PASSING ON THE FAITH THROUGH AN INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACH
APPRE – Saturday, November 8** 9:30 – 10:45 a.m.   RW11

Dr. Diane E. Shallue, rwshallue@cs.com
Adjunct faculty, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Category: Resourcing Workshop

Description:
        Some Christian congregations are shifting from an age-segregated religious education program to an intergenerational focus. This presentation will look at foundational theories and elements of an intergenerational approach as well as specific examples of intergenerational religious education.

(The first two sections are adapted from Chapter 1 of Across the Generations.)

Changing Intergenerational Relationships

        In societies all over the world intergenerational communities and extended families have long been the norm. Grandparents, parents and children have lived together in patterns of cultural, economic and educational interdependence. Among these generations, grandparents share their experience with their children and grandchildren, provide care to their grandchildren and serve as a base of values and information for family, community and society. Parents and other adults in the community provide economic support for both their children and their parents. Children share their energy and enthusiasm with older relatives and learn to be productive members of society as they participate in family and community life. When these generations live together in the community, growing up and aging, birthing and dying are natural dimensions of life.
        Today, shifting core values and fast-paced contemporary lifestyles in the United States are pulling the generations apart. Placing a high value on individualism and mobility tends to fragment communities and isolate age groups from one another. Schools separate children by age-levels as well as separating children and youth from adults. Community sports and recreation programs organize children's activities around peer groups while their parents are at work or engaging in adult projects. Grandparents regularly live great distances from their children and grandchildren having little interaction with the very youngest in their extended families. Not only are elders separated from their own grandchildren, in most cases they live in senior communities that often separate them from all children and most younger adults. Activities, which once pulled generations together, are often delegated to paid professionals and institutions such as nursing homes, schools and churches.

Many observers and scholars not only chronicle these changes, but also see them as detrimental. Patricia Hersch describes the extent of this fragmentation and its negative impact in the lives of youth. She writes:

> A clear picture of adolescents, of even our children, eludes us--not necessarily because they are rebelling, or avoiding or evading us. It is because we aren't there. Not just parents, but any adults. American society has left its children behind as the cost of progress in the workplace. This isn't about working parents, right or wrong, but an issue for society to set its priorities and to pay attention to its young (Hersch, 1998, p. 19).

Segregating the generations from one another adversely affects not only the young. Parents are often overwhelmed as they attempt the near impossible task of balancing career, parenting and homemaking without the help of elders or older children. The elderly are becoming more and more isolated and deprived of the energy, imagination and hopefulness of the young. Mary Pipher (1999) says, "Children and teens can go months with no contact with the old. Adolescent peer culture is especially noxious, but so are the cultures of isolated day-care centers or senior-citizen homes" (p. 12). This lack of intergenerational contact leads each generation to see itself as a separate subculture rather than an integral part of an entire community, a perspective that often leads to conflict and competition rather than cooperation.

Generations: Essential to Life and Faith

Life and faith are passed on from generation to generation. Much of the intergenerational character of life is obvious. Mothers carry and deliver infants. Parents and other adults tend and support young children who are too vulnerable to care for themselves. Adult generations do the work and tend the institutions that provide food and protection for young and old alike. Children not only carry family and community hopes for the future, but also provide energy and playfulness that enliven their parents and grandparents. Grandparents in turn lend stability to their communities as they bear the memories of the past and provide perspective on the present and future.

Probing beneath the surface of everyday affairs provides a glimpse of the importance of an even greater intergenerational dynamic in life. Behavioral scientists see psychological and relational "birth" and development occurring in the intense interactions and long-term relationships between infants and their caregivers. These earliest activities are essential to a child's identity, social competency and ethical behavior. Moreover, according to family system theorists, communication patterns, boundaries and roles are but a few of the ongoing generational dynamics in institutions that profoundly influence the tendencies and character of every member of society. Carter and McGoldrick write

of this intergenerational web of life:

> ...the tremendous life-shaping impact of one generation on those following is hard to overestimate. For one thing the three or four different generations must accommodate to life cycle transitions simultaneously. While one generation is moving toward older age, the next is contending with the empty nest, the third with young adulthood, forming careers and intimate peer adult relationships and having children, and the fourth with being inducted into the system. Naturally there is an intermingling of the generations, and events at one level have a powerful effect on relationships at each level. (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988, p. 7)

Religious institutions are some of the few organizations in the United States that are intergenerational in nature. All ages come through the doors. Often they are divided into groups by age but the proximity of all generations in the same building provides an opportunity to intentionally foster intergenerational interactions.

