
PLANNING INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP

Mary Jo Zwar

Intergenerational worship takes seriously the idea that people of all ages are part of the worshipping congregation.

Every Christian worship service can be considered an intergenerational worship service in the sense that the worshippers represent (or actually include) the whole body of Christ with its youngest and oldest members.

For this workshop, however, we will be looking at intergenerational worship as worship that **intentionally involves people of all ages** in an encounter with God through a range of acts of worship, eg hearing and reflecting on God's word, responding to God with praise and/or confession, receiving forgiveness, giving offerings.

Intergenerational worship is different from 'children's worship' in which, commonly, adults prepare 'something for children'. In worship that is truly intergenerational, young and old worship together. Children, youth, young adults, middle-aged adults and older adults can also take part in planning for, inviting to and leading worship.

Where congregations have such ministry teams: intergenerational worship can be planned through cooperation of the worship team and the children's/family ministry team.



PLANNING AN INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP SERVICE

An ideal team for planning intergenerational worship could include someone under twelve years, a teenager and/or young adult, a middle-aged person, someone over sixty years, someone who lives alone — and your minister. A gender balance on the team will tend to make it representative of all the worshippers. Such an intergenerational planning team will learn from one another about one another and about worship.

In planning an intergenerational worship service, the team may follow these steps:

- 1. Begin with prayer**
- 2. Select a Bible text and/or theme** (generally you will use one of the Bible readings/themes that your congregation would ordinarily use on the day)
- 3. Discuss the theme and/or text.** It can be useful to record ideas on a whiteboard for later reference.
 - a. What is God saying about God?
 - b. What is God saying about us?
 - c. How does it relate to the lives of the people on the planning team as representatives of the people in your worshipping community?
 - d. What opportunities does it provide for contemplation, confession, celebration?
- 4. Plan the broad outline** of your worship service.

Use an outline of the components of your usual worship service (sample attached). Make copies of the outline for everyone to make notes on — with one person designated as official scribe, or copy the outline onto an OHT transparency and fill it in as you go along.)

For each component of the worship service, ask and discuss four questions, filling in the outline as you go.

- *How do we ordinarily do this part of the service?* (eg ENTRY: How are people welcomed when they arrive? What do they see/hear/feel when they arrive?)
- *How does this part of the service relate to the theme/text for the day?* (eg OFFERING: What are some specific things in the text that we are thankful for or that lead us to give ourselves to God, our money to support the work of God's church?)
- *Do we want to do this part of the service in the ordinary way or in a special way for this service?* (PLEASE NOTE that this is an important question. Intergenerational worship is not necessarily radically different from your ordinary service. You may choose to do only one or two parts of the service differently.)
- *How can we do this part of worship in a way that is particularly meaningful to people in our worshipping community (young and old)?* (eg BIBLE READING: How can we help people to use their senses — not just hearing — and imaginations and emotions as they encounter this story?)

In planning, you will not necessarily work through the parts of the service in order. There may be one item for which you have a great idea (eg a way of presenting a song, or a drama presentation of the Bible reading). This may become a centrepiece for your service. Start there and work out the other elements relating them to the centrepiece.

In consultation with your minister, you may vary from your usual worship pattern, changing the order, adding or deleting parts.

5. **Plan the details** of your service and complete the planning outline.
6. Make sure that everyone (on the team and anyone else you are asking to help lead the service) understands the **specific responsibility** they take on.



SOME THINGS THAT MAY OCCUR IN INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP

1. People sit in **family groups**. People who are worshipping on their own (or single-generation families, eg older people, young adults) are 'adopted' into multi-generation families, invited to sit with them and interact with them.
2. A worship-leader (or 'compeer') may **explain each part of the worship service**, what happens, why it happens, how it will happen, exactly what people are expected to do.
3. Worship leaders attempt to **use language that can be understood by all worshippers**. Some 'church' words can be used, but they may be explained.
4. An effort is made that everyone (tall and short) has **a clear line of sight** to anything that is happening, including anything projected on a screen. This may mean that little people sit near the front or in aisles, or stand on pews, or are held up.
5. Opportunities are provided for **interaction of small intergenerational groups**, eg discussing a question, finding a key word in a Bible passage, blessing one another . . .

6. As much **programmed movement** as possible takes place, eg actions, dancing, clapping during songs — possibly just one part or one phrase of the song — by everyone, not just kids; everyone comes to the altar with offering or to receive a token or blessing.
7. **Visuals** have a high priority, including such things as: decoration of the worship area in symbols relating to the theme, handouts of items or pictures that people can look at and touch, acting out or showing pictures (or even showing a video) of the gospel story, demonstrating symbolic actions (and having people copy them).
8. An effort is made to provide **multi-sensory experiences** including touch and taste as well as sight and hearing.
9. A number of **different people** — representing a range of generations — **lead various aspects of the service**, eg a family group reads parts of a prayer, an intergenerational band leads music, people of different ages read Bible passages.
10. **A range of music** is used: at least one simple children's song especially for the youngest worshippers, possibly an old favourite Gospel song introduced by an older person who explains the significance of the song in his/her life.
11. Attention is given to what happens **after the service**: people are challenged to go and do something (specific and do-able) or talk about something. There may be some provision for accountability, feedback, eg a challenge printed in the worship bulletin to 'pray about some situation you see on TV this week', with a tear-off section where families can report: 'This week we prayed about _____' that can be returned to the church the following week.
12. **A short sermon** is included. Generally this will be aimed at all ages and may include a point that parents explain to children (or vice-versa). Where an adults-only sermon is preached, younger worshippers may be given a quiet activity (related to the sermon theme) to do where they are sitting with parents. At the end of the sermon children share with families (or the whole congregation) what they have done.
13. There is an emphasis of the multi-generational **family (caring) nature** of the congregation.
14. **Fun, excitement and surprise** are seen as legitimate elements of worship.

**WORSHIP IS NOT A PERFORMANCE BY A FEW LEADERS.
IT IS AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN GOD AND ALL HIS GATHERED PEOPLE.**

A SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR PLANNING INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP

Date _____ Key Bible Text _____ Theme _____

Special elements, eg decorations/symbols/symbolic acts/take home ideas _____

Any words or concepts that need explanation: _____

	What happens: <i>We all . . .</i>	How we will do it	Who is responsible? leads?	What needs to be prepared?
ENTER	come into God's house			
WELCOME	are welcomed into worship in God's presence			
SONG	sing a song that sets the mood of worship.			
OPENING PRAYER	pray a prayer related to the theme of the worship.			
BIBLE READING	hear what God says to us.			
REFLECTION	respond, confess sin, hear God's forgiveness.			
SONG	sing a song of praise to God.			
BELIEF	celebrate our faith (eg a creed or A testimony)			
SONG	get ready for the message.			
MESSAGE	listen to a message clarifying God's word.			
SONG	sing a song that helps us remember the message.			
OFFERING	respond to God with: our hearts/lives and money.			
PRAYERS	pray for others and for ourselves.			
SONG	sing a song of prayer.			
BLESSING	receive God's blessing			
ANNOUNCEMENTS	learn what is happening in our community.			
LEAVING SONG	sing a song of praise as we get ready to go out			
TAKE HOME	have something to do or talk about at home			