

# 7 Gifts for church & home

**Summary Gift One:**

Mentoring and  
Participation in  
Intergenerational  
Communities

**INFORMATION & DISCUSSION GUIDE**

Why is participation and mentoring in intergenerational communities important for our children? Because too many of our young people are simply graduating from their faith. “Too many youth groups are holding tanks with pizza,” LifeWay Research director Ed Stetzer said in a 2007 interview with USA Today. “There’s no life transformation taking place.”

David Goodwin discovered in his research that our young people are working their way through our segregated children’s programs and upon graduating from their church youth group are leaving and many have made their decision to leave the church before they reach their teenage years. Goodwin believes that one of the big reasons children leave is the lack of connectedness with mentors in their congregations. They never truly belonged to the church congregation or participated in it. (David Goodwin, *Lost in Transition*, 2012).

Mentoring is one of the best ways to provide support for our children and to pass on our faith to the next generation. As children see how God works in the good times and more importantly in the not so good times in the adults that surround them, they are more likely to adopt the faith of the next generation.

Current research supports the idea of consistent mentoring and children’s participation in intergenerational communities.

Cara Powell and Chap Clark found in their sticky faith research that our children and teens flourish when we surround them with five significant adults who can speak into their lives. These are adults who we trust, who know them by name and stand for the same ideals and values that we as parents stand for.

Further, Powell and Clark discovered that there is a strong correlation between our children attending all age intergenerational worship and sticky faith. This is as close as their research came to finding the “Silver Bullet” in developing a faith that sticks for our children and teens. (Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 2011: Zondervan 93-122).

However it is not just attending intergenerational worship services that is key to growing faith in our children. Participation is also vital to growing a faith that lasts in our children. David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith state that “to participate in the life of the faith community, children need to be a part of this community. And to be a part of the community, they need to rub shoulders with all sorts of folks who make up this community. When they participate in meaningful ways in the core practices that define a faith community, they can allow these experiences to penetrate their bones and help them grow not only as members of a particular church but as members of the band of misfits seeking to follow in the way of Jesus.” (David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, *Children’s Ministries in the Way of Jesus*, 2012:IVP, 116.)

Smaller Churches have the distinct advantage of being able to do this well. Instead of providing more exciting age-specific ministries, they find hope by bringing the generations together. Whether in the worship service, Sabbath school, or through service projects, these churches look for ways to develop relationships across generational lines. And for this effort, the smaller the church the better!

## **What can CHURCHES do?**

Involve them in intergeneration communities/worship. Children are more likely to remain in the church if they are a part of it.

### **1. MAKE SURE YOUR WORSHIP SERVICE IS FAMILY FRIENDLY**

Worship is for everyone, from the youngest to the oldest. Imagine what will happen when we dare to assume that this is true and make the changes to include everyone. This might mean doing things a little differently but the church can only be the people of God when members – including the youngest – participate in its life, engage in its core practices and exercise their gifts as vital members of the body of Christ.

## **2. APPRENTICE CHILDREN INTO CHURCH POSITIONS**

Children can begin their apprenticeship into the practices of the church by serving alongside the adults. They can lend a hand in all the many and varied activities that make up what we call worship and learn from and alongside the adults in their congregation.

## **3. MAKE SURE YOUR WORSHIP SERVICES ARE MULTI-SENSORY**

We all learn differently and experience God in different ways. As children participate in the sights, sounds, smell, touch and taste of what we call worship they feel welcome and a part of the worship experience.

## **4. ADD SOME CHILDREN TO YOUR WORSHIP COMMITTEE**

Children are able to contribute as fully-fledged members of the church now – not just at some future date. Jesus placed children front and centre throughout his ministry and when we welcome, listen to and involve children we are ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven.

## **5. CONNECT WORSHIP AND HOME**

What happens at home is far more important than what happens during the worship hour at church and so if we can find ways for parents and children to talk about the things that happened in the worship service this will literally drive the point of the sermon home. Questions and activities that the whole family can participate in is a great way to do this.

## **What can FAMILIES do?**

Children need people of faith in their communities who mentor them and show them what a strong faith connection looks like.

### **1. INTENTIONALLY PLACE FIVE MENTORS INTO THEIR LIVES**

Find five people you can trust and who share the same values you do to invest in your children. The church is the best area to find these people. These are people who your children feel safe to be around. The mentors go out of their way to be in the picture of your children.

### **2. INVOLVE CHILDREN IN CHURCH WITH YOU**

Children learn about serving and develop “sticky faith” as they serve alongside you so involve them in the various positions you as parents hold at church.

### **3. ADOPT A GRANDPARENT**

In this age of global mobility, extended families can often find themselves separated by vast distances. Involving older church members in the lives of your children allows them to rub shoulders with people of faith and provides healthy communities for your child to grow their faith in.

### **4. INVOLVE EXTENDED FAMILY IN THE LIFE OF YOUR CHILD**

Extended family gives your children the roots and stories they need to ground and find themselves. Extended family celebrations also give children a taste of the kingdom of heaven as families take time out to be together. It is in this setting that true intergenerational community and mentoring occurs.

### **5. SET UP A NETWORK OF PRAYER WARRIORS FOR YOUR CHILDREN**

There is nothing more powerful or meaningful to our children than for them to know that extended family and friends are praying for them. Seek out people of faith and ask them to pray for your children.

## **5 Questions for Boards and Churches to Discuss/Brainstorm**

- 1. WHEN ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH (INCLUDING CHILDREN) TO BE TOGETHER? HOW CAN WE INTENTIONALLY CREATE THEM?**

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- 2. HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR WORSHIP SERVICES TRULY FAMILY FRIENDLY AND INTERGENERATIONAL?**

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- 3. WHAT CAN WE DO TO INVOLVE FAMILIES IN OUR WORSHIP SERVICES?**

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- 4. HOW CAN OUR CONGREGATIONS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO MENTOR OUR CHILDREN?**

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- 5. WHAT CAN WE DO TO MAKE SURE THAT HOME AND CHURCH ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO RAISE CHILDREN WITH FAITH?**

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