

Worship Leading Course – 6 Intergenerational worship – July 2020

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Why 'Intergen'?

I believe how we approach nurturing faith (for all ages) comes down to some basic questions that question our attitude profoundly;

- Is our role to minister **to** people, or **with** them?
- Can children and young people be Fellow Pilgrims with us, or do we hold the knowledge?

'Follow Pilgrims' is an expression which describes a mutuality in the way that we minister- I hope to be blessed by you, you hope to be blessed by me. We are eye to eye as we travel together despite our differences. We all know that children bless us through their immediate spirituality - but do we recognise how profound that mutual sharing can be? And if we recognise children and young people as Fellow Pilgrims;

- Are we teaching facts or nurturing faith? Are we enabling the two to go on side by side?

For many group leaders, the responsibility of teaching the faith, of handing on the story, weigh heavy with us. In reality, much of our teaching is *about* God, not being *with* God. As the home page of the UK Godly Play website says;

- *"In most religious education children are told who God is. In Godly Play children discover who God is."*

This is a subtle but massive difference, and the falling numbers of children, young people and their parents in church indicate that what we've been doing hasn't worked too well- so maybe it's time to re-think?

There is a quite delightful 'Pixar short' called 'La Luna'ⁱⁱⁱ **which I'd like you to watch**;

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=la+luna+pixar&docid=608008798868341841&mid=C0E73ECFDDAB755DAC93C0E73ECFDDAB755DAC93&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

which is a parable for us all. It's only about 7 minutes long.

1, Write down the three most important features of this parable for you- we'll share them over the next session.

2. Which of the three characters has the most to learn?

What is 'La Luna' offering the Church?

Intergenerational worship, i.e. everyone is there all the time all the way through, is not the same as 'All Age'. Intergenerational worship is where everybody is worshipping together- not a service that has been adapted through having a 'talk for children', or even activities for children. This is about everyone coming to worship and recognizing that there needs to be give and take on all sides, and everyone needs to be heard. It involves mutuality, equality and reciprocity, and aims to become the culture rather than a curriculum or programme. In worship, it may involve a change in seating- many churches run a 'café style' church, where everyone eats as well as worships. Round tables are ideal, but the whole service needs to be carefully planned to include everyone. Most adults don't recognise that when they speak, the children and young people will go quiet, so we have to listen to and include younger voices carefully before the adults do the usual 'taking over'.

Westerhoff¹ tells us that for children to be included effectively we need to share:

- Story; both the story of who we are- how did this worshipping congregation come together, how did we change over the years, what is the story of each family, as well as the story of salvation.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Authority; who has the authority in this group, and how is it given? Many churches have people who assume authority despite never being 'given' it by those who are officially in charge. Facing that coup and sorting who is really in charge is painful, and something that many churches avoid noticing, let alone dealing with.^{iv}
- Ritual; what do we do together that marks our life as a community? How do we mark birthdays, festivals? How do we welcome new members in? How do we say goodbye to those who leave, either through moving away or death? How do we manage it when others leave because they don't want to be with us anymore?
- Life; how do we share our day to day lives? Do we know what work others do, what the children and young people are doing at school, college or university? Do we even know which school, college or university they are part of? How do we support those who are finding life difficult at the moment? How do we share success?

By including children and young people in all of the above, we become more intergenerational, as the unspoken message is that we value what the children and young people bring and want their input in the day to day experience of our lives, partly so that we can pray in an informed way, but mainly because we care and value them.

Importantly, intergenerational worship can be introduced slowly- perhaps just for a couple of festivals to begin with, along with a change in how you work to make the community more intergenerational, but this is a massive shift for many, indeed most churches and worshipping communities, so we're looking at change over years, not days.

Mary Hawes, who is Going for Growth Adviser for the Church of England, leads such a service in Teddington in West London², and she has devised the following acronym for intergenerational worship;

- **Wonder**; children are noted for their 'Awe and wonder' moments, and in 'La luna', it is a child who stares open mouthed at the rising moon, so enabling his father and grandfather to recapture their awe and wonder at the moon and her beauty. The trick for adults is to recognise that what we may now take for granted may have been a moment of awe and wonder for us once upon a time.
- **Openness**; have we come to worship expecting to be touched by God's spirit, and are we open to whoever might be bringing that blessing to us? Or do we have set expectations of what the service will 'do for me', thus removing the awe and wonder moment? The fleeting joy of something understood or recognised, either once again, or for the first time.
- **Relationship**; worship only works through relationship- as we see modelled in the Trinity. Who we become friends with seems fairly hap hazard to me, across ages and generations, there are some people that we recognised as kindred spirits, and so through worshipping intergenerationally, we make ourselves available to everyone who is gathered for friendship. A recent Channel 4 series, 'Old people's home for four-year olds' showed this clearly- when a nursery class became part of the day to day lives of a group of older people at a retirement village, the children gravitated towards people seemingly at random, and became very fond of 'their' person or people. As the relationships were unpacked, so we discovered that many had similar backgrounds or life experiences, and somehow the children intuited

¹ Will our children have Faith?

² For a taster service see https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=teddington+parish

this, and it became a great bond. Children and young people make friends with adults who like them, often who are like them, and they sense it.