The theme for this conference is "Embracing the Past, Envisioning the Future: Religious Education in an Age of Transition." I think that embracing the gifts of the older adults who provide the spiritual foundation of our religious organizations is crucial. I also think that the present vitality of religious organizations is dependent upon engaging children and young adults. These younger members will be the ones who will help religious educators envision a new future for religious education. The challenge before us is how to help the generations interact and learn together in ways that will enrich and enliven our faith communities.

Sociological Theories

Two social theorists whose ideas support the intergenerational approach are George Herbert Mead and Erik Erikson. George Herbert Mead described people as social animals that become human in the process of interacting with others. He taught that both mind (thinking) and self (identity) are created through social interactions, especially through language. Sharing experiences across the generations helps to build a community of meaning. Erik Erikson developed the concept of the eight stages of development. All people work on these stages of development and the satisfactory working through of the tasks of that stage are dependent on social interchange. Both adults and children are going through various stages and working on the developmental tasks of that stage. The generations help each other through the stages and their partnership is important for a healthy family and society. These theorists show the importance of intergenerational interaction and exchanges

Philosophical Support

Given this interdependent view of life and faith, these questions can be posed.

Where is God within and among the generations? What wisdom is there in this intergenerational matrix of life and faith for those who do educational ministry in the 21st Century? An intergenerational approach is a non-hierarchical and non-linear way to look at religious education.   All ages are valued for what they can contribute. All are learners and all are teachers. Religious education changes hearts and minds in an interdependent web of relationships. This approach fits well with the post-modern view of the education with its emphasis on subjective rather than objective thinking, on the importance of desire and on the use of language and discourse. The focus on experiential learning is a key element in the intergenerational approach as well as in postmodern thinking about education. Modernist theories of education applied in the religious education setting have not created substantial numbers of faithful believers. Transmission of religious belief is not a rational, objective process.   Age-segregated religious education classes with graded curriculum are not the best way to pass on the faith. Another approach needs to be emphasized. In my opinion, a focus on an intergenerational approach has tremendous potential to enrich and enhance the faith of all generations, although it is an approach that can be chaotic with hard to measure objectives. Yet I feel that it has great potential for passing on the faith in a playful, relational format.

John Westerhoff and James White are two Christian educators who emphasize the importance of an intergenerational approach to passing on the faith.   James White in his approach to intergenerational religious education sees God, humans and the world as in the process of becoming. Human beings are created to be in relationship with other human beings. We are always changing and growing. In addition, the world around us is constantly changing and evolving. Everything is interconnected. We give and receive in equal measure so all ages and all generations are valued for their ability to make and remake us. Love is the active principle which draws us into a new way of being and guides religious education, especially when it is a voluntarily activity. People are best motivated by relationships which honor and respect them as persons. The creation of community and the quality of that community depends on the existence of intergenerational relationships.   White (1988) stresses the wholeness of people and the world that results from intergenerational living.

On the other hand, John Westerhoff emphasizes the nature of "being" more than "becoming." Westerhoff stresses that children need to be respected and valued for what they are, not just what they are becoming. Adults can learn much from the faith of children. Like White, he views intergenerational exchanges as valuable for all ages as all learn from one another. Westerhoff accentuates the importance of community in the process of passing on the faith. "Faith can only be nurtured within a self-conscious intentional community of faith….true community necessitates the presence and interaction of three generations…Without interaction between and among the generations, each making its own unique contribution, Christian community is difficult to maintain" (1976, pp. 52-53). Westerhoff puts strong emphasis worship as an important

ritual to socialize children to feel a part of the faith community.

Intergenerational relationships provide significant meaning and enjoyment. Remembering is an important function which adults play in the community. Change is the gift which children bring to the community. Each generation needs to transform the old traditions for a new time and then pass them on. Together the generations sustain community and pass on the faith. Content and knowledge about a religion can be taught but faith is passed on or "more caught than taught." Love, commitment, and faith are first experienced in the intergenerational community. Then those qualities are valued, shared and passed along to other people through social interactions.

