



BEING AN INTERGENERATIONAL CHURCH

Resource Paper #6 | INTERGENERATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

The Uniting Church in Australia seeks to be a genuinely intergenerational church in which all ages are welcomed and valued, where every generation is engaged together in active discipleship, growing in and sharing faith in Jesus. This paper is one of a series that has emerged to assist the church in being and becoming more intentionally intergenerational. It is offered as a resource for all those who share the dream of a more intergenerational church – a church comprised of lifelong followers of Jesus, of all ages, caring, praying, celebrating, learning and serving faith-fully together.

DISCIPLESHIP

There are many definitions and descriptions of discipleship. Different academics, authors, leaders, ministers, missiologists, practitioners and theologians articulate different understandings. A survey of different denominations, let alone specific congregations and individuals within such denominations, and theological traditions would yield similarly varied outcomes. One way Christian discipleship could be understood is as an intentional orienting toward Jesus that involves following, learning and embodied action.

INTERGENERATIONAL

At the most basic level, being intergenerational is about two or more different generations engaging relationally together. To be an intergenerational experience requires the generations to be genuinely interacting and engaging together – multiple individual interactions across multiple generations. Whilst being alongside, listening, learning and sharing together are all valuable, being truly intergenerational involves a more comprehensive mutuality (we're all in this together), equality (all are equally valued) and reciprocity (all give and receive) in relationship.

WHY INTERGENERATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP?

Among many valid answers, one compelling reason stands out. Emerging research over the past 15 years reveals that an intentionally intergenerational environment is more likely to sustain life-long...discipleship.

FOUR Ds of DISCIPLESHIP

Just as there is no one-size-fits all way of being church (even though churches may have much in common), there is no one-size-fits all model of discipleship. Each local church needs to do the work of contextualising its understanding and expression of discipleship in the light of the specific context in which it is placed. Take time to prayerfully discern, describe, design and develop localised approaches to discipleship, paying close attention to the value of intergenerationality.

DISCERNMENT

takes into account the tradition/denomination in which the church sits, the way discipleship is understood by the local church leadership and the nature of the local community being engaged. This discernment seeks a common mind as to how discipleship is to be understood in the local context.

DESIGN

first imagines, and then establishes, processes that will encourage the identified practices, behaviours and actions. Of particular importance is the integration of discipleship processes into the whole life of the church. Such integration needs to foster the expression of discipleship individually, as households and as a whole church community.

DESCRIPTION

identifies what discipleship might look like in the specificity of the local church. The practices, behaviours and actions that arise from the discerned understanding of discipleship need to be clearly described.

DEVELOPMENT

focusses on the implementation of the agreed processes, monitoring the progress, reviewing the outcomes and adjusting the processes as required.

Rather than the pressure of doing all of the above from scratch, which can sound quite daunting, there are many discipleship frameworks available. For example, the **Here2Stay**¹ approach is proving very popular in Australia, New Zealand and beyond. The **Holy Habits**² approach is growing in popularity in the United Kingdom.

Up to a point, it is more important to adopt an intentional approach and commit to it for an extended period of time than to agonise over which one to choose. Whether you embrace either of these frameworks, another of your choosing or develop your own, it is vital that it is contextualised to your unique circumstances.

¹ <https://here2stay.org.au/>

² <https://www.holyhabits.org.uk/>



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INTERGENERATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP CARE© MODEL

To assist in this overall task of determining and implementing an integrated approach to all-age discipleship, a useful model is that of Intergenerational Discipleship CARE©. Whichever framework is adopted for all-age discipleship and however it is adapted, the four elements from the model below need to be incorporated in the actual processes.

C

COMMON UNDERSTANDING

once discerned and agreed upon for the context, needs to be clearly articulated and consistently communicated. It includes not just what is believed about discipleship and how it might be described, but also practically what it looks like. For example, a church could develop an infographic that highlights five key discipleship practices that it seeks to encourage. Posters of the infographic can be displayed around the church space. Copies of the infographic can be placed in the Welcome Packs provided to new households. Images from the infographic can be used as visual prompts when a particular practise is being modelled, such as prior to exploring a Bible passage during a worship service.

A

ALIGNED PRACTICES

refers to the need for the identified, described and modelled practices to be broadly implementable as individuals, households and whole communities. Ideally, different practices need to be integrated as part of a coherent whole rather than being implemented in isolation. For example, a church can encourage engagement with social justice – perhaps with regard to Climate Justice. During a worship service there could be a response activity that involves an art project that the whole community contributes to. The finished product can then be prominently displayed for other users of the church space to see. An At Home resource can be provided to encourage specific action for households. Pro-forma letters that are age-sensitive can be made available for individuals, in some local or national contexts, to send to their local Member of Parliament.

R

RELATIONAL EMPHASIS

draws upon an understanding that the living out of discipleship through action is intrinsically connected to relationship. For example, relationship with God (as individual, household and community), relationship with God's world (as individual, household and community) and relationship with God's purposes (as individual, household and community). For example, an additional further relational dimension can be added to common practices of prayer. As part of encouraging individuals in prayer a church can implement a system of Prayer Partners or Prayer Triplets (taking into account appropriate Safeguarding/Safe Church practices) that connects people of different generations. As part of encouraging households in prayer a church can promote the idea of nearby households regularly partnering together for a Prayer Walk around their local community. As part of encouraging a church community as a whole in prayer, a church can enter into a relationship with another church that includes a commitment to intentionally pray for one another as whole communities.

E

EMBEDDED INTERGENERATIONALITY

calls for the intergenerational dimension to be a growing part of who we are as individuals and community, as well as in what we do as individuals and as a community. It is especially important that this element is understood, modelled and intentionally cultivated by all those who contribute to the leadership of a church. With regard to discipleship it means viewing discipleship practices through an intergenerational lens, looking out for ways to make the practice more relational.

³ <https://multivocality.wordpress.com/2019/06/20/segregation-vs-sensitivity-an-alternative-approach-to-recognising-and-acknowledging-age-diversity-in-faith-formation/>

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