

ARTICLES

INTERGENERATIONAL CELLS By Pastor Don Baron Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Honolulu, HI 96817

Many of our congregations have small groups or "cells" - a term drawn from biology where the cell is the basic life unit of the body. Cells are proving for many people to function in the same way in the Body of Christ. As a wonderful supplement to Sunday morning, the cell provides a setting for intimacy, trust, mutual support, nurture, accountability, and hands-on leadership training.

What many of our cells are missing, however, is the intergenerational dimension. Most cells do not incorporate our children. Instead, we find a baby-sitter or provide childcare, and head out for cell meeting. And thus the cell becomes one more dimension of church life where, instead of bonding the generations we tend to send them off in different directions.

When I first heard of the idea of intergenerational cells, I was extremely skeptical. I thought it would bring distraction, if not chaos, to the cells. I expected resistance from the children. Such has emphatically not been the case!

To begin with the children, we have found that, on the whole, they love the cell and actually look forward to cell night. Several have been known to ask, "Mom, when's cell night?" The cell has become for them extended family (THE extended family for children who are far from granddads, grandmas, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.). This is reinforced by the fact that every adult cell member rotates responsibility to spend time with the children at a certain point of the cell meeting. Let me describe a typical meeting as we do it here at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Honolulu.

The gathering lasts one and 1/2 hours. The group is helped to relax and to reconnect by means of the "Ice Breaker" time. While sharing refreshments, a simple question is asked and all are asked to reply. Example: If you had a million dollars, how would you use it?

Then follows the "Presence" time, fifteen minutes to celebrate Jesus' presence in our midst. It's a large family-like gathering in someone's living room. For about 15 minutes, we sing songs of praise, being careful to include songs that the children can relate to. We share informally: What did God do in your life this past week? We speak with Jesus conversationally via sentence prayers - and you should see the freedom with which the children join in!

The second part of the gathering is a 30 minute slot called the "Power" time, with focus on the Scripture lesson & sermon theme of the previous Sunday, with focus on life application. From that flows prayer time for one another's needs as they are brought to light by the Word. As "Power" time begins, one of the "aunties" or "uncles" takes the children to another room. This person has been provided by a person in the cell that we call the "Child-link" with suggestions as to how to help the children think about the sermon topic at their level. The only thing forbidden is to do it in a "classroom" atmosphere, with the adult serving as "teacher." They sit on the floor; they play a game, draw a picture, tell a story from their own lives. They pray. Cell is a fun place for them to get serious about God.

The next part of the gathering is called "Purpose" time. Cells, left to themselves, have a natural tendency to become turned inward. While they are usually good at Christian nurture, they are not often places where evangelism happens with any regularity. However, we are actually seeing "pre-Christians" coming into the cells because we stubbornly hold to a 30-minute block of time where we focus outward on several individuals in each of our webs of relationships, and we talk with great anticipation about the day when our cell has grown to the point that we will have to "multiply" and become two cells.

Since we are finite creatures with limited time and energy, we have all prayerfully selected one or two individuals or couples for whom we are praying that they might come to faith. As a genuine, close-knit team, we pray for one another's people. We plan pre-evangelistic fun events to which to invite those people so as to develop ties with them. Once a month, the cell gathering is called "Friendship Night." To this we invite people who we think are prepared to go beyond the fun event to experience a "lite" version of a cell meeting.

The children ordinarily do the "Purpose" time while apart from the adults so that they can name and pray for their own friends. However, fun events are usually planned together, so that the needs of two or more generations can be taken into account.

This kind of team evangelism, we think, is far superior to "solo" evangelism (because so few of us are gifted at that) or to "mass" evangelism. We pool our spiritual gifts, our skills, our imagination, our resources. It's so good to lean on one another in this area where so many of us feel inadequate and are fearful! It has produced a kind of corporate boldness that we could not have imagined! We're glad that our children are experiencing this, observing their parents deeply involved in Christ's mission, and being given a vehicle for reaching out to their own friends.

Can you imagine how this ongoing experience is strengthening families? And how it supports Christian parents whose children are growing up in a society that no longer stands by them with Christian values and moral standards? Parenting has become a lonely job!

But not in the intergenerational cell.