Definition of Intergenerational Religious Education

What is intergenerational religious education? James White's definition of intergenerational religious education provides the basic building blocks and patterns for intergenerational ministry. "Intergenerational religious education is two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/ growing/ living in faith through in-common-experiences, parallel-learning, contributive occasions and interactive-sharing" (White, 1988, p. 18). If there are more than three generations involved, White calls it "multigenerational." White sees these intergenerational activities as influencing cognitive, affective and lifestyle developments. According to George Koehler, intergenerational religious education is "a planned opportunity for nurture, discovery, or training in which a major purpose is the interaction and mutual ministry among persons of two or more generations" (Kohler, 1977, p.14). James Gambone defines intergenerational ministry as ministry to the five living generations plus the unborn generation and the generation that is deceased. Rather than religious education, Gambone puts the emphasis on ministry to and with the generations.

I tend to use the term, "intergenerational" very broadly to mean any grouping from two to five generations. Education for me involves not only what we know but what we believe about what we know and how we feel about what we know and believe. Education must touch both our mind and our emotions. Education also can not neglect neither the content of the tradition nor the power of the Holy Spirit to transform. Like Thomas Groome, I see the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the learner in the transformational process.

> "Surely to educate well invites love from the soul of teacher and parent...That love is asked of the educator's soul is accentuated by remembering that teaching is, essentially, 'a way of being with' people. At its best and fullest, education is a relational encounter - an I/Thou relationship - intended to influence who each other becomes; it reaches into the very souls of people to affect their 'being'" (Groome, 1998, p.98).

In the process of education, both the teacher and the student are changed in some way. Education is a much broader concept than sitting at tables or desks with books, papers and pencils with a teacher in front of the room. Christian education may teach content in this way but can not teach about love, or sharing, or commitment except by relationship formed in community. The whole person needs to be engaged with their reason, memory,

imagination, and emotions. The intergenerational approach has the potential to touch the whole person who exists and interaction in a community which consists of multiple generations.

I define intergenerational religious education as any on-going program or series of sessions or a one time event that involves people from two or more generations with the objectives of cognitive learning and relationship building. This can involve adults born in several decades or children and youth from several grade levels. It does not always involve parents and their children. It is an approach that many people will agree is needed and necessary to pass on the faith.

HAZARDS AND PROBLEMS

Although most people will agree with the rational for an intergenerational approach, resistance in a congregation can destroy any well-intentioned program or event. Kohler (1977) listed ten hazards that I have found can still derail a program even with strong staff and volunteer support.
1. It takes a lot of planning with few ready made resources.
2. Children may dominate the interaction while adults hold back or talk down to children. If this happens, the adults tend to disappear.
3. Adults may dominate the interaction especially if the program stresses talk over activity. Then the children disappear.
4. It is difficult to meet the wide range of knowledge and interests.
5. The program may lack continuity and skip from one topic to another.
6. The leadership may change frequently especially with a rotation model or a learning station approach.
7. The attendance may be irregular because the informality of the intergenerational approach invites a take-or-leave-it attitude.
8. Some students are loyal to their own classes and resent their class being merged with another for an intergenerational program.
9. Some parents want to get away from their children and other adults also may not want to be around children.
10. Some children and youth want to get away from adults and be with their own age group.

In my experiences in planning and conducting intergenerational events as well as talking to other Christian educators, many intergenerational programs that involve parents and their children are begun with great enthusiasm and attendance. Within a couple of years or sometimes even sooner the attendance drops drastically. People just stop coming so the congregation discontinues the program and vows to not try that again. I have had my own personal experiences with the difficulties in creating and sustaining intergenerational educational programs. I am still learning about various models and the ones that seem to work the best in certain situations.

Various Models

White outlines four patterns in planning intergenerational religious education and a whole list of models. I will highlight them and share some observations about each of them.