- **Space;** both literal and metaphorical. Children or young people confined in a small space will become fidgety, put out their limbs to claim more room, and annoy each other. As do adults. Give everyone enough room. But also include silence, time to breathe and internalise, time for the Spirit to move and inspire. Don't rush, despite the difficulty many adults have with silence. Different worship styles respond differently to images, candles, lights- include them.
- **Hospitality;** often comes down to two questions- what sort of biscuits do you serve, and is there someone who stops children having more than one? And for the adults- is there firstly decent coffee, and then a saint in your community who ensures no-one is outside of the coffee cliques? We might say we're friendly, but practice often gives that an unintentional lie. No church wants to be unfriendly^v but ask any visiting minister and they'll have a story of drinking coffee and watching the regulars chat. And if there are biscuit police, it will impact on the children very quickly. Let their parents do that, and you can engage them in a conversation.
- **Imagination;** all religious belief involves imagination, as we can't prove God exists. And if you engage the imagination of all worshippers, then they are set free. Children don't have a problem with creativity, it sort of gets knocked out of us by the education system in this country, and most of the western world, so encouraging everyone to be imaginative together is empowering and brings us closer to the creator God.
- **Participation:** the question is not 'what can the children or young people do?' but 'what can't they do?'. Do we save the 'better' jobs for the adults? When I introduced the choir children to reading the bible passages as normal in the main service in my last parish, I had a complaint from one of the adults, as he so loved doing that...and now he didn't do it as often. People don't show the same enthusiasm for cleaning up after a service. When I introduced young people as part of the rota for servers (helping the minister with laying out the communion) some adults were concerned that they 'wouldn't do it properly'. They probably didn't do it in the same way as some of the adults, but who decides what 'properly' is? It seems to me that we each minister as we minister, and that means variation along the way.

So neat- notice what the acronym spells?

Importantly, at this church all jobs can be equally shared out, and after a while that will be the norm.

Intergenerational worship aims at *being* church, not just coming to church, and when we achieve that, then faith will grow, and we become Fellow Pilgrims together. *You might like to consider if your church has begun to travel this path while the buildings have been closed.*

Alongside Mary's WORSHIP, there is another acronym that I feel is very important, and this comes from Rebecca Nye.^{vi} She uses SPIRIT to sum up the conditions she believe are necessary to facilitate spirituality, and although Nye is using it with regards to children's spirituality, it is equally true for adults, and thus for intergenerational worship.

- **Space;** as above, with every possible understanding of the word. Adults are so bad at waiting, in quiet. If we are to internalise the worship we are taking part in, we have to slow down and give time. We also need to think about the physical environment. This has a huge impact on us in our lives and our spirituality. If you want proof, try sending the adults out to the children's room one week, and keep the children in the worship area of the church!
- **Process;** spirituality is a process, not a product. You cannot measure it, and it is only when you take the time to reflect as a group as well as an individual, that you can see that we have moved together along the journey of faith. You cannot rush it, you just have to be attentive and wait...

- **Imagination;** as above, free the imagination of everyone present. Listen to ideas from anyone and encourage creative thinking. Try the 'I wonder' style of questioning and see what happens when there are no right and wrong answers.
- **Relationship;** as above. We need to be in relationship with each other if we are truly to be the Body of Christ. This requires more than the occasional Sunday commitment, and takes time.
- **Intimacy;** a tricky word in these safeguarding days! But children will only share profound thoughts with someone who they both know and trust, and the same is true of adults. If we are genuinely Fellow Pilgrims, then sharing our lives together will go deeper, but never, ever, put someone in the position where you expect them to share any aspect of their life with a relative stranger without their prior agreement and strict confidentiality rules which have been agreed. And, even then, let them be silent if they want to be silent, it is their right.^{vii}
- **Trust;** as above, we need to be able to trust Fellow Pilgrims about our lives and dependability. This means being honest and knowing when you need to involve another person. If a safeguarding issue arises, tell the person that you need to tell someone else about it- and this is not optional, it is the law.

Finally, do take note about the time plan here; this is a process which takes years, so begin slowly and hopefully any who might not appreciate what you are trying to do won't be leaving the church quickly! And good luck. Nothing of worth is easy to give birth to. Even in the church.

Questions for discussion. **Please make notes ready for our Zoom session on Tuesday.**

- 3.** Remembering the different worship styles, how do you think we can serve each person's need during Intergen worship? What do we have to include?
- 4.** How do you think your worshipping community could offer Intergen worship within the 'menu' that you offer at the moment? What will you need to let go, and who is going to struggle?
- 5.** What do you need to put in place to enable the whole worshipping community to go forward together as an intergenerational community?

ⁱ www.Godlyplay.uk 2017

ⁱⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbug7w3ZDUQ>

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Congregation' by James Hopewell is interesting on how a congregation perceives and holds its own story

^{iv} See 'The human face of church' by Savage and Boyd-MacMillan for a devastating analysis of the culture of 'nice' within churches.

^v Years ago I read a story in the 'Church Times' where a contributor visited a church whilst on holiday. At the end of the service, he was told that coffee was 'just for the regulars'.

^{vi} 'Children's Spirituality; what it is and why it matters'