose as revealed in the Bible...In order to truly be alive, we embrace Jesus' mandate to love God and to love our neighbor and to make disciples of all peoples. (2012 Book of Discipline, Paragraph 121).*

Scripture proclaims that we are all important, Wesleyan theology affirms that God is actively present in all of our lives, and developmental theory demonstrates how people learn and grow in community. IGM affirms the importance of learning, growing, and living in community. Community learning is often more effective than individual learning. When all ages gather, it creates space to share, teach, guide, and pass down stories and practices of our faith. People learn from one another when they are invited into an intergenerational community. Children and youth bring gifts that can teach, shape, and form adults. In turn, adults bring gifts that can teach and nurture children and youth.



WHAT IS INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY

Intergenerational Ministry affirms all people's joint participation with God's work in, and for, the transformation of the world. When we recognize and claim God's presence in the lives of all people, then our response must be ministry that invites all people to participate – regardless of age. Ministry leaders must pay attention to the gifts individuals and communities possess, and encourage them to use their gifts to share Christ's light and love. IGM is contextual. It looks different in various congregations who faithfully discern God's call for their unique setting. In order to determine what IGM looks like in your context, take time to ask and discern:

- What are the gifts in our community?
- What are the needs in our community?
- How is God calling us to work together?

Churches must pause with these questions to discern where and how God is calling them to be at work. Answering these questions helps congregations identify what shape IGM can take for them. When ministry leaders faithfully discern and respond to these questions and God's call, intentional and faithful IGM blossoms and best practices begin to develop.

There are three basic ways of categorizing Intergenerational Ministry:

SURPRISE (UNPLANNED/UNINTENTIONAL)

Places where the entire body of Christ gathers together without planning or intentional work. Examples might include, worship, meals, hallways (where small groups have gathered for conversation). This is a great place to stop and say, "These communities are already gathering. How can we make these IG communities intentional and fruitful?"

EPISODIC (EVERY NOW AND THEN)

Planned IG meals, outreach projects, or individual ministries such as an all church retreat or advent family festival. These are important ministries that invite church leaders to pay attention and learn how generational interaction strengthens and unites the Body of Christ. They are also a reminder for leaders to stop and ask: “How (or should) more of our church ministries become intergenerational? How can we nurture intergenerational community in all that we do and in all that we are?”

SYSTEMIC (PART OF WHO WE ARE)

This is when IG ministry becomes part of the fabric and identity of the church as an intentionally intergenerational body. Examples include congregations who intentionally involve persons of all ages in every facet of their ministry. This includes ensuring that all age groups are represented on church committees and in planning groups. When IGM is a systemic thread of the church’s tapestry, every meeting has advocates present who raise questions like: “How are people of all ages invited into this ministry opportunity? What gifts do we have in our congregation that might contribute to this work? Who is missing from this table that we are setting?”

When congregations move to a systemic IGM focus, it means they no longer create opportunities to just “do something with all ages”. Instead the congregation becomes intentionally engaged in meaningful and transformative work that involves the entire Body of Christ. Best practices can vary by context, just like IGM as a concept. One church’s IGM might look different from a neighboring congregation. Best practices develop out of intentional discernment and the faithful use of all a community’s gifts.

Faithful ministry is intrinsically intergenerational, offering hope to the world while providing ways for all people to work with God while making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.



INTERGENERATIONAL SMALL GROUPS

Many churches utilize small groups to aid in Christian formation. These cohorts are often formed based on gender, marital status, proximity, similar interests, and, most frequently, age. Some small groups may intentionally (or unintentionally) have children in their midst due to a lack of childcare. Many never have youth or young adults present. Young people often spend their time in church within age cohorts that have like-minded peers and a few adult mentors (volunteer or paid). Those mentors are expected to relate well with everyone in the group. Young people may have nothing in common with their mentors or their age-related peers, but the church expects them to form deep relationships and grow in discipleship anyway. Growing in discipleship is tough, and made even more difficult without a diverse and deep pool of experiences to swim in. Help youth and young adults feel like welcome members of the body in small groups of mixed ages!

Not all groups may be well-suited for an IG model, but several typical groups can easily make the leap. Short-term Bible studies that meet when youth are available and that are advertised to youth could be an easy place to begin. Studies don't have to include games, pizza, or movies to interest young people. Pizza cannot replace a group of fellow Christians who are genuinely invested and interested in discipleship. Curriculum does not have to be "dumbed down" either. Many young people want to study deeply and are interested to do so alongside adults, asking questions along the way. Developmentally, youth are often trying to find answers to questions of belonging like "How do I fit into this community?" and "When will my church see me as spiritually mature? As an adult?" Intergenerational groups can create a space for young people to discover how they belong and learn from (and teach!) adult members of the Body. If a Bible study encourages group participation, young people often thrive. Remember that young people probably may not share their questions or opinions unless asked, or until trust and relationships are formed. Initially, group leaders should be prepared to give more than they expect to receive from young participants.

Life Groups, Accountability Groups, 4th Day Groups, etc. are also good places to include youth and even older children. Young people learn best about discipleship when they hear and see older adult's experiences and growth in faith. It is good for young people to learn about adulthood from adults! It is good for adults to remember the passion and struggles of their youth. Interpreting scripture and praying in a diverse age group can lend great depth to conversation, and shine a light on the challenges of today from a variety of perspectives. It also increases the likelihood that a young person will find adults they can relate with in church, rather than hoping they get along with an assigned group leader

Intentional age inclusion should also happen on a mission, service, or project team. Anytime the church participates in a mission, locally or abroad, think of ways to include all ages. This way, everyone can learn and participate in the mission of the church together. Some mission sites may not be suitable for children but with some advance planning, children can usually be included in some way. Perhaps they can make something the team uses or gives away? Or be present at lunch, prayer time, or worship? The team serving could send pictures, letters, etc. back to children or youth ministries during a mission project. Perhaps all the age-level ministries of a church could fundraise together for different aspects of a project. Maybe children pray while a mission team is gone and then hear stories from the team when they've returned? Small ideas like this grow into deep, intentional, and formational intergenerational ministry.



RESOURCES FOR MORE IDEAS

ONLINE

- <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>
- umc-intergenerational-ministry.com
- **UMC Intergenerational Ministries Facebook Group:**
<http://facebook.com/groups/815750038486649>
- **Little Box of Big Questions:** <http://www.smlworld.co.uk>

PRINT/E-BOOK

- *Seasons of the Spirit* (Woodlake Books)
- *One Body: Integrating Teenagers into the Life of Your Church* by Sam Halverson
- *Always in Rehearsal* by James Ritchie
- *God Don't Like Ugly: African American Women Handing on Spiritual Values* by Teresa L. Fry Brown.
- *Intergenerational Christian Formation* by Holly Allen and Christine Ross
- *Intergenerational Faith Formation: Learning the Way We Live* by Mariette Martineau.
- *Sleeping with Bread: Holding on to What Gives You Life* by Sheila and Matthew Lin
- *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kid* by Kara Powell