



Skills for leading intergenerational worship

Rachel Turner, Discipleship Lead at Hope Church, Harrogate and founder of Parenting for Faith, explores how to frame and introduce elements of an intergenerational service to encourage connection and engagement.

Four foundational skills

However engaging the content of your intergenerational worship, it is often the communication skills of the person leading that determines if it will flop or fly. The tendency might be to talk in a 'sing-songy' voice around children, or to address children and families specifically, thereby excluding everyone else! Some leaders may feel pressure to be someone they are not (like a tv presenter)! So how can you be authentic and lead intergenerational worship in a way that meets the needs of all those present, from babies to the oldest person in the room?

I believe that leading all-age gatherings well is a skill that anyone can learn. It does not require a bubbly personality or any special experience with children. In this article, I'm going to outline four foundational skills for doing so:

- 1) Helping congregations navigate a service with clarity
- 2) Leading with consideration and permission
- 3) Facilitating spiritual transitions
- 4) Encouraging connection across generations.

Let's explore these in more detail.

1. Help congregations to navigate worship

The first foundational skill for leading all-age gatherings is to give people a framework of what will be happening and why through the service or time of worship. We should not assume that everyone understands what is happening and how to engage with it – some may be visiting for the first time, and others may need a refresher. Everyone needs to know four things about a service – 1. What we are doing next and why. 2. What you, the leader, are going to do. 3. What they are going to be asked to do. 4. What God might do in and through the worship.

As an example, rather than kicking off proceedings by saying, 'Let us worship the Lord, please stand', take a few extra seconds to properly frame the activity. So, you might say something like, 'When we sing to God, the words shape our hearts and help us to express our thoughts and feelings to God. Our worship leaders will be leading the music and singing, feel free to sing, listen to the words, or speak to God in your heart. When we sing together, the Bible says that God comes close to us. Let's meet

with him together.' This frames for the congregation what they are going to do and why and what God might do within that. It gives the congregation a feeling of safety because they know how and why to engage with the activity.

Think about how you could do this at other points in the service, e.g. how would you frame 'sharing the peace' or the time that you turn to each other and say hello? What about a prayer time after the sermon?

2. Lead with consideration and permission

In my congregation there are people with a variety of reading abilities, from differing church backgrounds and faith journeys, people experiencing grief and trauma, people with different needs, none of which are confined to a particular age group. They all need consideration and help in feeling comfortable within worship.

In my experience, people often hold themselves back until they have been given specific permission to do something. Get into the habit of anticipating when people need to know where their 'yes' is rather than leaving them to assume an automatic 'no'. Say things like, 'We know that an hour is a long time to sit for some people, so if you like listening by standing up, there is a section in the back where you should feel free to go anytime, and if you like dancing during the singing worship time, there is space up here too. And if you are here with a small person who likes wandering around, feel free. You are welcome to be you, here.'

Where are people unsure where the 'yes' is in your worship gathering? What permissions can you give ahead of time?



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3. Facilitate spiritual transitions

Intergenerational services can be a wonderful opportunity to help everybody learn how to connect with God better. Using the first skill of framing that we talked about, create transition points between activities. For example: We can often jump straight into the start of a service, but these moments can be key places to create spiritual transitions for people to position their minds and hearts. Using the framing tool of ‘why, what am I as a leader doing, what are you going to do, and what is God going to do’, try popping spiritual transitions into the service, for example: ‘Welcome to our service, I am so happy to see you! Perhaps you’ve had a busy morning and found it stressful getting here on time today. Maybe we are carrying lots of emotions in our hearts and minds. It can be hard to put that down and focus on God! Let’s do it together. I’m going to suggest some things for you to do just between you and God – you can do it in your own head or whisper it in your hands. It is only for God to hear. God is right here and was with you throughout the day, however stressful. God’s going to help you get some peace right now as you chat to him.’

Then invite people to speak to God about what is burdening them, picturing in their minds all that is cluttering their brains and laying it down in front of God. Or you could encourage people to clench their hands and imagine all the things they have brought into the service with them, and then have them open their hands to put them down.

Whether you are transitioning into singing, the next part of the liturgy or going out into the world at the end of the service, create spiritual transitions that keep everyone able to engage in the moment, but also to spiritually transition when they are out in the world.

“ Create moments for people to build familiarity with each other and form relationships that cross generations. ”

4. Encourage connections across the generations

This is one of the greatest joys of intergenerational worship. When we are leading, we can create moments for people to build familiarity with each other and form relationships that cross generations. Whenever possible, create opportunities for people to interact with each other. For example, do a four-question quiz where people work in groups with those around them. Ask a question from the front and then encourage people to get into small groups and share a story of when that situation with God was true for them. For instance, one sermon I gave was on Priscilla and Aquilla and how ‘God works all things together for the good of those who love the Lord.’ I then talked about how the God who helped refugees whose world was destroyed to find a beautiful future is still at work today. I shared a story of my miscarriage and what God did afterwards to help me. I then asked people to get into groups to share stories of times when God brought good out of what seemed terrible. I used the



framing tool to ensure people knew what to do, and I ensured people also knew that they had permission to not tell their stories – instead they could say, ‘I’m just here to listen’. People of all ages chatted and listened to each other.

How can you create opportunities for people to hear each other? One church I know does a ‘five-minute slot’ where one person is invited up and interviewed about their life and faith for five minutes, inviting people of different generations to do so (including children). Where could we create opportunities to help people connect and belong?

Leading intergenerational services is a great blessing, and the more you practise these skills, the more comfortable you will be in using them. They will soon become second nature to you! Be bold and try some new things this year as you lead people of all ages to meet and know God well.



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