Intergenerational Family Events

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/content/pdf_articles/616.pdf

Intergenerational Vacation Bible School

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/content/pdf_articles/630.pdf

Family Crossfires, Inc.

Reuniting Generations

Through United Intergenerational Ministry

Family Crossfires, Inc. W9318 Oak Ave Shawano, WI 54166-6239

(715) 526-2349

<http://members.tripod.com/~familycrossfires/index.html>

"The future ain't what it used to be." Nor are our congregations!

In LCMS congregations, 16 to 18 percent of all members are over 65 - and many report that more than 30 percent of their members are in their upper 60s or older. With these numbers in mind, it's clear that our church needs to examine not only how we are ministering to, with and for this fastest growing segment of our population, but how we are intentionally working to break down the hurtful and unproductive age divisions that are already beginning to characterize our congregations.

Churches are probably the only intergenerational institutions open seven days a week. Yet once in the door, are the worshippers truly "one" gathered around the Word and the Sacraments? Or are they a group of four or five very different age-split and separated groups who really don't know each other, understand each other or enjoy each other?

And if this is the present unfortunate situation, what of the future? In the next three decades, the number of people over 50 years of age will increase by 74 percent, while the number under 50 will increase by only 1 percent! Amazing?

Also amazing and true is that over half of all persons age 65 or older who have *ever* lived are alive today! In addition, the over 65s are growing more than twice as fast as the rest of the population. In fact, by 2040 when the last baby boomer reaches 65, 25 percent of the country's population will be over 65.

So in the future, will more than a quarter of our members be left just sitting in the pews or at home, isolated and labeled "the oldies," or will they be a part of vibrant, intentionally intergenerational congregations who embrace and encourage them in ministry to all generations?

Would you like to know more?

Would you like some suggestions to help move forward to new and exciting intergenerational ministry?

Then [request a free copy of our "Older Adults and Intergenerational Ministry" booklet](http://humancare.lcms.org/DC/INTGBKLT.htm)
<http://humancare.lcms.org/DC/INTGBKLT.htm>

Intentional Intergenerational Ministry

IIM Resources without Web Sites

Connecting Generations: An Intergenerational Ministry – Rev. Don Smidt, 1535 E. Meadow Lane, Phoenix, AZ 85022. Telephone: 602-548-8536. E-mail to: Gnerations@aol.com

IIM Resources with Web Site Links

[GenX and God: A GenX Perspective](#), book by Kristoffer Cox.

[Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#) – resource page on family ministry.

[Jean Morris Trumbauer](#) – consultations, workshops, and retreats on a systems approach to empowering lay ministry in faith communities, gifts-based ministry, and gifts-discovery.

All Are Welcome—A Primer for Intergenerational Ministry and Dialogue, is designed to be used by communities of faith. This book demonstrates how to break down isolation and separation between the 5 living generations found in congregations. It presents the Intergenerational Dialogue™ process as a proven tool for joining all ages, cultures, races, genders and economic classes in Intentional Intergenerational Ministry (IIM).

This easy to use, spiral-bound book is a valuable resource book for anyone working in the areas of: congregational education; stewardship; congregational revitalization & turnaround; missions; seminary education; community outreach; public policy; healthy community initiatives; asset development for youth & families; social ministry; spirituality & aging networks; and diversity initiatives.

[Learn more about *All Are Welcome!*](#)

Cost: \$24.95

The book, *All Are Welcome*, contains:

- Background on the Intentional Intergenerational Ministry Movement
- Issues Facing the Movement Today
- 12 Key Intergenerational Dialogue Organizing Steps
- Follow-up – Moving the Dialogue to Action
- Outcomes from Previous Dialogues
- A Dialogue Sampler on the Issue of Meaning and Happiness in Our Lives
- Discussion About Diversity and Dialogue
- How to Build an Intentional Intergenerational Ministry Movement
- Copyright-free documents you can photocopy for your own use in your community or organization, including: Position Description—Director of IIM; Qualities of a Good Facilitator; A Dialogue Process Timeline; Suggested Agenda for Four Dialogue Planning Meetings; A Dialogue Room Diagram; Diversity Grid; What Is A Good Scenario?; Generational Groups

by Age; How to Develop Cross-Generational Questions; Sample
Registration Sheet; and Sample Evaluation

<http://www.pointsofviewinc.com/Pages/OurProducts.html>