1) The first pattern, in-common experiences, brings people of different ages together to do something in a similar manner at the same time. These ministry activities are usually more concrete and active and less verbal. Participants could be engaged in accomplishing a shared task, doing a project or participating in a common event or game. These shared experiences are absolutely critical for building cross generational relationships. Other examples would be watching together a dramatic presentation, hearing a violinist, making a banner, singing a song, or baking communion bread. This is a very common and useful pattern but a major critique by adults is that it is often planned at the level of the children and with a child's perspective so that the child can participate. This pattern seems easier to plan but engaging the interest of all age levels is not done automatically.

2) A second pattern of parallel ministry experiences separates persons by age to work on the same activity simultaneously, each at their own operational level. This pattern is particularly useful if cognitive learning is emphasized and the wide range of abilities can be accommodated. A critique of this pattern is that people of various ages continue to be segregated and cross generational relationships are not fostered. In order to create some intergenerational interaction, these age-segregated groups need to come together either intentionally or informally to share and work out their common focus. For example, Christian lectionary-based learning materials provide a common biblical text for all ages to study at their own level.

3) The third pattern uses contributive occasions where each group shares what has been learned or created previously. These groups could be age segregated or mixed ages. This pattern can stand on its own or follow parallel ministry activities. Different groups work on parts of a worship service or a skit or a large mural which are then put together. All ages experience the whole which is greater than any of the parts because of their contributions. This sharing can be lots of fun.

4) In the last pattern, interactive-sharing sends persons into interpersonal exchanges of thoughts or feelings or actions in order to get another generation's perspective. Even though this pattern is the most difficult to facilitate, it gives the greatest benefit in increasing understanding between the generations. White says that this pattern is the most difficult but is IGRE at its best. Because this pattern is more abstract and verbally based, I feel that it is not successful with younger children who are not verbally astute.

More important than using these four patterns is creating a perspective which sees and includes all generations when planning for any activity. A religious institution could ask each ministry group or committee to find a way to involve one additional generation to ten percent of their activities planned for the coming year. This would encourage an intergenerational perspective. In a proposal called Total Parish Paradigm, James White (1998, pp. 204-211) provides instructions for developing this cross generational

perspective.

1. Integrate the activity into the whole life of the congregation;
2. Involve people of all ages as much as possible;
3. Employ symbols, songs and rituals;
4. Use "dramatic persons" often
5. Pay attention to timing, action and movement;
6. Involve all the senses;
7. Preview and review ministry activities regularly;
8. Recite and restate often in the activity;
9. Make the activity enjoyable;
10. Get each person involved individually;
11. Factor in physical and material elements;
12. Exercise quality control and evaluate continuously;
13. Allow angels to enter in the unexpected interruptions and surprise guests.

White's patterns and ideas provide congregational leaders with strategic ways of thinking as relationships are nurtured and intergenerational activities are developed.

These are some of the various models of intergenerational religious education that White and others have developed over the years. I have just listed them below with their references. We will discuss them and other models you have seen or used.

White, James W. (1988) *Intergenerational Religious Education.* Birmingham: Religious
      Education Press.
1. Family groups by Virginia Satir and Family Clusters by Margaret Sawin
2. Weekly Class at building,
3. One Day Workshop or Event
4. Worship Service
5. Worship-Education Program
6. All-Congregational Camp
7. The at-home religious education

White, James. (1995) "Family Ministry Methods." The Handbook of Family Religious Education, Chapter nine.

1. Family Counseling with Virginia Satir as the theoretical mover.
2. Media Religious Education Model such as used in Focus on the Family.
3. Institutional Assistance such as twelve step programs which function as a family, retirement homes, nursing homes, fraternal, service and travel organizations as well as prison ministries that have a strong religious orientation and relate to the whole family.
4. Family Night at Home
5. The Church-as-a-Whole model.

The "Church-as-a-Whole" model is not a direct family education approach but uses the current strengths of the church as an institution which still involves multiple generations. It does not involve planning new programs or events. "Instead of concentrating new program efforts aimed directly at families, and instead of trying to model the church to become 'family-oriented'(it already is), religious educators should keep on in the track of continuing to be the church and let that faithfulness rebound to individuals and families" (White, 1995, p. 220). White gives three techniques to facilitate the Church-as-a-Whole Family Religious Education:

♦ follow the Christian calendar year in a liturgical observance;

♦ emphasize the narrative story of the Christian faith;

♦ improve and enliven the rituals and basic rites of the Christian community.

