



...we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.
...which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;
that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments

Psalm 78:4-7

So, this is nothing new. The Psalmist writes about the expectations of God's faithful people: they were to pass on a vibrant faith to the next generations, even planning to transmit faith to "the children yet unborn." This is serious business!

Cross+Generational ministries

- are rooted in relationships
- shower each generation with the gifts, stories, and wisdom of the other generations
- build understanding
- take down the walls between us
- and are profoundly faithful to what God is up to with all of us.

As Director of Cross+Generational Ministries at The Youth & Family Institute, I have had the privilege of learning from Christian congregations throughout the United States. What a gift to be able to share their stories.

At The Youth & Family Institute, we know that using the Four Keys - simple, daily faith practices, braided into everyday life – is a powerful, effective way of linking the generations to pass on faith. The Four Keys are caring conversation, devotions, rituals and traditions, and service. Note that all of the cross +generational ministries identified below can include the Four Keys.

Here are some of the ways congregations both do cross+generational ministries and equip the generations to engage in these ministries in their homes, schools, workplaces, communities, and carpools!

FOUR KEY FAMILY CLUSTERS

Gather four to six families, teach them the Four Keys, give them opportunities to practice together, and send them home with more ideas to do together. Gather the group once a month, providing simple resources and experiences of "doing faith" together. Families, of course, are a quintessential cross +generational small group. Add grandparents and you've got at least three generations. Congregations become the equippers of cross+generational ministries that happen all the time, wherever they are.

MILESTONES MINISTRY

Congregations throughout the country, across denominational lines, are celebrating milestones – meaningful, memorable moments in which God’s presence is marked, by naming it, blessing it, educating about it, and giving a gift to mark it. Congregations do this three ways: in a cross+generational learning opportunity, in worship, and sending home Four Key ways for households of faith to mark this milestone. These opportunities include the “usual suspects” in congregational life – baptism, starting Sunday school, receiving a Bible, learning to pray, holy communion, confirmation, weddings and funerals – and some that mark the presence of Jesus in commonly experienced life milestones – blessing the backpacks, managing money, blessing a driver’s license, graduation, moving to assisted living, and dozens more.

SERVICE PROJECTS

One wondrous way to link the generations is to collaborate on service projects. This can be as simple as cleaning out and replenishing worship bags for children or as huge as crossing an ocean for a mission trip. I challenge anyone involved in service to not also do the other three of the Four Keys – having caring conversations, finding God in the midst as a devotional time, and making the service project a new favorite tradition!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Has your congregation tried intergenerational Sunday school? This opportunity, done well, neither “dumbs it down” for the adults nor “makes it boring” for the children and youth. Consider this an opportunity to help all the generations learn from others how God’s story intersects with their story.

TEAM TEACHING

There may be no more powerful way to pass on faith than to engage two or more generations as team teachers, caring for young children in the nursery or teaching vacation Bible school, day camp, or Sunday school together. In my experience, teaching is the most effective way to learn. Linking generations invites all to tell the stories of their experiences of faith. Youth bring great energy, enthusiasm, real questions, and an openness to learn. Adults and seniors bring experience, wisdom, and reflection. Generations gift one another and the children they serve.

LENTEN MENTORING

Many congregations choose the season of Lent to link youth with non-family adults to share worship, a meal, and conversation around questions that helps both partners to share their experiences, questions, and faith. What a way to create opportunities to tell stories through the lens of faith!

PRAYER PARTNERS

“Teach us to pray,” Jesus’ disciples implored him. In every generation, we need both to be taught to pray and to have opportunities to pray. Prayer partners can link generations in sharing prayer requests, joining in prayer, and building God-bearing relationships with one another, as we pray for each other.

ADOPT-A-GRANDPARENT

Link middle school youth with seniors in assisted living for weekly conversations and shared experiences. Give them questions to ask and answer, activities to share, and opportunities for kids without local grandparents and seniors without local grandchildren to “adopt” one another.

NEW BABY MINISTRY

Recently, I had the opportunity to bring a simple meal to a family with a new baby. It was a flashback to 30 years ago, when my third child was born. Others ministered to my family with food, and I will always be grateful. But it was more than the food; it was a visit with a compassionate adult, a lifeline to the outside world. What a privilege to be able to pass on that gift of presence and understanding, with a basket of food. This is what it means to be the family of God; we get to feed one another ... in so many ways.

Opportunities for cross+generational ministry are bounded only by our collective imagination. Blessings to you as you link the generations to pass on a vibrant, life transforming faith in Jesus Christ.