



‘I like the sound of intergenerational church BUT..’

In the second of our series on intergenerational ministry, Suzi Farrant addresses some possible objections.

Introduction

Perhaps you’ve had this experience: you’ve attended a webinar, conference or training event. You’ve been really enthused in the moment, have encountered God, wholeheartedly agreed with all the things shared and got really excited about all the possibilities. You return to your church fired up with new ideas that you enthusiastically share... only to be greeted with a lukewarm response and a host of objections and questions. These then begin to nag at you, and where you once saw possibility you now see difficulty; where you once felt this new thing was from God, now you’re not so sure...

This may have been the case for you as you’ve encountered the idea of intergenerational church. I’ve often had conversations with people that begin with ‘we like the sound of intergenerational church BUT...’. So, let’s consider some of these ‘BUTS’ and see if we can return to a place of hope and excitement about the possibilities.

‘BUT... we don’t have any children’

This is one of the most common objections to intergenerational church. On the face of it, it’s a valid one: after all, how can you have children and adults in relationship with one another if you don’t have any children around? But perhaps we need to explore it a bit more. Intergenerational church is not simply about engaging children better in the life of the church – it isn’t a fresh model of children’s ministry. Rather, it is about who we are as the Body of Christ in our communities.

Let’s consider for a moment what we mean by ‘generations’. It’s about more than just ‘children’ and ‘adults’. Broadly speaking, a generation is a group defined by age who grew up with the same cultural reference points, e.g. music, a particular political figure, technology such as smartphones and social media, or perhaps even big events like a world war, the Covid-19 pandemic, or 9/11. So most congregations, even those with no children or young people, will have at least two generations present and can therefore be intergenerational. Perhaps you could ask the people in your congregation what cultural reference points defined their childhood, and see if you can spot the similarities and differences.

It’s also important to remember that the word intergenerational is formed from two words, ‘inter’ and ‘generational’. When we focus on the ‘generational’ aspect, we come up against the challenges of not having people of all generations in our midst. When we focus on the ‘inter’ aspect however, we find that what is important is the relating of people to each other, so having all generations in our midst becomes less important than the relationships we are enabling between the people we have.

‘BUT... we’ve tried all-age worship and nobody seemed to be happy’

Another common objection to intergenerational church is that it reduces everything down to a child’s level, so lacks the depth needed by the older generations. Unfortunately, this objection is ageist and comes from a place of unrecognised adult privilege, rather than from theological conviction. Being an intergenerational church is about intentionally recognising the inherent worth in each individual regardless of their age and so relating to one another on a basis of mutuality. All humans are created in God’s image so children are not just equal in humanity to adults; they are fellow disciples with as much to give as to learn. Likewise, there is no ‘junior’ Holy Spirit, or a specified age at which the Holy Spirit becomes available or known to us. Rather, the Spirit is freely, graciously and abundantly given to anyone, no matter their age. Perhaps we need to reconsider how we deepen our faith – is it always a cognitive thing or can it be experiential too? Is it something we control or something led by the Spirit? Is it dependent on someone with more learning and experience teaching us or dependent on our own openness to the work of God in our lives?

The most helpful approach I’ve found when planning intergenerational worship is to stop seeing it as ‘all age’ worship, as when we do that we try to come up with separate activities for each age group and put them one after another in an order of service. That means only a small portion of the service is designed for each generation – based on the false assumption that people of the same age like the same things – and also that there isn’t an intentional focus on enabling people from different generations to relate to one another as they worship. I’d suggest, therefore, that a better way to plan intergenerational worship is to approach it as ‘all styles’ worship. Roots resources are an amazing help here, as they are designed with spiritual styles in mind (for more information on these, see [WEB](#)).

“ Perhaps we need to shift the focus of Church from being about us and what we want to it being about God and what God is calling us to. ”



‘BUT... nobody wants change’

This can appear in many guises – ‘we can’t get the minister to do it’; ‘church works for me so we don’t need to change it’; ‘isn’t this just another fad that will have gone in a few years?’; ‘our existing people won’t be happy if we change how we do things’. I absolutely get it – change is hard and can be painful. But the whole story of God is one of transformation – God is in the business of making all things new, and as the Body of Christ we are part of that too. Perhaps we need to shift the focus of Church from being about us and what we want to it being about God and what God is calling us to.

“ God never said that being Church would be easy, yet he has called us to live in community with one another ”

‘BUT... it’s hard work’

This is true! Being an intergenerational Church is not easy and the journey to get there takes a lot of time and effort, is often messy and can be confusing. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t worth it! God never said that being Church would be easy, yet he has called us to live in community with one another. Jesus didn’t leave us with a comprehensive instruction manual for how to do Church, nor did he suggest that Church in any one locality should be the same as anywhere else. Rather, our calling is to be Church, to be the unique people God has made us to be, to share our lives together in all our diversity and communion with God, and this will look different in each community and throughout time.

‘BUT... will it work?’

An important thing to notice about the objections often raised to intergenerational church is that they are often practical rather than theological, concerned with ‘how’ we do intergenerational church rather than ‘why’ we should be intergenerational church. We do of course need to do the deep theological work first (for more on this, see Darren Philip’s article in the previous issue of Roots [WEB](#)). The journey to becoming intergenerational reaches to the heart of our identity as Church. But when we really understand why we are wanting to do something different, then we can begin to find ways of addressing and challenging the more practical concerns.

‘BUT... how do I take this forward?’

We’ve not been able to explore all of the objections here, and the ones in your context may be different. Try to explore beneath the surface of the ‘buts’ to the beliefs and experiences they are based on, and then consider if those beliefs match who you think God is and who he is calling you to be as church in your community. You can do this on your own first, but don’t forget to have the conversation with others in your community. The journey is worth it.

Want to learn more?

Being an Intergenerational Church: the game

bit.ly/3YXuUg5

An interactive, discussion-based game that accompanies Suzi and Darren Philip’s book, *Being an Intergenerational Church*. A great way to start a conversation with your leadership team or congregation.

Regenerational

bit.ly/4fEbWC2

A resource containing four service outlines, designed to introduce churches to intergenerational ministry, for use in worship with all ages gathered together.

Intergenerational steps

bit.ly/3Ztnxi1

A practical guide for churches looking to take the next step in their intergenerational journey.

‘Engage all ages’ podcast

bit.ly/3ATpISi

A stimulating series of conversations with practitioners from across the world.

Intergenerational Church webinars

bit.ly/3ZipjJ

A series of recordings from webinars hosted by the Church of Scotland.

 [Listen to a conversation with Suzi on this topic on the Roots podcast: rootsforchurches.podbean.com](https://rootsforchurches.podbean.com)



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