From a similar perspective, John Robert at the Center for Ministry Development created a Whole Church Faith Formation Curriculum which sees the regular activities of the congregation as the basis for an educational curriculum. In his viewpoint, the church does not have an educational program; it is the program. This model takes careful planning and coordination between all the various committees and learning groups to create a unified emphasis.

From a slightly different angle, Strommen and Hardel focus on the congregation as family. "Like no other institution, a congregation can become family to its members. Through intergenerational activities a congregation can create opportunities for members to become surrogate parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, or sisters to one another" (Strommen & Hardel, 2000, p. 157). They explore the value of intergenerational service efforts finding that these activities promote a sense of the meaningful involvement, a greater evidence of faith, and development of a special fellowship between adults and youth.

Many other models using an intergenerational approach are being used in many different faith communities. I have personal experience with intergenerational summer classes, mentoring programs, prayer partners, and intergenerational day care. These models and other examples will be shared during this Resourcing Workshop.

REFERENCES:

Carter, Betty and Monica McGoldrick, editors. The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy, second edition. New York City: Gardner Press, 1988.

Groome, Thomas. Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent. Allen, Tex. Thomas More, 1998.

Hersch, Patricia. A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence. New York City: Ballantine, 1999.

Koehler, George. Learning Together: A Guide for Intergenerational Education in the Church. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1977.

Martinson, Roland & Shallue, Diane (2001). "Foundations for Cross-Generational Ministry." Goplin, V., Nelson, J., Gardner, M., & Zahn, E., editors. Across the Generations. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Pipher, Mary. "The New Generational Gap." USA Weekend (March 19-21, 1999), 12.

Strommen, Merton & Hardel, Richard. (2000). Passing on the Faith. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press.

White, James W. (1988) *Intergenerational Religious Education.* Birmingham: Religious Education Press.

OTHER RESOURCES:

Faith Family Style: Generations Growing Together. (2001) Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.
> (This resource from the ELCA contains plans for ten intergenerational events.)

Fruedenburg, Ben. (1998) Family Friendly Church. Group Publishing, Loveland, CO.

Gambone, James V. (1998) All Are Welcome. Minneapolis: Elder Eye Press.
> (This book provides a biblical foundation and the six core principles of Intentional Intergenerational Ministry or IIM. It also provides practical suggestions for improving intergenerational relationships and how to organize an Intergenerational Dialogue. It has a nice summary of the characteristics of the five generations.)

Griggs, Donald and Patricia (1976).Generations Learning Together: Learning Activities for Intergenerational Groups in the Church. Nashville: Abingdon.
> (Practical suggestions for how to begin, plan, and organize an intergenerational event. Lots of good tips and ideas but the resources listed are dated. Interesting section on the formation of Christian identity.)

Hendrix, John & Lela (1975) Experiential Education: X-ED. Nashville: Abingdon.
> (Lots of ideas of games and stimulations for groups of adults and groups of adults and children. Good ideas on activities on the parables of Jesus.)

Neff, Blake J. and Ratcliff, Donald. (1995) The Handbook of Family Religious Education. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press.
> (Chapter 9 by James White provided a short outline of five models of family ministry. It summarized very briefly the six intergenerational models in his 1988 book as part of the third model of group programs which he offers in this book. His fifth model is the Church-As-A-Whole approach which he advocates. Chapter 10 by Ferro in evaluating a family religious education program had some helpful practical questions.)

No More Us and Them: 100 Ways to Bring Your Youth and Church Together. (1999.
Group Publishing, Loveland. CO.
  (This book has lots of ways to involve young people in the life of the congregation.)

Nuzzi, Ronald. (1996) Gifts of the Spirit: Multiple Intelligences in Religious Education.
Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association.
  (Fascinating book with some really clear suggestions for lessons plans in religious
  education which would use each one of the seven types of multiple intelligences as
  listed by Howard Gardner.)

Sell, C. M. (1981). Family Ministry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
  (The last five chapters discussed the theory of family nurture and the debate in the
  church whether family-based or church-based nurture was more effective with major
  writers and time periods of both approaches. His conclusion is that both need to be
  emphasized.)